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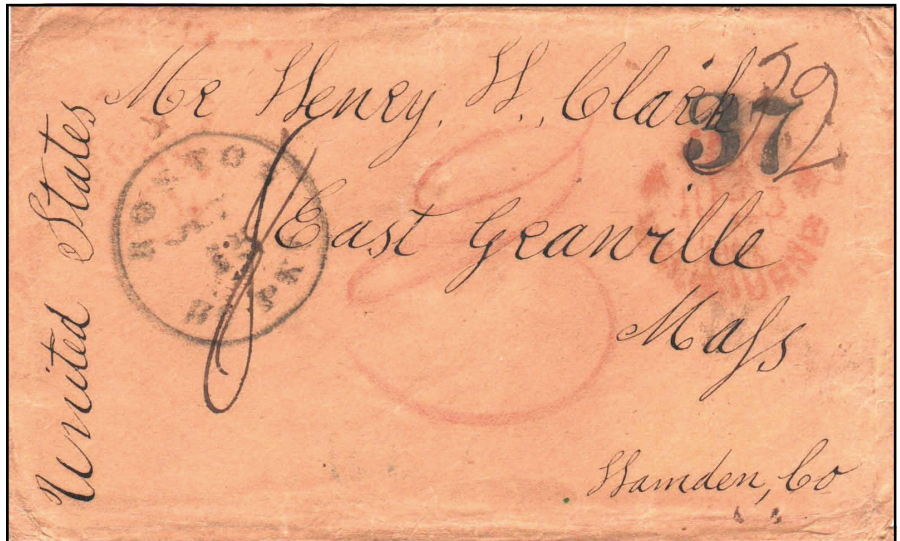
## Private Ship Letter from the Australian Gold Rush to the U.S.

Dale Forster

Posted at Melbourne 23 June 1853. 3d paid in cash for outgoing ship letter.

Backstamp London 29 September 1853.

Received in Boston 15 October 1853. "BOSTON/ BR PKT" c.d.s. and hand-stamped 37 cents due from recipient. "32" in manuscript at upper right is the amount due England: 8d (manuscript "8") or 16 cents due to UK for arriving ship letter from Australia and another 8 pence or 16 cents due UK for transatlantic carriage; 5 cents due USPO for internal postage to the recipient in the USA, making the 37 cent collect rate.



Melbourne to East Granville, Massachusetts, USA via London and Boston

Transcript of the letter enclosed in this cover:

*On board the Bark Jane at sea, Sat. May 21<sup>st</sup> 1853*

"Ever remembered friends and neighbors, I now seat myself for the purpose of giving you a short sketch of my voyage and adventures at sea between San Francisco and Port Phillip. I left San Francisco the first of March, was three days getting out of the harbour, had not been out but about ten days before the steerage passengers commenced making trouble about the bad provisions on board. They sent a written document to the Captain based in terms

which they did not wholly understand themselves, but which the Captain interpreted as a protest, to prohibit his proceeding on the voyage. He therefore wrote them back a letter stating that if they did not retract what they had previously written before eight o'clock in the evening he should put the Ship back to San Francisco, but they paid no heed to his demand and at precisely eight o'clock he put the Ship about. You had better believe we all spent a most miserable night in thinking of going back to San Francisco after proceeding nearly fifteen hundred miles on our voyage. But the next

*Continued Page 3*



Les Molnar's Website and Email were typed incorrectly in the Census Request article on Page 91 of the October 2007 issue. Please make a note on your copy.

Correct Website: [www.stamps of victoria.com](http://www.stamps of victoria.com)

Correct Email: [les@stamps of victoria.com](mailto:les@stamps of victoria.com)

The corrected version appears on Page 5 of this issue.

### INSIDE THIS ISSUE:

<i>Australian Gold Rush Letter</i>	1, 3-4	<i>BCOF Registration Labels</i>	12-16
<i>Les Molnar's Corrected Request</i>	5	<i>President's Message</i>	16
<i>Detained for Fumigation</i>	6-7	<i>Awards / Want Lists</i>	18
<i>QEII Challenge</i>	8	<i>Secretary's Report</i>	19-20
<i>New Samoa Postal Markings</i>	10	<i>SAS/O Roster</i>	21
<i>Success at Prestige Philately</i>	11	<i>Members' Bulletin Board</i>	22

day they sent a letter to the Captain as an apology for the letter they had written and requested him to proceed on the voyage.

