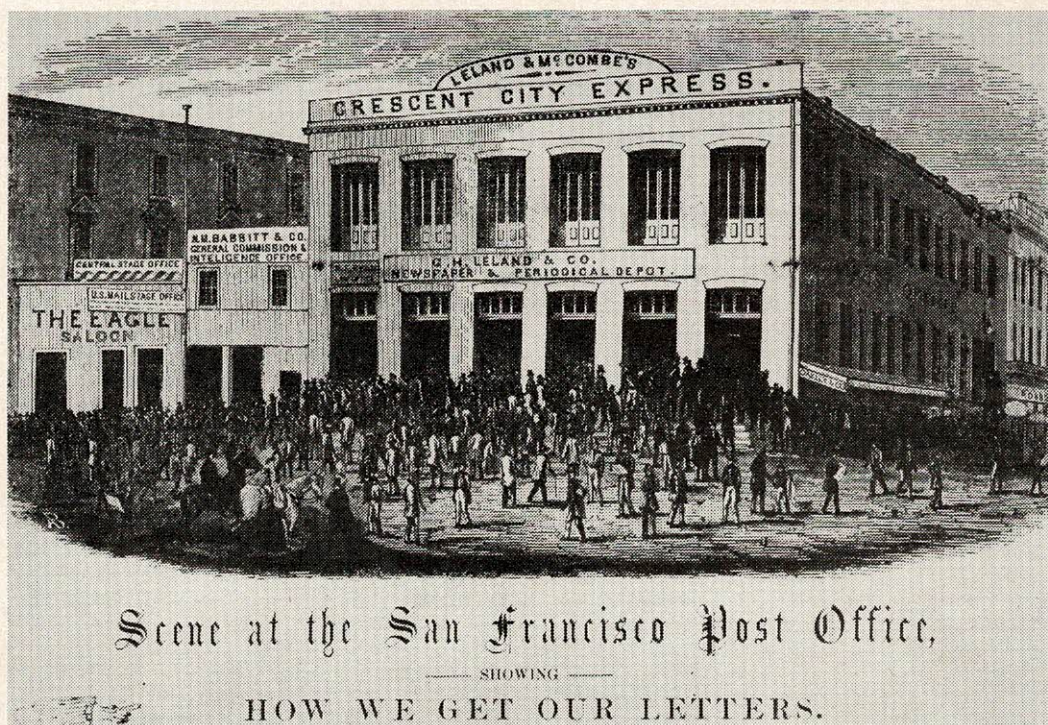


# A Minister Joins the '49 Gold Rush

By LAWRENCE B. ROMAINE

ON APRIL 17th, 1849, the ship *Mount Vernon* cleared for California with a crew and company of sixty seven members, most of whom were part owners. <sup>John</sup> Joseph T. Atsatt shipped as Master, and Mattapoisett, Mass. was her home port. She was built in Rochester, Mass. in 1832 of 383 tons, a whaler of the first New England water. Every dog has its day, or so the saying goes, and perhaps this was the *Mount Vernon's* golden year in a lifetime of blubber and oil. After her return from the gold fields she joined her brethren in New Bedford for the rest of her life. One year of "gold rushing" seems to have been her fill, as her owners decided that sperm oil glittered far more securely in the right market.

Isaac Bowles of Mattapoisett, God-fearing sail maker and part time preacher, kept the logbook that has just come to light at Weathercock House. I feel that it may prove of interest not only as a record of the voyage but for the picture he draws of San Francisco, Benicia, Helvetia and New York, all in California. The logbook, with a letter he wrote to Mrs. Bowles the following January, 1850, may well contribute material for research as well as amusing reading. Not everyone re-



"The above illustration will be recognized as a correct Post-Office scene upon the arrival of the mails from the Atlantic. An interval of two weeks elapsing from the arrival of one mail to another, creates an anxiety to hear from home that can scarcely be comprehended by other than residents of California. At an early hour of the morning on which it is announced the mails will be ready for delivery, anxious faces commence forming in the lines leading to the different deliveries, and by 8 o'clock the whole interior of the spacious building is completely jammed with persons, as well as the streets adjoining. The letters are generally delivered with all possible dispatch, yet evening will often find the different lines but little shortened; and the RUSH sometimes continues for three days . . ."

ceived "letters" in those hectic days.

The log starts, as stated above, on April 17th, 1849, with pleasant comment on Captain and company of sixty seven, in good health, with thanks to God for the opportunity, and a prayer for the little family left behind. On the 22nd a finback whale caused great excitement, and it is my guess that there were those on board who would willingly have filled the hold with oil if it had been empty. Seasickness racked Mr. Bowles' morale the next day or so, but on the 24th he felt quite spry again, and noted that "there was fiddling and dancing tonight." They overhauled the bark *Montgomery* on May 3rd and spoke her. She was from New Orleans and had just stopped at Charleston for repairs and here taken on a full quota of passengers for the gold "diggings." They had the cholera on board and had lost one man, but this didn't prevent a good "gam" during which the ladies came on board the *Mount Vernon*, and a jolly frolic it proved to be.

