gilcrease

THE JOURNAL OF GILCREASE MUSEUM

XVII
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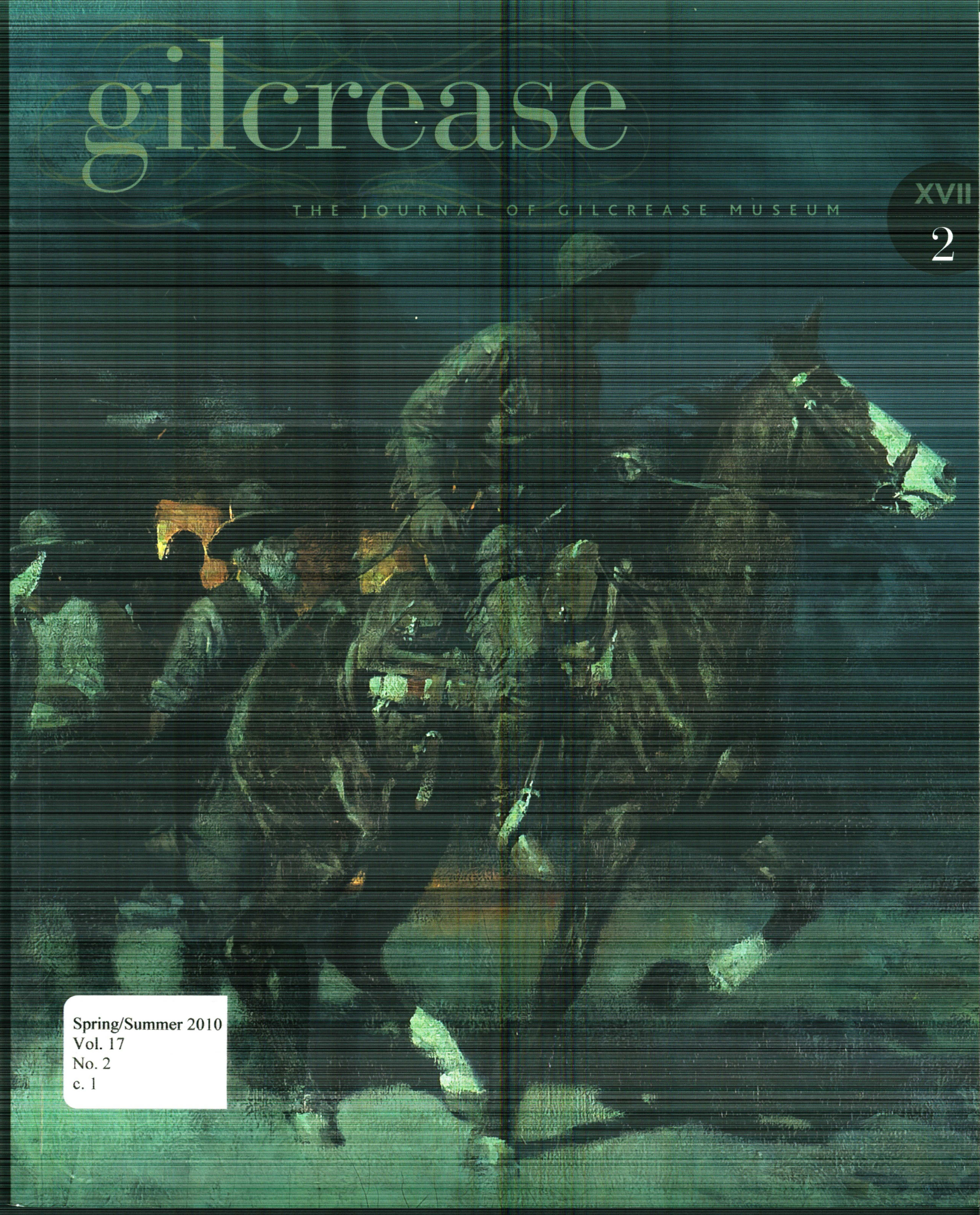

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THE LETTER

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The Coming and Going of the Pony Express. Detail.
Frederic Remington, 1900, oil on canvas. 0127.2333.

The Kansas City Times
ALWAYS ON HAND.

HARPER'S WEEKLY.
A JOURNAL OF CIVILIZATION.

VOL. XXXI.—No. 1583.
NEW YORK, SATURDAY, APRIL 23, 1887.
TEN CENTS A COPY.
$4.00 PER YEAR, IN ADVAN
Copyright, 1887, by HARPER & BROTHERS.

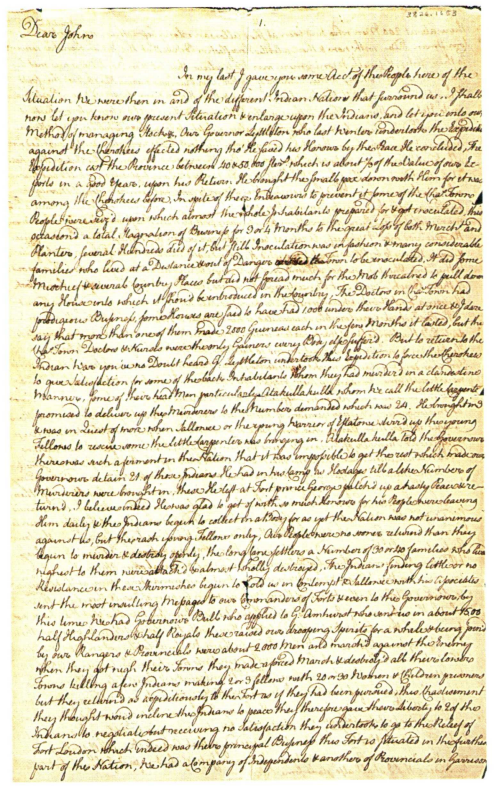




BY THE TIME FREDERIC REMINGTON PAINTED *The Coming and Going of the Pony Express* in 1900, the private coast-to-coast mail service that was its subject had long been out of business (it was in operation for only eighteen months in 1860 and 1861; Kimberly Roblin tells this story eloquently in the essay that follows). In the decades since, the Pony Express has been celebrated in film, television, its own museum in St. Joseph, Missouri, even a digital-interactive game for children. It surely floated in the mind of David Brin, author of *The Postman,* a novel made into a 1997 film starring Kevin Costner. The film depicts an unwitting hero who invents a horse-borne mail service to connect isolated communities in a post-apocalyptic America devastated by some unspecified disaster. After many plot twists, the social fabric is finally rewoven by the power of written communication.

Letters have been seen historically as privileged objects. A Pony Express rider was expected to protect his mailbag with his life. Criminal law has acknowledged the importance of the mail: in the 1860s a person who robbed a U.S. mail carrier could be sentenced to up to ten years of hard labor on a first offense and death on a second. Until the 1920s, letters carried by the postal service were entrusted only into the recipient's hand; if the addressee was not home, the letter was redelivered. Burning a letter is a uniquely violent gesture, useful as a stock turning point in traditional narrative fiction, and letters gone astray by accident have a similar poignance and gravity. When a sixty-four-year-old undelivered love letter surfaced recently, written by a British serviceman during World War II and addressed only to "my dearest," the RAF set out conscientiously to locate the letter's recipient. For a day, that story of a "message in a bottle" bobbing up unexpectedly on the shore of the present shouldered out what might be thought more dramatic front-page news. But letters are drama—the drama of intimate human life, in keepsake form.

