

1848 09 11 Wetmore to Gray

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San Francisco, Upper California, Sept. 11 1848

Dear Brother,

I am happy to be able to inform you of the termination of our long voyage of eight months and five days by our safe arrival here on the 27th of August at about dark on Sunday evening. We have now been here two weeks in the enjoyment of the same excellent health with which we have been favored throughout the voyage. The first news on our arrival was of the satisfaction of the treaty of peace with Mexico. This gratifying intelligence reached here on the 10th of August. We were disappointed in not finding any letters from home. It is a little singular that you could not among all of you find some way of forwarding letters to us. As Undine which sailed the last of January is daily expected here we have some faint hopes of receiving letters by then but they will be only about a month later than our departure. I have written home four sheets full from the Sandwich Islands which I shall send by the Rhone when she returns – We left Callao (*ed. A city in Peru*) on the 15th of June and arrived in Honolulu Sandwich Island on the 18th of July after a passage of 33 days. We spent thirteen days there very pleasantly and left on the 31st of July. The winds from the islands here are very unfavorable. We had to go north within 100 miles of the latitude of the Columbia River and all the casting we made did not exceed five degrees. We then tacked backwards and forwards several times and often baffling about for some days at length caught the N. West wind which brought us along rapidly within about 50 miles of land where we were becalmed for two or three days. For two days previous to the calm the wind blew almost a gale so that we ran under close reef topsails and storm sails for a good part of the time — the weather being perfectly clear all the time. After two days calm we at length caught a breeze which increased as we neared the entrance of the harbor which with the rushing tide bore us rapidly though into the bay where we anchored off San Francisco in full view of the town. The appearance of the place was more inviting than I had anticipated but to one just coming from the green hills of N. England the arid hills and dried herbage would not present a very inviting prospect but to me who had seen many places far more arid and barren the view was by no means uninteresting. This is the dry season, no rain having fallen for the last nine months, of course we could not expect to see much verdure. We were all however arguably disappointed.

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...with the place and all seem to like it much. The bay is a beauty one, easy of access and defense and very safe and capacious. The climate is good, that is to say I like it. The only objection I find is the strong winds that blow in for the sea in the afternoon and night bringing at times clouds of dense fog from the sea that render the air chilly. The mornings are very fine and rather warm but in the evening an overcast is not uncomfortable. This is not the case in other parts of California. Twenty miles from here in any direction makes a great difference even across the bay they are almost exempt from the winds that are here an of objection to the climate. But with this objection it is far preferable to any climate in the U. States, being very equable throughout the year and very healthy. The air is pure and bracing. Mary likes the climate and the place very much. Of the population, we are not prepared to judge at present. These two, three families here who form a little circle of good society. The remainder appear to be much like what you would expect to find in a western settlement with a mixture of good and bad and rather rough hewn. There are several intelligent merchants here who are genteel and well bred. Very few ladies of refinement and intelligence are to be found and those with a good clergyman are what is now wanted here to make the society what it ought to be. The greater part of the rowdy population have gone to the gold mines where many will probably die off with fever and ague. As to privations we do not find many, not so many as we expected. There are now twelve sail of vessels in the harbor who have brought goods from different countries so that you can get any necessary article here by paying well for it. Prices are very high—board is ten dollars a week, Cotton goods sell by the package at 16 and 18 cts and every

thing in proportion. A calico shirt that costs 50 cts at home sells for 2.50 and clothes of all descriptions in proportion. Brogans sell by the package at three dollars a pair and coarse boots at five and six. Ask Mr Murelt what he thinks of that! He had no confidence in my California expedition! I have disposed of my mills to Mr. Bethuel Phelps son of Col. Phelps of East Mindson for one half of a large flour mill of four run of stones capable of turning out nearly a hundred barrels per day. The high price of wheat at present in consequence of the drought and the demand for it to feed horses to go to the gold mines rendered it a matter of doubt whether I could make as much with them as at something else. Mr. Phelps is going to apply the horse power to a horse