All things passed tolerably well after this until we reached the Sandwich Islands. Owyhee [ed., Hawaii] was the first land we saw after leaving San Francisco. This is the island on which Captain Cook was murdered. It is a very high mountain, land the tops of which were covered with snow. There had been a terrific volcanic explosion here a short time before we arrived causing a great destruction of lives and property. It was still burning, but it being so thick foggy when we passed we could not see it.

We arrived at Lahina Mowee [ed., Lahaina, Maui] the 21<sup>st</sup> of March. This is a very fine town but a most miserable harbour and very dangerous coast for about a quarter mile from the beach, and all along the shore extends a high Coral reef over which the water breaks in sheets of foam. None understand the management of a Boat over this reef as well as the natives. After getting over the reef the water is very shallow between it and the Beach, and if the boat is very loaded, the Natives have to get out and go behind and push the boat as near the beach as the depth of water will admit, and then land the passengers on their backs. I spent four or five days here very pleasantly. It however happened to be the wrong time of year to get a great variety of fruit although watermelons, cocoanuts, and bananas were plenty. We took in a fresh supply of provisions here and set sail after a stoppage of five days.

We had fair winds until we reached the Equator, with but very little disturbance on board, but the day we crossed the line we had a high time of it by old Neptune and his amiable Lady making their appearance on board to keep their usual festival on such occasions, which consists in all hands going through the operation of being shaved.

I will give you a short description of it. They make a preparation of grease and tar and other nauseating ingredients and then after binding the subject they rub his face over with this composition and scrape it with a piece of hoop-iron, and then to finish off they throw five or six buckets of water over his head. All that never crossed the line before have to go through this ceremony or pay a bottle of liquor. You may be sure I took up with the latter, for it is impossible for anyone to escape even Ministers, Lawyers, and gentry – Even females have to pass through the same ordeal together with the Captain and officers. The scene ended off in a jolly row amongst the Crew with a good distribution of slush and salt-water and not a few knockdowns. It was altogether one of the most laughable scenes I ever witnessed.

In a few days after crossing the line the forward passengers again commenced making complaints about the provisions which grew on from one thing to another until it turned out a complete Mutiny. They broke into and plundered both the Ships stores and the Cargo, disobeying and

trampling under foot all law and order, using the most obscene and insulting language both to the Captain and Officers, until it arrived at such a state that the Captain gave up all command over the stores, and told them they had gone so far that they might do just as they d...d please.

Under such a state of affairs you may form some faint idea of some of the scenes enacted on board. We had to go without many a dinner in the Cabin as the mob would steal everything from the stewards they could lay their hands on. They also threatened coming down into the cabin and taking everything therefrom. We therefore took everything out of the hold and stored them in our several rooms, determined if they made me attempt to defend them with our lives. But for me to enumerate all the scenes that took place on board would be entirety useless as it would require a large volume.

Suffice it to say that things continued in this state for six or seven weeks until we reached Ockland [ed., Auckland] on the eastern coast of New Zealand, which place we reached on Saturday the 7<sup>th</sup> of May, but on going ashore we found it to be Sunday the 8<sup>th</sup>, having lost one day on the passage. Here we had great times making a selection of fresh provisions and holding Lawsuits which occupied fourteen days.

I will give you a short description of Ockland – It has a fine harbour, although very difficult to get into on account of it being so landlocked. We were five days after reaching the entrance of the harbour before we came to an Anchorage. The town contains five thousand inhabitants besides the Natives. It has six elegant Churches, the Catholic, Episcopal, Scotch, Methodist, Baptist, and one for the Natives. There is a full regiment of Soldiers stationed here, and I assure you it is a beautiful sight on a Sunday morning to see them all dressed in rich uniform marching to church headed by a band of music. It is now in the midst of winter here and very rainy, but they never have any snow or frost. The grass is ankle high and as for raising vegetables I think no climate can produce its equal. You may see men planting, hoeing and digging potatoes in the same field – also the same with corn. I saw several fields of green corn just right for roasting and it is the same with all kinds of vegetables –as soon as one crop is done they can put another immediately, no matter what season of year. If the Stars and Stripes only floated in the breeze here it would be one of the finest countries in the world, but here it is all “God Save the Queen.”