Facing: *Harper's Weekly* cover, April 23, 1887. TL2009.35.64ff. Above: Promotional poster for *The Postman.*

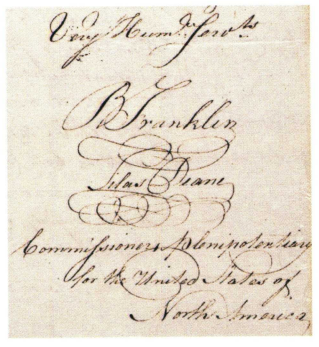


Mail of all sorts, legal, personal, business-related, is such a fixture in American life that it's easy to think of it as an unchanging part of our collective experience. But it has evolved as restlessly as any other part of our culture. Early colonial-era mail was transported by whoever was on the move and might agree to carry it. Most mail, however, was not destined for a sister colony but for the mother country of the correspondent, and must have recounted the trials, amazements, and the occasional low-drifting loneliness, of life in a new land. The first systematic gathering point for overseas mail, a Boston tavern, was designated in 1639. Inter-colony mail transit developed over the next decades. In 1753 the Crown appointed Benjamin Franklin one of two joint postmasters general for the colonies. Although Franklin was dismissed in 1774 for pro-colony sympathies, by that time colonial mail regularly traveled post roads the length of the eastern seaboard, in large part through his ingenuity and efforts. The Second Continental Congress, meeting in Philadelphia in summer 1775, restored Franklin to his post. He was still in office in July 1776, making him, among his many other legendary roles in American history, the first Postmaster General of the new United States.

Like communications of all eras, letters of this period bear the mark of their technology: in this case, script traditions and the hand-cut quill. Cutting a quill pen was an art in itself, and a pen lasted only a week or so under regular use. The technology of the quill influenced the movement of the hand, but so did the training and temperament of the writer. Handwriting, like any human gesture, mirrors the eccentricities of the individual, from unique musculature to emotional state to cultural background. But it walks a balance beam: it also must adhere sufficiently to a common model to be understandable. That model for 18th-century Americans was adopted from England. Benjamin Franklin was a particularly accomplished practitioner of the English-derived copperplate style,which took two general forms: rounder and bolder for business use and thinner and more lyrical for the use of ladies. The round copperplate style would influence the American "Spencerian" script that was taught in business schools in the mid-19th century and after. Its descendant was still around in elementary schools in the mid-20th century (if you are old enough, you may recall those lined newsprint tablets with the smoothly flowing model letterforms that a child was expected to trace over.) These days you can buy a font for your computer that mimics this style, which originated in the skilled engraving of a copper plate. But it will lack the nicks and moods of actual handscript. Handwriting is a "voice," influenced by forces both within and without.



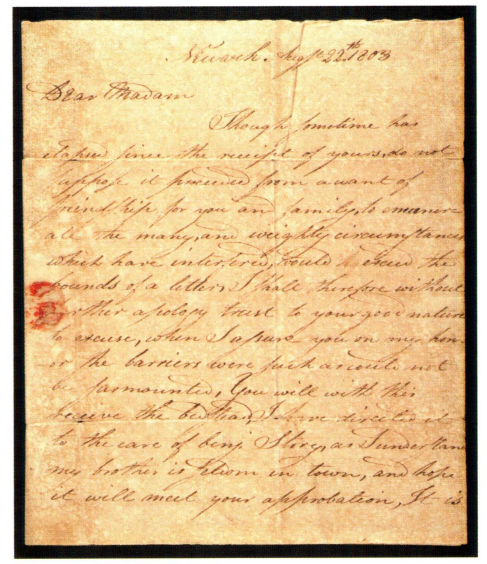


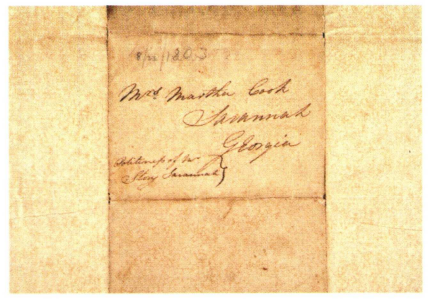


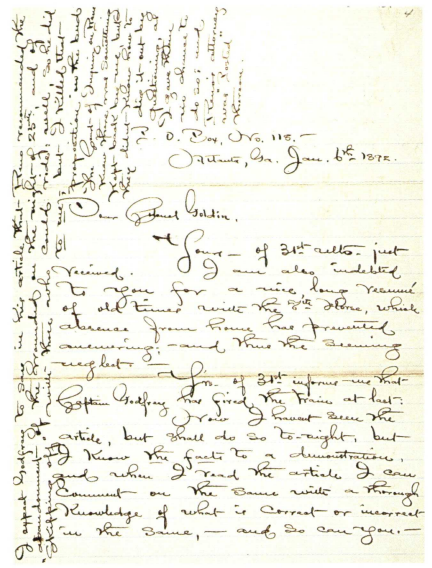
Top: A letter from William Fyffe, a Scottish doctor who settled at George Town, South Carolina, to his brother John Fyffe, a merchant and banker in Edinburgh, Scotland, dated February 1, 1761. The 8,000-word letter contains a thorough description of the Cherokees. 3826.1653.1.

Above: Benjamin Franklin one-cent stamp; Benjamin Franklin. Jacques Reich, etching on paper. 1427.11; Franklin's signature on a letter sent by Franklin and Silas Deane to Baron Schulenburg. 4076.3914.

Certainly the exigencies of early letter-writing affected the "volume" of the voice in which people set down their thoughts. Carrier rates were based on the number of sheets in a letter and the distance it traveled. Until 1815, a letter going 500 miles or more cost twenty-five cents per sheet. It behooved the writer to conserve space by writing in miniature—some "cross wrote," filling a sheet with writing and then turning it at a 45-degree angle and writing over it again. Not until 1863 would postage be based universally on weight, not distance, reflecting the emerging consciousness of the nation as a single whole, whose parts would be forged into a gradually annealing union after civil war.







Once penned, a letter was not secluded in an envelope, which we have come to understand as a symbol of privacy and confidentiality. It might be wrapped in a second sheet of paper, which was addressed, or addressed on its reverse side after folding. Handmade envelopes gradually became more common. In 1845, the first patent for an envelope-making machine was assigned, in England, and the invention flourished. Postage stamps made their debut in the United States two years later, the first two stamps picturing Benjamin Franklin and George Washington.

Perhaps the one-of-a-kind charm of a quill-penned letter in its trustingly unsealed made-from-scratch envelope faded with the advent of machined envelopes. But it wasn't long before energetic personalities set about warming up those cool envelopes. Artists such Charles M. Russell and Olaf Seltzer—acting within the long tradition of the illustrated letter but expressing themselves in characteristically American western style—began their own tradition of exuberantly embellishing the outer envelopes of their correspondence.

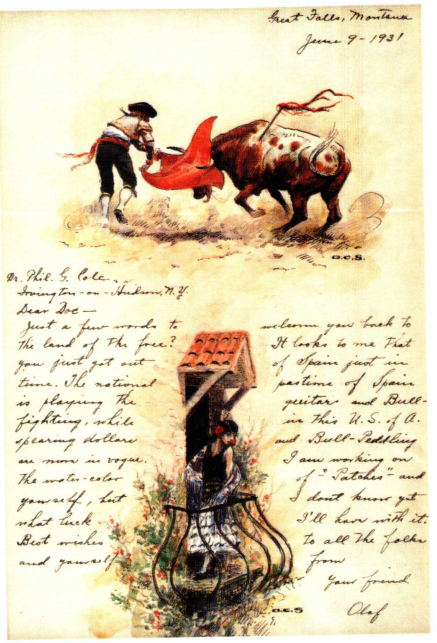


Top left: A letter from 1803 demonstrates a fine hand in English-derived copperplate script and the mark of red sealing wax. 3826.2063. Top: A letter to Mrs. Martha Cook of Savannah, Georgia, addressed on the reverse of the letter, as was typically done prior to the common use of envelopes. 3826.2063. Immediately above: Letter from William Benteen (1834–1898) to Theodore W. Goldin. Benteen, formerly Senior Captain under Custer, criticizes Custer's military tactics at the Battle of the Little Big Horn. The writer makes economic use of the writing paper. 3826.137.

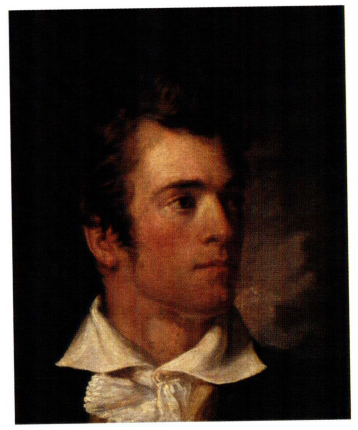
Left: Illustrated envelope of a letter from Olaf Seltzer to his patron Philip Cole in 1930. 0237.1183.