Mr. Pope, 2nd Mate, had a birthday party in the captain's cabin on May 9th, "which brought us in sight of a splendid cake and I wish I could say good water." Poor Mr. Bowles tried hard to be a good fellow but he was a Son of Temperance and his pages constantly remind us of his convictions. They kept close to the

*Montgomery* for some time and gammed with the bark *Hub* of Boston on the 11th. On the 12th our scribe wrote, "I think if I was again on shore in our village and knew as much about sea life as I do now, I never should go to California for the sake of a little gold that will tarnish in the using." I shall spare you the many sad philosophical passages in which he deplores most of mankind and calls upon God to give him strength to teach them a better way of life. After all, he was a preacher, and the poor chap was in pretty rough company, where the material things of this world were better understood than visions of a hereafter.

May 15th's log gives us a picture of the whole plan of the voyage. Mr. Ellis offered his share of the expedition for \$250.00 and asked to be left at Cape Verde Islands on account of ill health. \$250.00 then was the stake for each man aboard. The entire company had a meeting and accepted the offer, buying Mr. Ellis's share. The outfitting of the *Mount Vernon* for the voyage, plus materials for a smaller vessel to be built on board during the trip for navigating inland to the gold fields, if my calculations are correct, came to \$16,750.00. Just this one small fact may be news to many concerning the costs of reaching the land of promise in 1849. This was the first mention of this small

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boat, but from here on, the mechanics of the crew are busy almost every day working on her, from keel to sail. I have read of this scheme before and also of knocked-down boats shipped overland, ready to be assembled in California.

When they reached St. Antonio Island (the Santo Antao of the Cape Verde group), the temptation for oil proved too strong, and they put out the whale boats for "black fish." Success is indicated in the logbook with a very strange looking fish in pen and ink—one of the little things that makes a whaling log more fascinating than any merchantman's record. These old Yankee whalers simply had to have a bit of oil along to mix with their gold. The "fish" were hauled up, steaks cut for food and the rest minced down for blubber. The old try pots were soon boiling and the *Mount Vernon* began to smell as a whaler should. They left Mr. Ellis in the hands of the consul at Porto Grande where they also stocked up on fruit and other supplies. The Sloop of War *Decatur* gave them three salutes on departure for the Horn, and they again set a course, leaving behind them a smoky stench which few gold rushers could boast.

The work on the river boat continued, as frames, stems and other members were put together for assembly in San Francisco. Mr. Bowles continued to preach of a future and temperate life, while most of the company continued to revel in rum and dream of gold dust and whale oil. He wasn't like the fabled demented whaling captain who hung a man in the morning, and then cried in his rum in the cabin that night, as he wrote his justification to himself. Isaac Bowles must have been one of the sincerest men who ever left for the gold fields. His Sunday sermons to the company were truly from the bottom of his heart.

The 4th of July takes a full page of sorrow, in which we learn of all the members of the Bowles family who have passed away since the last celebration of Independence, especially a cousin who was lost at sea. The rest of the crew however really did it up brown, firing guns all day and washing each shot down properly. They again lowered for whales off Brazil, and failing to "fasten," drowned their sorrow in mince pie and rum. Mr. Bowles commented "I have learned from experience never to vote for a man who will drink liquor and knows nothing about a ship."

I have never before read a logbook wherein the vessel rounded the Horn with such ease. They must surely have had more luck than brains, for aside from a bit of tacking about, hunting for the right passage, they sailed through without loss of sail or man, which in those days was quite unusual. They even "spoke" two vessels on the way around, exchanging news with the bark *A. M. Smith* of New Haven, also bound for California, 48 days

out. Compared with the *Mount Vernon*, now already over three months out of Mattapoisett, she was rarin' for gold and no question. However, she wasn't a whaler, and she would bring no oil along to wash the gold—or to sell, if the gold proved a mirage in the distance, as it did for so many in 1849. The *Mount Vernon* may have plodded, but she got there just the same!

Perhaps a few lines from the log will give you a better picture: "This day fine weather and we are speeding along as well as things will admit for the officers do not agree as well as they might—the favored ones may lay below, but I prefer to stand my watch and I'd rather do my part of the work than sneak out of it—but anything for peace—so ends this day. "Thursday, July 26th, 1849. This day made the land and it was the Diegos and cape horn and hermite Island, and were so far in land we could not get by, so we are tacking and filling to get past the islands . . . ." A bit of argument about navigation, and then the cruel and terrible Horn is past!