A very sad accident occurred while we were stopping here. A party of five Officers belonging to the barracks were out on the Bay on an excursion of pleasure, and a squall of wind springing up, the boat was driven on the rocks, and all were drowned. There has been Gold found here lately to considerable extent but cannot be worked to any advantage at present on account of the animosity existing between the government and the Natives. Had it not

been for this I think I should have stayed here a while, but before anything can be done here to perfection by the government it must be sent to England to be signed by her Majesty the Queen, which will be a year or more before it will be settled. But enough for the present of New Zealand.

Before arriving here however we passed many very beautiful Islands clothed in the richest foliage – the Navigators, the Friendly, and the Feejees were the three principal groups. I will name some of the principal Islands that we passed alongside of – Oteewhy, Boskewens, Heppel, Amargura, Mayorga, Eaookwe and Pylstarts. At the last-named Island the ship lay-to, and about fifty Natives came on board bringing with them potatoes, yams, sugarcane, bananas, watermelons, pineapples, and many other varieties of fruits common in these tropics for which they would take in exchange the most trifling articles, such as pipes, tobacco, old bottles, fishhooks, old shirts and blankets, and such like. We spent an hour or two here in fine glee and made no other stop until reaching New Zealand, from which place we sailed on the 21<sup>st</sup> inst., and I am now on the last Thousand miles of my voyage.

And for the present I will drop this letter and finish the remainder on my arrival at the port of destination.

Melbourne, Victoria district Australia June 22<sup>nd</sup> 1853 – I now seat myself to finish this dry sheet. I arrived here in Melbourne the 17<sup>th</sup> of this month after a long passage from San Francisco of 109 days, and now find myself in excellent health. There was but little sickness and no deaths during the whole voyage, although we had to put up with the most inferior provisions that could be raked up in San Francisco. I have previously mentioned the riotous conduct we had on board, in consequence of which 8 or 10 of the ring-leaders were given into the hands of the police on our arrival.

I must give you a short description of this great city in the new world of nearly twice the size of San Francisco. It is situated on the Yarra Yarra River two miles up from the Bay of Port Phillip. It is very handsomely laid out and contains many magnificent buildings. It is mostly built of brick and stone, but of all the places for drunkenness it caps any place I have ever seen. It is ten times worse than Frisco, for here the women drink as much as the men and are taken up by the dozens daily for drunkenness.

Today I saw a man and his wife and a little girl about eight years old all in a drunken state trying to ride in a dray, but could not make it out, and the woman rolled out of the cart into the ditch. A day or two ago another woman was reeling through the streets and caught a billy goat and hugged it in her arms and at last lay down in the street and went to kissing it oh so lovingly. But this is only two out of hundreds of similar cases.

But my sheet is full and I must close. I am not able at present to give you any description of the Mines, only from reports, which if it be true, is not very flattering. I intend

starting to the mines tomorrow in company with Quin, Bill Welch, Tom King, and seven or eight of our old shipmates. I am going first to what is called the Bendigo Diggings one hundred and twenty miles from here. Everything here is about on an average with California prices. Provisions are transported into the mines all of the way on drays.

It is now the middle of winter here, yet they have had but little frost, the grass is as green as you ever saw it in old Granville in May. But I have no more room and must close. I will give you more particulars in my next – Please write as soon as you receive this. Give my best respects to all enquiring friends. Your friend, Joseph Ripley – Please direct your letters to Melbourne, Victoria District, Australia.”

Letters like this are a great “find.” They give a flavor of the conditions of transport and the mails at that period, as well as a glimpse into everyday life so long ago. sas/o

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