Right: Illustrated letter from Olaf Seltzer to Philip Cole, 1931. 0237.1157. Below: Portrait of George Catlin. John Neagle. 0126.2164. Bottom: The Creek poet and educator Alexander Posey. 4327.62581.

Facing page: A letter from Alexander Posey to his father. 3826.2176.


Great Falls, Montana
June 9 - 1931

Dr. Phil. G. Cole
Irvington-on-Hudson, N.Y.
Dear Doc —
Just a few words to welcome you back to the land of the free? It looks to me that you just got out of Spain just in time. The national pastime of Spain is playing the guitar and Bull-fighting, while in this U.S. of A. spearing dollars and Bull-Peddling are now in vogue. I am working on the water-color of "Patches" and yourself, but I don't know yet what luck I'll have with it. Best wishes to all the folks and yourself from
Your friend
Olaf

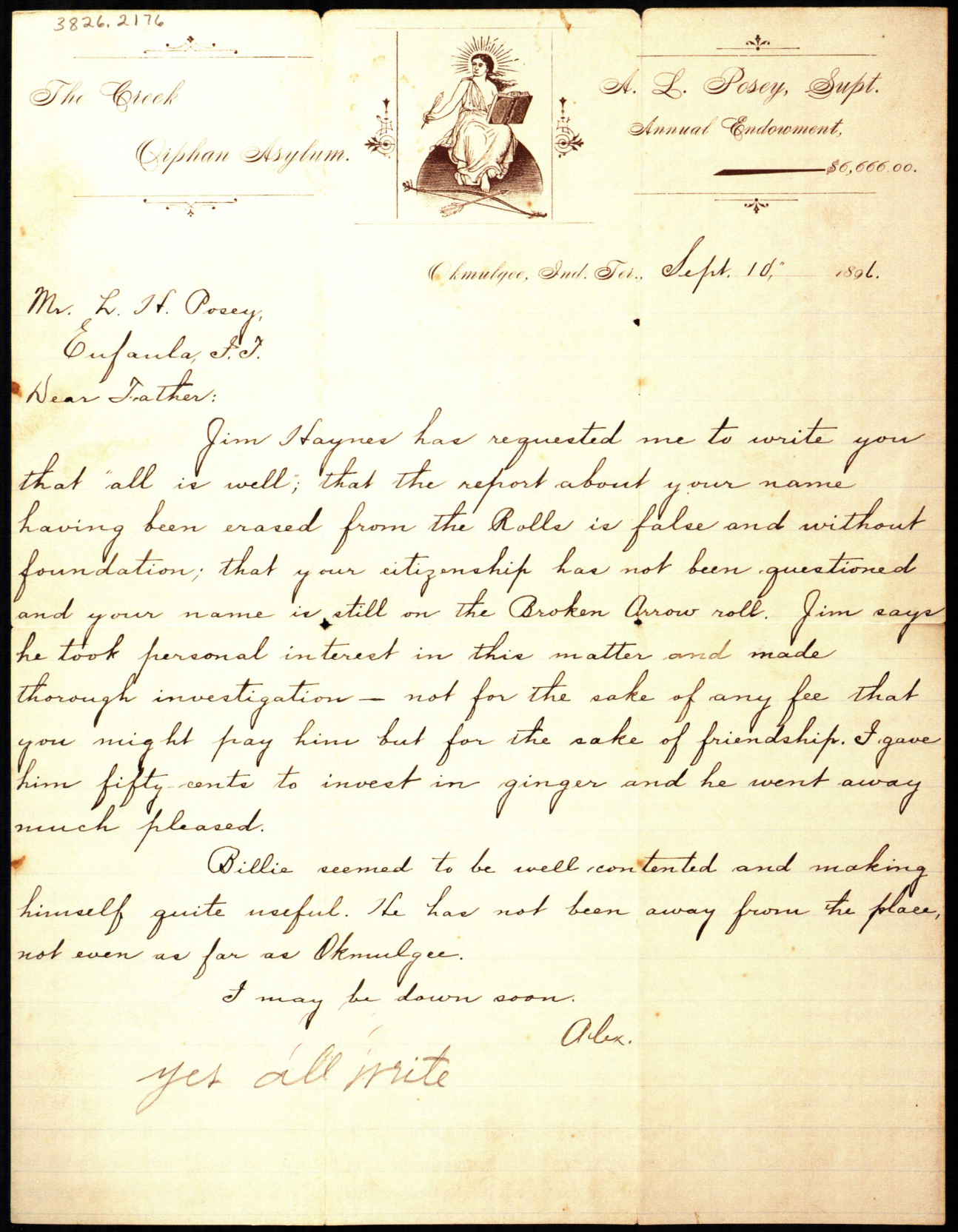




The human impulse to personalize even so utilitarian a thing as an envelope (or, these days, an email background color or font) seems perennial. And perhaps it is related to the very effect of writing on the human brain. Developments in communication technology remake not only the world but also the brain that experiences it, according to some neuroscientists. They suggest that the invention of written language re-purposed the part of the human brain once hard-wired to recognize useful shapes in nature—edible things, branches to cling to—and that is why so many written languages, though developed in isolation, employ similar letterforms. Others say that the act of reading alters the corpus collosum that links the right and left hemispheres of the brain, widening it from a footpath to an ample highway. The vigorous image-making capacity of the right brain more quickly marries the analytic language-processing power of the left brain. Voila! An illustrated letter.

BY 1863, THE PONY EXPRESS HAD PASSED INTO LEGEND. The telegraph, or "Victorian Internet," as Tom Standage calls it, was in place. Still, "telegraphy was generally a system for informing, not conversing," as Naomi Baron writes. The actual, palpable, rustling, ink-perfumed, paper-based letter remained king, or queen, of personal correspondence, or co-responding, between people. And in the 19th century the penned page was also the tool for recording new experiences in the American West in the letters and journals of expeditionary writers.

There can be a fine line between a journal entry and a letter. In the days of typewriters, some writers kept carbon copies of letters as a form of journal (some email correspondents no doubt still do, but without the need for carbon). A journal entry may be thought of as a letter to the future self; the journals of explorers as letters to future generations. American anthropologists of the 19th century such as Adolph Bandelier (1840–1914), George Catlin (1796–1872), and Frank Hamilton Cushing (1857–1900) were consummate letter writers in this sense. Expeditionary letters to patrons, colleagues, or friends were likely written with an imaginary third party (future readers) looking over the writer's shoulder. In this, they are somewhat akin to the declarations of love carved into aspen tree trunks by lonely 19th-century sheepherders on the Colorado Plateau—or to today's tweets and Facebook postings, where the "thou" in the classic "I-and-thou" relationship expands to encompass assorted friends, bare acquaintances, and random passersby. These methods of communication have returned again to the unsealed "envelope."


3826.2176

The Creek
Orphan Asylum.

A. L. Posey, Supt.
Annual Endowment,
$6,666.00.

Okmulgee, Ind. Ter., Sept. 10, 1896.

Mr. L. H. Posey,
Eufaula, I.T.
Dear Father:

Jim Haynes has requested me to write you that "all is well"; that the report about your name having been erased from the Rolls is false and without foundation; that your citizenship has not been questioned and your name is still on the Broken Arrow roll. Jim says he took personal interest in this matter and made thorough investigation — not for the sake of any fee that you might pay him but for the sake of friendship. I gave him fifty cents to invest in ginger and he went away much pleased.