When they reached the Island of Juan Fernandez, about half way up the Chile coastline, they sent three boats ashore for provisions. They visited five or six caves, "some 5 feet long and some 20 feet high" that impressed Mr. Bowles greatly. He also mentioned the green vegetables, carrots, peaches, goats, turkeys and wild horses as things one would never expect to see in such a wasteland of the Pacific. At this time bedlam broke loose as a group got together and signed a petition demanding their right to sell out their shares and leave the *Mount Vernon* at the next port on the mainland of South America. Mr. Bowles expressed his doubt that they would ever accomplish their purpose as a body, but apparently the scare blew over, and the company continued reunited.

On September 21st they spoke the bark *Vernon* of New York, 200 days out, bound for San Francisco, and gammed with the bark *Elizabeth Hucher* of Sydney, Australia. The *Hucher* was also bound for the glittering gold fields and everlasting fortune. The women and children in tatters and rags upset our "little minister," but not as much as the fact that *their* minister and guiding light offered him brandy—not to mention tossing off several glasses even while arguing with him about liquor!

October 2nd, 1849 they anchored in the Bay of San Francisco, at long last. One hundred and sixty five days at sea—but, let the good man tell it himself:

"Oct. 2nd 1849. This morning we weighed anchor and at 10 o'clock a.m. we cast anchor in the Bay of San Francisco and in the afternoon went on shore & I cannot describe the number of people that was in this city and they lived some in poor huts and some in tents and some lay out of doors and have not wheron to lay their heads labour is all the way from 17 dollars down to ten.

"Wednesday Oct. 3rd, 1849. This day spent in getting our effects on shore and we had to boat it a good ways as there were rising 3 hundred sail of vesels in this place but we mad a good headway.

"Thursday Oct. 4 1849. this day on shore and we are still discharging our cargo nothing new Drunkedness & gambling and Sabath Breaking is caryed on in this cyty may God deliver me from any of these Damnable sins

"Friday Oct 5 1849 this day closed up our busines in this place sent a number of leters on shore . . . . was very sorry to find that I had no leters in the office for me.

"Sat. Oct. 6th 1849. this day took a pilot on boad and started up the river Sacramento we got aground and after wating some 2 hours or more we got of and the tide being against us cast anchor for the night.

"Sunday Oct 7th 1849 this day weighed anchor and run up as far as helvetia a small village which is about 15 fields short of the cyty of York which is I suppose as far as we can get with our ship and we cast anchor and can go no further on act of fog which is very thick and a number of our men is very bad of with coldes."

Monday the 8th presented a bee-hive of activity. Some were making gold washers, others packing up their odds and ends, and the majority painting the river boat before assembling and putting it together. A few went on shore gunning. Alden Dexter of Mattapoisett was shot and killed by one Prince Snow, and the turmoil that followed can be imagined. It was the old story that we hear on the radio and read in the papers every Fall during hunting seasons—and always will. Mr. Barnum was never more correct in all of his many calculations about the human race than when he said there was at least one fool born every minute. The next day they all went ashore at Benicia and dug a grave for their departed friend, the place of burial being about three miles from the village. They buried him beside the grave of Captain Littlefield who had once mastered the ship *Hopewell*. They painted boards with his initials and placed them at his head and feet (as the old song goes) and also cut "his leters" in a stone and placed it about two feet from his head. Here endeth this lesson.

On the 9th they again set sail for "New York" but were aground in no time. On the 11th they finally arrived at New York, after passing through mountains and valleys and pastures of "milk and honey," and Mr. Bowles glowed over each line as he wrote it. New York was apparently quite a place: "There are some 5 or 6 buildings here and they are small—there is 5 ships and amongst them the *Mayflower* of New Bedford." On the 12th they held another meeting and decided to sell the river boat as was, without putting it



together. They also elected two directors *pro tem*, as the gentlemen who were supposed to meet them in San Francisco and take charge had not arrived. The question of keeping boarders on the ship was decided in the negative. The original company was broken up at last and some were paid off, after deducting passage, in stores and a whale boat to go on inland to the gold fields. The rest were allowed to stay on board and make sails, tents and other necessary equipment. This is about the end of the voyage and Mr. Bowles' log-book at New York, California, about sixty miles from Stockton. Here is the last entry:

"Sunday 15th, 1849. Hail Blessed day but how art thou desecrated by this company how will the Savior of lost men look upon this company I know not this day 30 of our company started for the mines this morning and I raised my warning voice against the movement on the Sabbath and it makes my heart sick and I shall turn from it."