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... to run up and down the Sacramento to carry freight and pay to and from the mines from which he expects to realize a good amount of money. I consider my sale equal to three thousand dollars. Mr. P. is to give me one half of his mill and erect the building taking my note for one half of the expense and I am to be half owner of the whole superintendency the establishment for which I receive a salary from the firm. It is a most fortunate thing for me indeed. He seemed to take quite a fancy to me from the first. He came across the Isthmus and took passage with us at Callao. He is wealthy and so is his father. This transaction though very advantageous, throws me out of some ready capitol and my future back a little. I have opened a store for jobbing and retailing with a prospect of good success. I have a credit of \$5000 to start with. I have been going five days and made over two hundred dollars less expenses on goods which I have bought from the ship besides those of my own and those consigned to me. I have sold about half of your consignment at a handsome advance and thus I shall be able to remit you the proceeds in gold dust by the Rhone. I take it at 16 dollars the ounce while it is worth 17 in Valparaiso and more than that at home so that though you will be some time in receiving the proceeds it will pay you a good profit and interest. Gold dust is about all the money now in circulation here. Coin is at a premium and is wanted to pay duties with. Merchants are also disposed to speculate on it. They buy gold dust sometimes as low as eight dollars per ounce send to Valparaiso and buy goods with it at 17 dollars the ounce. I might remit you in Treasury notes but if I had to buy them at eight dollars an oz for the gold dust you would not receive half what you will if I send it round the Horn. Although it will take Congress. I want you to come right out here unless you have made some arrangement by which you will make money. I could get consignments to a considerable amount from the states and from the house of Alsop & Co. in Valparaiso & Lima if I could continue in business. But as I cannot devote my whole time to it – I should like to have you take hold with me or alone as you may deem best. You could no doubt get consignments to a considerable extent and purchase some on your own account. I shall continue in business until about next June or July when I suppose the mill will arrive and I shall either be obligated to quit it or have a partner. If you could come out in one of the first steamers and send a lot of goods around ahead of you. I can put you in the way of making money faster...

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faster than you have ever expected. It is perfectly astonishing how fast goods sell here and at enormous profit. The gold mines will attract thousands of people here another year which will greatly increase the consumption. Already they begin to pour in from the Islands and Oregon. We brought about 45 in the Rhone from Callao and several from Honolulu. Above 20 have come from Oregon and about 30 from the Island since we arrived. Half of the goods sold here now go to gold mines and many to the adjacent villages and puebls. People come from the mines with their bags of gold and seem to care but little what price they give for goods. The prospect for all kinds of business is most accelerated. Labor is very high from five to ten dollars per day. Gold is so plenty that everybody is well off and no one is obliged to work of necessity after they have been a month at the mines. It is perfectly astonishing what quantities of gold are brought in. The accounts which you have probably seen before this are not exaggerated. The gold extends over a region of 300 or 400 miles square. Every one

can go and dig for himself. They consider it a bad business if they do not get thirty dollars per day while sometimes they get several hundred. It looks like little scales about the size of flaxseed and from that up to the size of a dollar. If I had time I would write more particularly but this must go to night into the package for Mr. Melle's who is going early to morrow for the States via Valparaiso and the Isthmus. I shall soon have another opportunity of writing when I will drop a line home and to you also. Meanwhile think seriously of coming. If Lucy does not wish to come you must come without her. I would not ask you to come did I not believe it to be greatly for your interest. If any one would insure me five thousand dollars a year I would not go back to Balt. One can hardly help making money here, there are so many openings for all occupations and professions. I write in great haste and must close. Remember me to friends at home and to all who all who inquire after my welfare. If you have done nothing in regard to the mills I wrote you about you need not take any steps in the matter. If you have sent them it is well as they bring a good price but I shall not want them.

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The following were written on the vertical edge of each page of the letter:

(vertical edge of page 1): I send this enclosed to Dr. Peabody. You can pay the postage between you if you like. Your Aff Brother --- C. E. Wetmore

(vertical edge of page 2): Tell Lucys friend Mr. Y Cayden that his friend Harrison has recently been appointed collector of this part by his Excellency Gov. Mason. Love to Lucy and Lucy XXX.

(vertical edge of page 3): Henry is going to the gold mines as he thought he could **be better included in** the connection we had formed of doing business together. Excuse the hasty scratches.

(vertical edge of page 4): Flour is fifteen dollars a barrel grain 150 per bushel 1848 Chauncey 11 Sept.