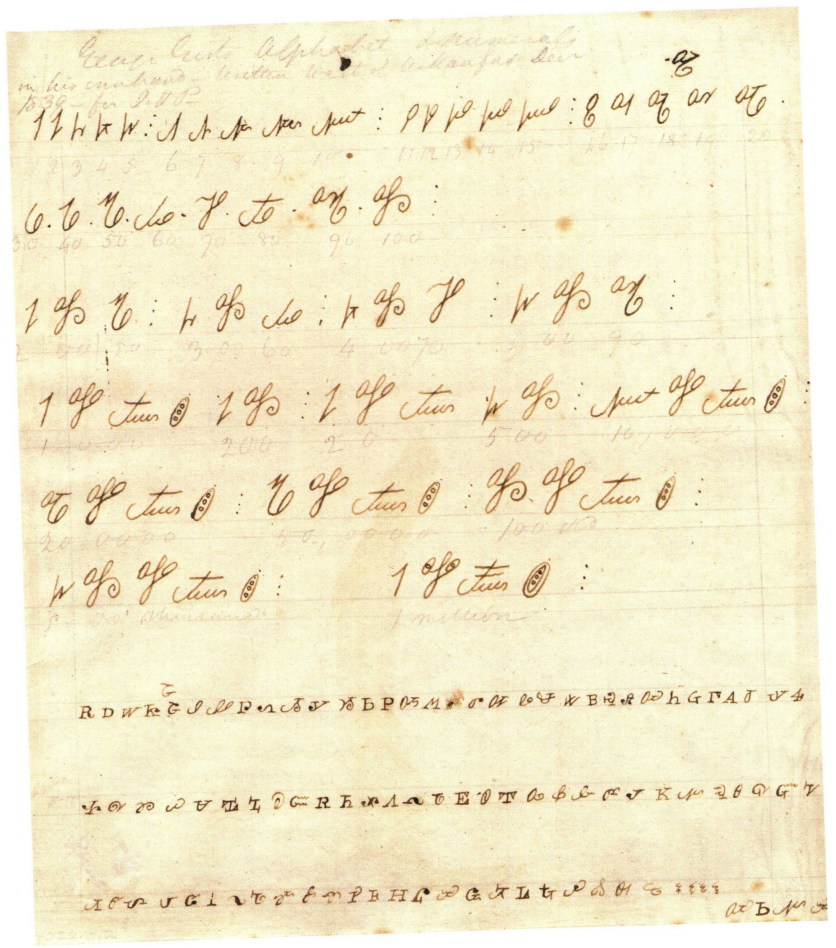
Billie seemed to be well contented and making himself quite useful. He has not been away from the place, not even as far as Okmulgee.

I may be down soon.

Alex.

yes all write





Above left: Sequoyah (also known as George Guess or George Gist), 1770s–1843. Hand-colored lithograph after an 1828 portrait by Charles Bird King. 4026.312. Sequoyah's writing system, made public around 1821, offered a new means of communication to the Cherokee people. Above right: A document written by Sequoyah includes the numbering system he devised and his syllabary. The syllabary, lower three lines, is followed by his signature at bottom right. Individual glyphs that make up the syllabary correspond to syllables of spoken Cherokee speech. 4026.312.

The historical drama of evolving relationships between Native and non-native Americans unfolded not only in the observations of early expeditionary anthropologists but in letters and documents throughout the 19th and 20th centuries. The Gilcrease library archive is rich in materials related to treaties, tribal rolls, property issues, and other aspects of this story. Not all concern negotiations and administrative jockeying. One example is the poetry of Creek educator and poet Alexander Posey. Another is the arcane 1860s notebook of Wilson Mellowbug, containing Cherokee sacred formulas, such as those for medicine and witchcraft, love charms, hunting charms, and other ancient secrets, in syllabary. Such formulas were handed down orally from remote antiquity until Sequoyah's invention of the Cherokee syllabary allowed them to exist apart from the spoken language, as letters do.

Like other forms of art, letters have a dual relationship with time: they celebrate the particularity of a fleeting moment and simultaneously seal it into timelessness. As children we sensed this power when we wrote secrets to each other in lemon juice "ink," which was then made visible by passing the paper over a flame. What was hidden became legible and as quickly burned away, entering memory's realm. Perhaps this relationship to time explains the nostalgia often surrounding old letters. As there are pods of aficionados who gather to laboriously re-enact Civil War battles, wearing hand-made clothing and carrying vintage gear, there are groups of those whose passion is to authentically re-enact the writing of Victorian-style love letters and naval military correspondence.

History itself loves a letter. "Among other things, letters are the lifeblood of history, the beating heart of biography," writes Stacy Schiff. The scriptwriters for the 2008 HBO miniseries on the life and times of John Adams must certainly have been glad that Adams and his wife Abigail exchanged some 1,100 letters over the course of their marriage. As a curious aside, the U.S. Postal Service invited viewers of the series to purchase a card bearing a quote from the John and Abigail Adams correspondence. The cards were then sent to the purchasers, who could add their own words and mail the cards in prepaid envelopes. The project, though meant to promote physical, traditional mail, depended on the Internet—where the cards were selected and purchased.

Who knows how future historians will be able to mine today's tweets, youtube videos, cellphone texts, Facebook comments, blogs, and emails for source material. Perhaps there will be electronic sifting technology that can recapture at least some of the evanescent zeroes and ones otherwise evaporating constantly like an invisible mist from our digital devices. In them they will still see the stamp of the unique individual with all his or her eccentricities, as distinctively as it is expressed by the cut of a quill point or the adornment of an envelope.

IT IS A LONG WAY FROM HEARING A TAP AT YOUR CABIN DOOR and receiving a stained and creased sheet from the hands of an itinerant stranger to scrolling your email queue and spying a letter from an old pal. No wonder some observers pointed to email as the transformative stage of interpersonal expression. But in the broad journey of techno-change we are likely to find it just another port of call. In 1849, a letter from New York to San Francisco took a month to reach its destination by steamboat. In 2006, it took six hours by air. In 2010, it takes the instant required to hit Send. While we might be tempted to think of the Pony Express as pounding the plains in some distant past, things have changed a lot faster than that. If a lifespan averages to seventy-five or eighty years, the last Pony Express rider stepped dusty and weary from his saddle only a brief two lifetimes ago.

Is there a difference in the way humans thought when they commited their words to hard-to-come-by paper with a goose-quill pen versus the way we think when we compose electronically, deleting and rewriting near-instantaneously, or— OMG!—collapsing a message into the abbreviated language of texting? Are we different in some unbridgeable way from earlier letter writers like Charlie Russell and Andrew Jackson, whose correspondence Carole Klein and Randy Ramer so adeptly address in this issue of the *Gilcrease Journal?*

To today's kids, a typewriter ("Where did they put the paper, Mom?" a friend's son asked when he saw one) is as foreign as a goose quill pen. Their younger siblings will find the Blackberry clumsy and quaint. With the gaps between technological leaps growing shorter and shorter, it's hard to imagine what our kids' kids will find normal. We're on a wild ride and a crazy adventure here, inspiring an exhilaration that may echo that felt by the explorers, settlers, and artists whose story is told at Gilcrease Museum.

One thing, however, seems not to change. The intensity of creative energy and resources that fuels the ongoing explosion of communication technology seems proof of the enduring value we place on relating to one another, honestly and intimately, across space and time. No matter the medium, we need the message.

Sources

Historical details concerning the evolution of the American postal service are based on information from the U.S. Postal Service, online at http://www.usps.com/cpim/ftp/pubs/pub100/pub100_toc.htm. See also http://postalmuseum.si.edu

Naomi S. Baron. *Alphabet to Email: How Written English Evolved and Where It's Heading* (London and New York: Routledge), 2000.

Nicholas A. Christakis and James H. Fowler. *Connected* (New York: Little, Brown, and Company), 2009.

A Guide to Manuscripts in the Library of The Thomas Gilcrease Institute of American History and Art. (Tulsa: The Thomas Gilcrease Institute of American History and Art), 1969.

Alison Gopnik. "Mind Reading: A neuroscientist explains the phenomenon of literacy and its effects on the brain," *New York Times Book Review,* January 3, 2010.

Stacy Schiff. "Thomas Mallon writes a history–and elegy?—of the letter," *New York Times Book Review,* November 29, 2009.



Here He Comes!