But for Mrs. Bowles, we might have had to leave our Yankee minister making sails and tents and preaching to a gang of very uninterested gold-washers. Very fortunately and thoughtfully she saved a letter dated Stockton, Jan. 20th, 1850, which tells us that Mr. Bowles survived his trials and tribulations and carried on in the true American style. I shall give you the important parts of the letter in his own words:

"Dear Wife-

I now take my pen in hand to pen a few lines to you to inform you that I am as well & hearty as I ever was in my life. I have long boots & have been to meeting this day & the mud is one foot deep in Stockton but business is good at present we have sold out most of our goods and hope I shall get clear of the rest for so many ships are now arriving that everything is coming down & I am receiving goods daily from San Francisco. I have sent up from our shop this week 6000 lbs. of flower on commission 700 wght. of cheese from Capt. Hicks of Westport.—It keeps me busy as a be(e) but if the news at the mines is as good next Spring me & my pardner will probably go up to the mines and ask for the best of business.—I want to see you all but, Sarah, you know how hard it is to get a living at home & I have come a long ways & I am young yet & have a little family coming up and they are very dear to me. I hope to get home in the fall and make those dear children very happy—tell old Brad that he must be ready to build that barn for me.—I purchased 1100 lbs. of butter for one dollar and sold it for 1.50 a pound & bought a lot of corn & give 1.00 a bushel for it and sold it at \$12. a bushel and then bot 50 gallons of pickled cucumbers for .75c and sold them for \$4.00 per gallon; but it is no use to expect such whacks now for too many are on the lookout and I don't like to risk my money unless I can more than double it in a very few days—and here I am at the bottom of the sheet before I am aware of it - Yours Isaac Bowles."

It would seem from this letter that something has happened to our little sea-sick, sailmaking minister. Where was his conscience? He still went to meeting, and perhaps he still preached, but surely such profits were not helping to feed the little ragged Australians and fill their little tummies. California must have agreed with him, and as long as he didn't keep shop on the Sabbath, sell rum or drink rum, perhaps he felt the Good Lord would forgive him. I sincerely hope he returned to Mattapoisett and his family in the Fall of 1850 with his carpet bag leaking double eagles. No one in the village seems to remember anything about him, and though the history of Mattapoisett and Rochester tells of religious meetings at the home of Isaac Bowles Senior in the eighteen thirties, it gives no information about his son who went to California in the Gold Rush of '49, and—we hope—returned safe and sound after a very successful experience.

*Postscript:* I have just been informed that "Isaac Bowles never brought any money back . . . left his wife and daughters to fend for themselves . . . wife kept house for others and finally went to California. If Isaac ever made any money, probably his brother Resolved got it away from him." (From a chat with an octogenarian of Mattapoisett now living.)

L. B. R.

## A NOTABLE DICTIONARY

"*Holt's Spanish and English Dictionary: Diccionario Ingles & Espanol*," by Edwin B. Williams. Demy 8vo, Pp. 1277. Henry Holt, 1955. \$7.50; thumb indexed \$8.50.

Reviewed by  
ALEXANDER McQUEEN

THIS TRULY up-to-date and comprehensive dictionary will be welcomed in many places. Not only does it contain about 10,000 more entries than other one-volume works in its field, but it offers a wider range of words, chosen by an expert. These include terms needed in the discussion of television, the atomic age, the wonder drugs, and other phenomena of the ever-challenging present. American usage in both languages is given generous recognition.

There is a fair inclusion of American and British slang words, the translations of which are often amusing. British *spiffy* is "guapo, elegante." U. S. *baloney* is "tonterias, musica celestial." (Turning in the Spanish-English section to *musica celestial*, we find "nonsense, moonshine, piffle.") Interesting equivalents are given for *Scotch tape*, *jaywalker*, *funnies*, etc. *Stooge*, marked "slang," is defined as "preguntador apostado en el auditorio para hacer preguntas preparadas de antemano a un comediante que las contesta de manera divertida para el publico," which seems rather long—until we try to define *stooge* in English. Slang of Spain and Spanish-American countries is also well represented—a real service to travelers, writers, and readers of modern fiction.

Much can be learned from a good dictionary, such as this one. For example, when *limerick* is translated as "quintilla jocosa," we are reminded that this type of verse contains five lines, and is therefore not, as sometimes described, a quatrain.

Many idiomatic expressions in both languages are translated, and much help to students is given by summaries of English and Spanish grammar, pronunciation, and verbal systems. To aid Spanish-speaking readers, the pronunciation of English words is shown by a simple adaptation of the International Phonetic Alphabet. Reference is made easy by putting all types of words together, one list for everything in English, one for everything in Spanish. The list of dictionary abbreviations for both languages is placed conveniently at both ends of the book.

Dr. Edwin Bucher Williams, Provost of the University of Pennsylvania and Professor of Romance Languages there, was the right man for this important work. Making the dictionary took him ten years, but *preparation* for the task probably dates back to the days when he studied in Europe and began to gain familiarity with several Romance languages at first hand. In any event, the preparation was thorough. Dr. Williams, and Henry Holt & Company, deserve to be congratulated.

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