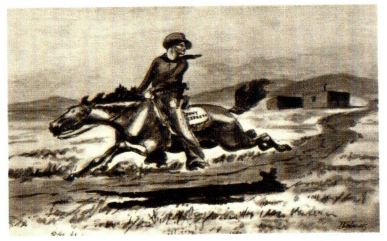
The Story of the Pony Express

Kimberly Roblin
Associate Curator

A paradox perched on the Missouri, St. Joseph was a town of beginnings and ends—the end of the East and the beginning of the West; the end of the railroad and the beginning of arduous emigrant journeys; the end of everything familiar and the beginning of everything unknown. On April 3, 1860, it became forever associated with another beginning when a young rider bolted from the Pikes Peak Stables to the cheers and shouts of an expectant crowd. The rider's name is now uncertain but his identity is not—he was the first rider of the Pony Express. Synonymous with the American West, the Pony Express has been described, depicted, and dramatized since its inception. Covering over 2,000 miles, it was an impressive and industrious endeavor; but beneath this mythic reputation lies a far more ordinary origin. Like so many inventions before and after, it was a product of necessity and opportunity during the mid-19th century.

"St. Joseph" from T*he United States, Illustrated.* Charles A. Dana (Ed.). Herrmann J. Meyer: New York, 1855. 2516.891b.

"Pony Express and Overland Mail Office at Fort Kearney, 1861" from *The Overland Stage to California.* Frank A. Root and William E. Connelley. Topeka, 1901. 2627.208.



"Gregory Gold Diggings: Colorado, May, 1859" from *Beyond the Mississippi: from the Great River to the Great Ocean.* Albert Richardson. American Publishing Company: Hartford, 1867. 2626.525.

Since late January 1860, local and national newspapers had advertised the initial run of the new mail service. Bands played for crowds of onlookers gathered for the event as a train pulled into the station late in the afternoon. Men quickly unloaded the freight and carried the mailbags to the post office for sorting. They emerged with a leather satchel called a mochila, intended for the young man waiting with his bay mare in the stables. He was dressed in a light shirt tucked into his trousers, boots, and a slouch-hat. At half past seven, Mayor Thomason slipped the mochila over the saddlehorn and a cannon sounded as a flash of horse and man burst from the stables. They carried forty-nine letters, five personal telegrams, several newspaper dispatches, and the hopes of a nation.

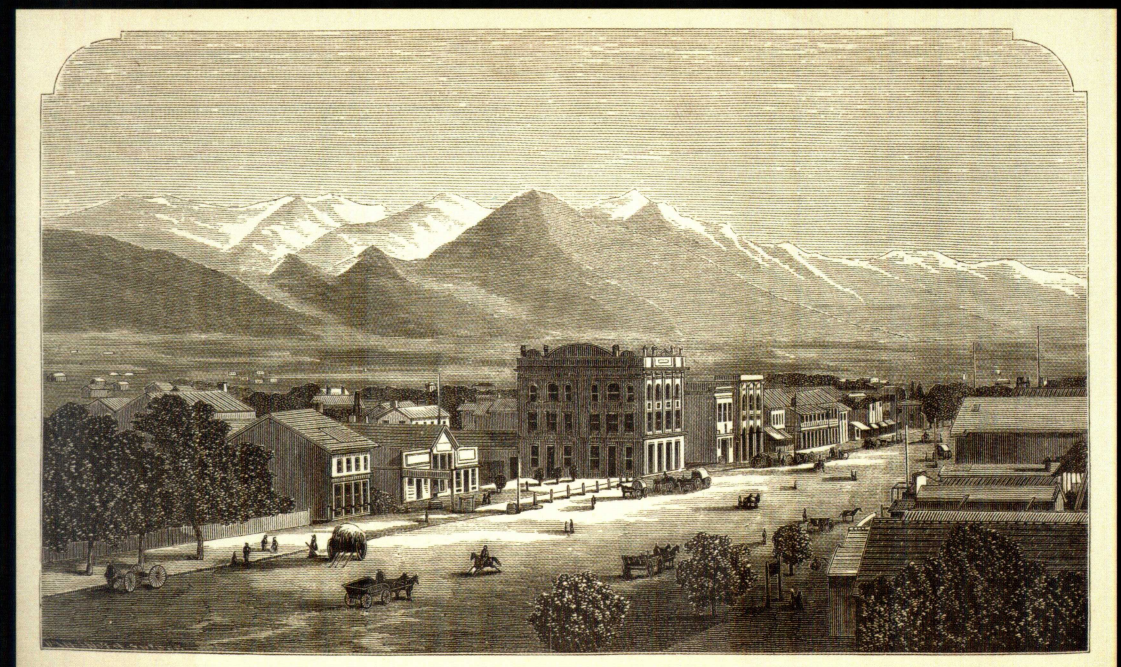
Beginning in the 1840s, western migration had dramatically increased as thousands of settlers traveled the Oregon Trail. Although different reasons motivated them, they all looked to the West for opportunity. For the Mormons who settled Salt Lake City, Utah, it was a chance to establish a community free from the persecution they had experienced in Missouri and Illinois. For some it was a chance to sate their curiosity about the unknown lands west of the Mississippi. And for others, it was a chance to strike a fortune in the rivers of northern California after the discovery of gold in 1849 sparked an exodus from the east. As the terminus of the eastern railroad, St. Joseph was both the embarkation point for many of these men and the last place to purchase supplies. Seemingly overnight the small Missouri town became a hub of western migration.



GREGORY GOLD DIGGINGS, COLORADO, MAY, 1859. Page 181.



Harlan's Band.



MAIN STREET, SALT LAKE CITY.

"Harlans' Band" from *California Gold Book.* W.W. Allen and R.B. Avery. Donohue & Henneberry: San Francisco, 1893. 2536.5664.

"Main Street: Salt Lake City" from *Three Thousand Miles through the Rocky Mountains.* A.K. McClure. Lippincott & Co.: Philadelphia, 1869. 2626.541a.

The stream of settlers pushing west continued throughout the 1850s, yet, despite this pronounced demographic expansion, the government hesitated to develop infrastructure in what was considered the Great American Desert. Opting to forego railroads and turnpikes west of the Missouri River, officials also decided against a subsidized mail service, choosing instead to use a contract company. The paltry pay, however, ensured nothing but poor and unreliable service from a system plagued by inefficiency and expense, caused largely by a lack of competition. Only three major routes connected the eastern and western United States, each taking approximately six weeks to traverse: The overland Butterfield ran a southerly course, the Central Overland ran a more northerly course, and an ocean route plied from New York City to San Francisco. Inclement weather and weight restrictions hampered the overland routes, translating into significant delays and the inability to transport newspapers and books. The ocean route therefore received the majority of the business and capitalized on its advantage by charging exorbitant rates. This troubled mail system exacted a heavy toll on those in the West. The six-week gap in communication negated all immediacy of eastern news, further distancing them from the American mainstream. Compounded by their geographic isolation, this led to a pervasive sense of cultural and social alienation in the West.

California Crossing, South Platte River. William Henry Jackson, 1867, oil on canvas. 0136.1208.



Some, however, recognized opportunity in this situation, and first among them was Senator William Gwin of California. Knowing that an express mail route would be popular with voters, in 1854 he set out for Washington with the goal of securing government funding for one. Fortuitously he traveled with Mr. Ben F. Ficklin, superintendent of the large and successful freight business of Russell, Majors, and Waddell. Although historians debate the accuracy of his claims, Gwin always held that it was during this journey that he and Ficklin forged the idea of organizing a post horse express mail service along one of the already established overland routes. Upon his arrival in Washington, Gwin proposed the plan to Congress where it was soundly defeated. It was not the content of the idea that was categorically unpopular, but its timing. Slavery was dominating political discourse, and, as dissent deepened between the northern and southern states, both sides feared subsidizing a route that would favor the other should a war erupt. Whoever controlled the route would gain access to the West's natural resources and the ability to control the information the West received. Neither the northern or southern politicians were willing to risk such an advantage.

The mail system, however, continued to worsen, and under pressure from its constituents Congress passed a bill in 1858 subsidizing western mail service along the southerly-running Butterfield Route. The nearly 500,000 settlers living west of the Rocky Mountains anticipated the reconnection with the East through a new and reliable mail service. Unfortunately, federalization of the mail system did little to improve it. It remained unreliable and slow, and did not even service Salt Lake City, Sacramento, or any city in Colorado. Once again, Senator Gwin and the Russell, Majors, and Waddell freight company became involved.



"North Fork, Mining Camp" from *Experiences of a Forty-Niner.* William G. Johnston. Pittsburg, 1892. 2626.201.



"Sacramento City, July 1849" from *Experiences of a Forty-Niner.* William G. Johnston. Pittsburg, 1892. 2626.201.



The Pony Express. Frank Tenney Johnson, 1924, oil on canvas. 0127.1088.

While in Washington, Gwin made the acquaintance of William H. Russell of the popular freight company, who was in the Capital to discuss freight contracts. The two discussed the opportunity to establish an express mail route. Since federal involvement had not dramatically improved the system, both men agreed that a private mail company was a better solution. Energized and enthusiastic, Russell returned to Leavenworth, Kansas, to secure the support of his partners. On paper, the plan was simple and differed little from ancient systems such as those used by Darius the Great of Persia, Kublai Khan, or the Roman Empire—one trail, a series of strategically positioned relay stations, and a steady supply of men and horses. It would be an expensive venture, Russell acknowledged, but would more than return the investment over time. More importantly, he stressed, the company would demonstrate that it could provide fast, reliable service year-round, perhaps inducing the federal government to grant it a contract. His partners agreed and the three formed the Central Overland California and Pikes Peak Express Company. Within four months, the first rider of the Pony Express would race into history.

The company committed itself to preparations as newspapers began reporting the news. In late January of 1860, the *New York Herald* announced:

The Pikes Peak Express Company has decided to run in connection with their line a pony express from Leavenworth to Sacramento City, California. The time for the trip is fixed at ten days, and, under the admirable system of this company, there is little doubt but that this will be accomplished.



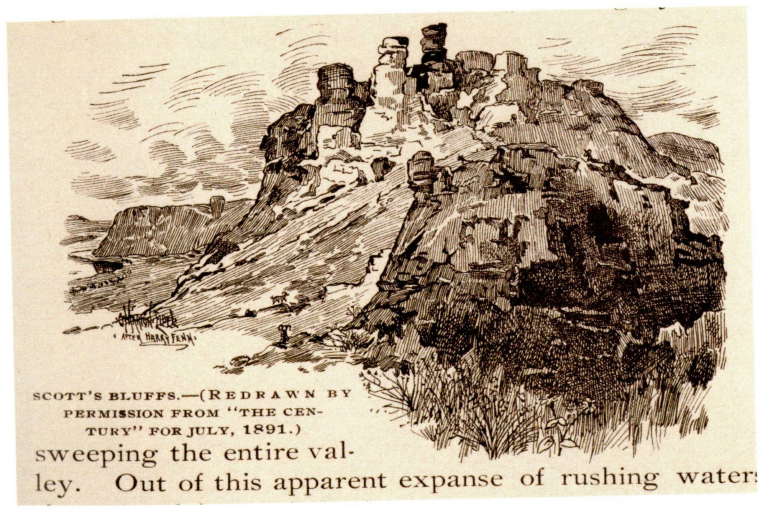
Great Salt Lake. Thomas Moran, chromolithograph. From *The Yellowstone National Park, and the Mountain Regions of Portions of Idaho, Nevada, Colorado, and Utah.* Louis Prang & Co.: Boston, 1876. 2426.47.15a.

The first task was to secure an adequate route from St. Joseph, Missouri, to Sacramento, California. Although Leavenworth, Kansas, had been the original eastern terminus, St. Joseph was determined more suitable because of its location directly on the Missouri River and its status as the final railroad stop. The partners acquired the stage line from Atchison, Kansas, to Salt Lake City, Utah, and bought the mail route from Salt Lake City to Sacramento. While some of the trail was in good condition, large portions of it were overgrown and difficult to traverse, requiring extensive restoration. Work was also done to repair existing stations and to build additional ones so that no more than fifteen miles separated any two relay stations. Many of the landmarks familiar to western settlers, such as Chimney Rock and Scott's Bluffs, were now landmarks along the Pony Express route.



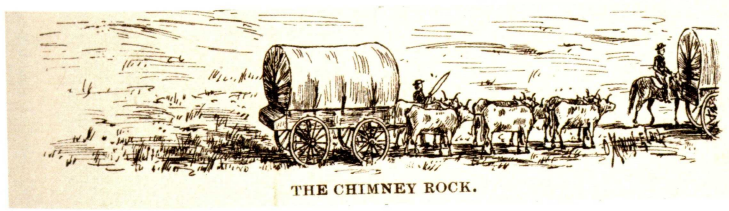


"The Chimney Rock" from *The Argonauts of Forty-Nine.* D.R. Leeper. J.B. Stoll & Co.: South Bend, 1894. 2626.95. The most famous landmark along the Oregon Trail, Chimney Rock rises nearly 500 feet above the Nebraska plains. It signaled the transition from the plains to the mountains for emigrants and express riders.



"Scott's Bluffs" [now called Scotts Bluffs] from *The Argonauts of Forty-Nine.* D.R. Leeper. J.B. Stoll & Co.: South Bend, 1894. 2626.95. The bluffs were another landmark passed by those on the Oregon Trail in Nebraska.

"Devils' Gate" from *The Argonauts of Forty-Nine.* D.R. Leeper. J.B. Stoll & Co.: South Bend, 1894. 2626.95.



"Independence Rock" from *The Argonauts of Forty-Nine.* D.R. Leeper. J.B. Stoll & Co.: South Bend, 1894. 2626.95. Located in Wyoming and directly along the Oregon Trail, the large granite rock gained its name because emigrants who left for the west in early spring hoped to reach this point by July 4—Independence Day. Many carved their names into the rock. The inscriptions can still be seen today.



Above: "Down the Sierra Nevadas, in 1865" from *Beyond the Mississippi: from the Great River to the Great Ocean.* Albert Richardson. American Publishing Company: Hartford, 1867. 2626.525. Below right: *The Swing Station at Box Elder.* Olaf Seltzer, oil on board. 0137.829.

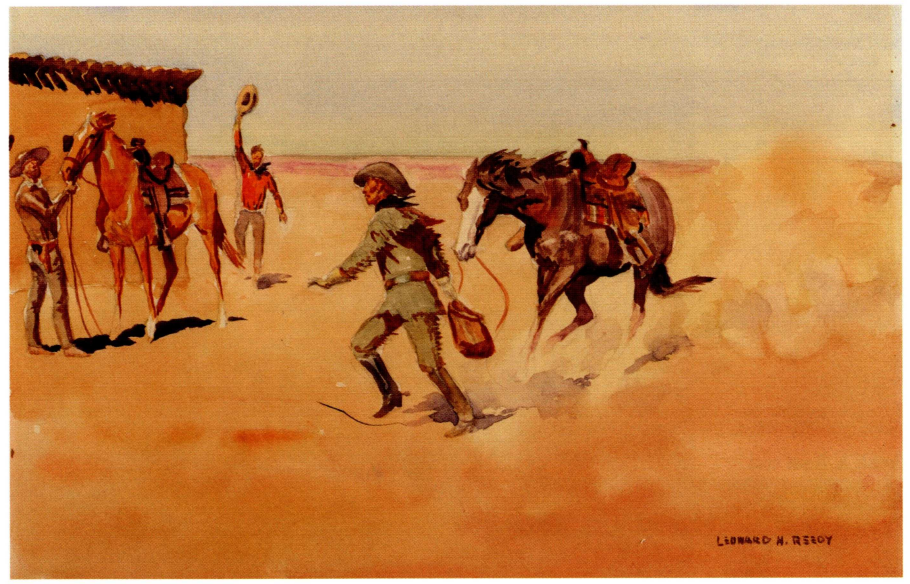
The company turned next to recruiting and equipping Express riders. In California an advertisement solicited young, thin, wiry fellows not over eighteen—"Must be expert riders willing to risk death daily. Orphans preferred. Wages $25 per week." The requisites were clear: youth, to better tolerate the hard ride that averaged seventy-five miles; slightness, because loads, including rider, were limited to 165 pounds, averaging 120 pounds for the rider, 25 pounds for equipment, and 20 pounds for mail; excellent horsemanship, because the trail was arduous; and bravery, because racing across the plains was not for the timid. Wages listed were an average as riders received pay proportionate to the dangers of the section they rode. Some made as much as $150 a month, a large sum in 1860. Station men also made good wages because of the inherent risks of their posts. The difficulties of the job, however, did not excuse unruly behavior. All men hired by the Pikes Peak Express Company took an oath to refrain from swearing and fighting, and to always behave professionally.

Excellent riders also needed excellent equipment, and success depended on both the man and his mount. Mustangs were a natural choice because of their endurance and speed but were not the only horses used. Relay stations were roughly fifteen miles apart; horses had to maintain a steady near-gallop the entire distance. At each station, the rider switched horses. The station man's duty was to have the fresh horse ready for a seamless transition. In an effort to minimize the weight of the load, the Pikes Peak Express Company also hired a prominent St. Joseph saddler, Israel Landis, to design a special lightweight saddle for the riders. Every element of the Express was as streamlined and efficient as possible to ensure maximum speed and results. Riders carried little protection, normally no more than a rifle or knife. The most important item they carried was the mochila, a four-pocketed leather cover that slipped over the saddle horn. Letters and



Facing: *Summit of Sierra Nevada Mountains.* Thomas Moran, chromolithograph. From *The Yellowstone National Park, and the Mountain Regions of Portions of Idaho, Nevada, Colorado, and Utah.* Louis Prang & Co.: Boston, 1876. 2426.47.12a. The trek across the Sierra Nevadas was considered one of the most difficult sections of the Pony Express route.









Fort Kearney (Nebraska Territory 1860). Alfred Sully, watercolor. 0226.1335.

dispatches were wrapped in oiled silk to prevent water damage and slipped into one of the mochila's pockets. Each pocket was then locked. The design of the mochila made for a fast and easy exchange at the relay station where the rider could simply slip it off his old horse, slip it onto the new horse's saddle, and be off again in less than two minutes.

By the second week of March 1860, arrangements for the Pony Express were fast being consummated, according to *The New York Times,* with a portion of the riders and ponies already in St. Joseph. Further details emerged in late March with a detailed time and price schedule. The Express would leave every Friday morning at 9:00. Dispatches from New York City began at $6.90 plus twenty cents for every word over ten words, and dispatches from St. Louis began at $5.30 plus twenty cents per word over ten words. Most dispatches were well over this word count and cost an average of $25.

On Tuesday, April 3, after months of public anticipation, the Pony Express finally became a reality when the first rider left St. Joseph at 7:30 in the evening. His counterpart in California, Harry Roff, had a far less illustrious departure. While the rider in St. Joseph left to cheers and excitement, Roff was delayed, leaving at 3:00 in the morning to nothing but empty and muddy streets. News traveled across the nation as the Express originating in St. Joseph galloped across the country. The *Chicago Press and Tribune* reported that spontaneous celebrations erupted in every town the Express passed through. Guns were fired and speeches made, bands played, flags waved, and there was "a general hurrah." When the steamer carrying the horse and rider arrived in San Francisco, "The city was lit up by numerous bonfires, a torchlight procession formed, the military companies were out, and the pony was escorted from the steamer to the heart of the city amidst a blaze of fireworks. Altogether, this was the most enthusiastic demonstration ever witnessed in California, evincing hearty appreciation of the enterprise so gloriously consummated." A journey that had once taken six weeks or more had been completed in only nine days and twenty-three hours. The Pony Express quickly gained entry into popular culture, becoming the subject of authors, journalists, and artists. One of America's best-known authors, Mark Twain, recounted the excitement surrounding the approach of the Express in *Roughing It:*

Above left: *Fort Laramie.* Alfred Jacob Miller, 1851, oil on canvas. 0126.727. Fort Laramie and Fort Kearney served as relay stations for the Pony Express.

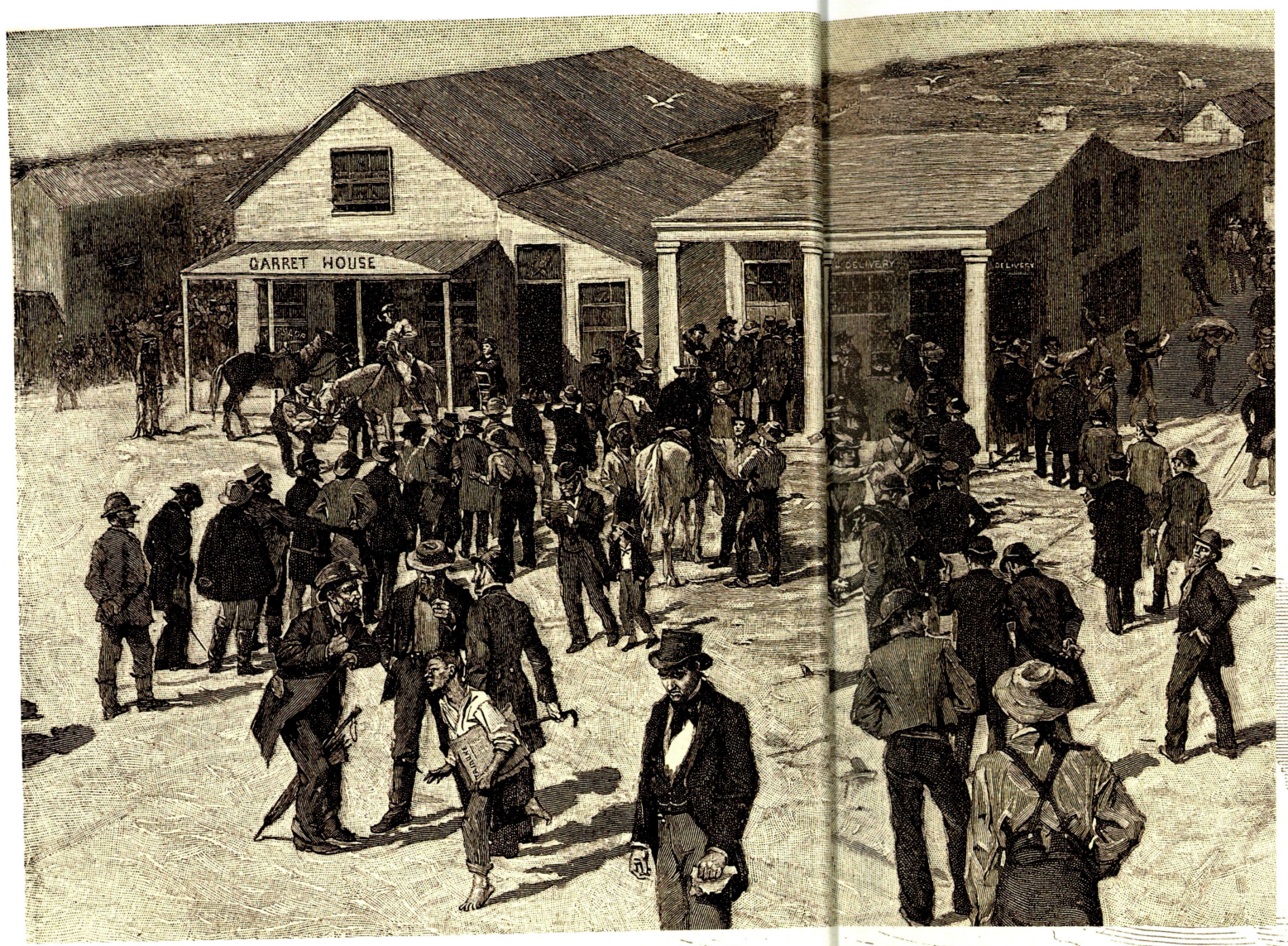
Above right at top: *Pony Express Leaving the Station.* Leonard Howard Reedy, watercolor. 0227.660; Above right at bottom: *Changing Horses.* Leonard Howard Reedy, watercolor. 0227.661.

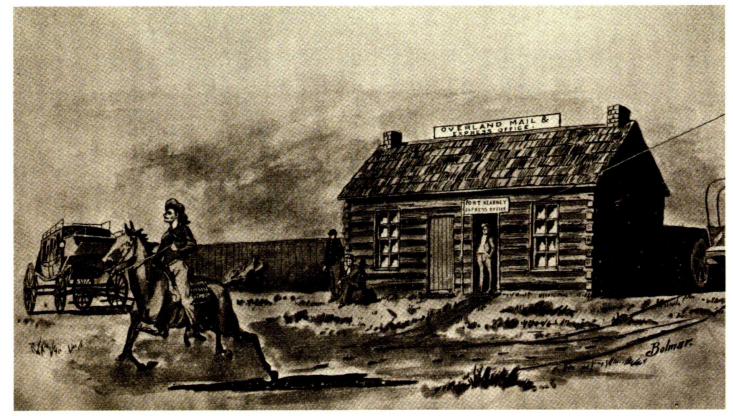
"The Garrett House and Postoffice in San Francisco" from *Experiences of a Forty-Niner.* William G. Johnston. Pittsburg, 1892. 2626.201.

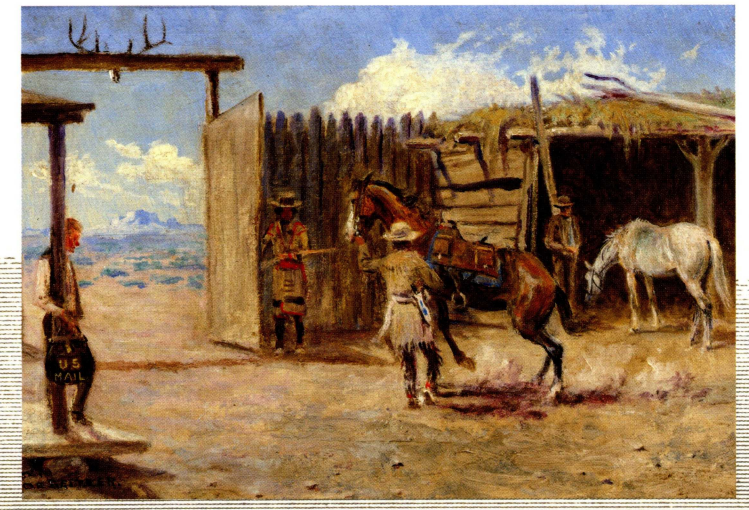
Facing, top: "Pony Express En Route Across the Plains" from *The Overland Stage to California.* Frank A. Root and William E. Connelley. Topeka, 1901. 2627.208.

Facing, bottom: *Pony Express Station at Diamond City, Montana.* Olaf Seltzer, oil on board. 0137.790.

Facing, inset at bottom: "The Overland Pony Express" from *Harper's Weekly,* November 2, 1867. 5027.1936.









Here he comes! Every neck is stretched further, and every eye strained wider. Away across the endless dead level of the prairie a black speck appears against the sky, and it is plain that it moves…In a second or two it becomes a horse and rider, rising and falling, rising and falling, sweeping toward us nearer and nearer—growing more and more distinct…nearer and still nearer, and the flutter of the hoofs comes faintly to the ear—another instant a whoop and a hurrah from our upper deck, a wave of the rider's hand, and a man and horse burst past our excited faces…So sudden is it all…we might have doubted whether we had seen any actual horse and man at all.

Covering over 2,000 miles from St. Joseph to Sacramento, the trail wound through a rough and often inhospitable country that posed numerous threats. Weather was a constant concern, from thunderstorms on the plains to snow in the mountains. Some peril, however, was manmade. Newspapers sensationalized these risks through hyperbole and mistruths. In May 1860, the *Chicago Press and Tribune* reported the theft of thirty Express ponies by American Indians, an erroneous rumor quickly refuted by the Central Overland California and Pikes Peak Express Company in the next week's edition.





Above left: *Riding through a Blizzard.* Leonard Howard Reedy, watercolor. 0227.659; Above right: *Robbing the Pony Express.* Leonard Howard Reedy, watercolor. 0227.657.

Although some Indians did attack the express and relay stations, outlaws and emigrants also posed significant risks, a fact advertently absent from papers. Several riders were fired on by emigrants along the trail who could not distinguish the identity of the approaching rider. Express riders, tanned and occasionally wearing fringed shirts, resembled Indians, prompting the emigrants to fire. Station men also faced danger because of the idle and predictable nature of their posts, making them easy targets. Yet, contrary to the prolific reports of atrocities against riders, only one was lost during the entire run of the Pony Express.

As the months passed, the Express continued delivering an average of 300 pieces of mail between the East and West nearly each week. Some correspondence focused on current events and entertainment, such as the bare-knuckle World Heavyweight Championship held in London, known as the Great Prize Fight. It pitted American John Heenan against Englishman and current world champion Tom Sayers. After two hours and an astonishing thirty-seven rounds, the match ended in a draw.

For the most part, however, mail related to business or politics, and the more important the news the harder the Express rode. By early 1861, there was much to report. Tensions between northern and southern states had resulted in what so many had feared, and South Carolina, Mississippi, Florida, Alabama, Georgia, Louisiana, and Texas had officially seceded from the Union. The fastest time ever logged by the Express came one month later in March when the transcript of Abraham Lincoln's inaugural speech reached Sacramento from St. Joseph in just seven days and seventeen hours. Within a few weeks, the Express recorded its second best time of eight days and fourteen hours with the delivery of solemn news—the Confederate States had fired on Fort Sumter in Charleston Harbor. The division once confined to words and rhetoric had erupted. The Civil War had begun.

President Lincoln's response was swift and decisive. He issued a proclamation raising 75,000 militia and offered command of the Union army to a distinguished veteran, a Virginian by birth. Robert E. Lee, however, declined the post and joined the Confederacy, becoming its most famous general. By summer, the Confederacy included Virginia, Arkansas, North Carolina, and Tennessee, and the Union had begun strategically developing and defending its resources.

Two outcomes of this turbulent time uniquely underscored the significant, if transient, role of the Pony Express. As the conflict escalated, so too did the concern over California and the role it could play should it join the South. An infantry regiment and five cavalry companies were posted along the overland express route west of Salt Lake City to protect the communication route. The protection, however, was intended only for the immediate future as Congress had recently approved telegraph construction in the West. As fast as the Express was, it could not outrun progress and wood and wire would soon render it obsolete.



The Pony Express. Olaf Seltzer, oil on canvas. 0137.868.

The end came quickly. On October 25, 1861, the telegraph wires were connected, linking San Francisco directly to New York City. The following day the *Chicago Tribune* declared "The Pony Express is no more." Financially, it had been a failure for Russell, Majors, and Waddell, costing them nearly thirteen dollars on every letter sent. Socially, however, it had been a resounding success. The day after the first rider left St. Joseph, the *Chicago Press and Tribune* had said that

> Whatever increases the communication between the Atlantic and Pacific States, and makes the transmission of intelligence more rapid, is a public benefit. It tends to bind these distant sections of the Union together, and to make us in every essential element one great and happy people.

In this aim, the Express had excelled. It had delivered mail quickly and reliably. It had reconnected the East and West during a critical time, helping settlers reaffirm their identities not as westerners but as Americans—a critical association in the days before the Civil War. Had this connection not been reestablished, and had the western states and territories not identified themselves with the Union, the trajectory of the Civil War might have been dramatically different.

In the 150 years since its last ride, the Pony Express has become part truth and part myth, indelibly fixed in the American West. Defined by its large scale, the West was a place of big skies and big prairies, big opportunities and big risks. The Pony Express was no exception. In only eighteen months, it covered 600,000 miles and delivered 34,000 pieces of mail—remarkable figures even by western measures. From its creation to its service, from its duration to its demise, the Express was an exercise in speed and demonstrated what newspapers called the American enterprise and energy—the sheer willpower and determination to overcome any obstacle and a belief that the future was America's to forge. It is a spirit that transcends time and resonates still today.

Sources

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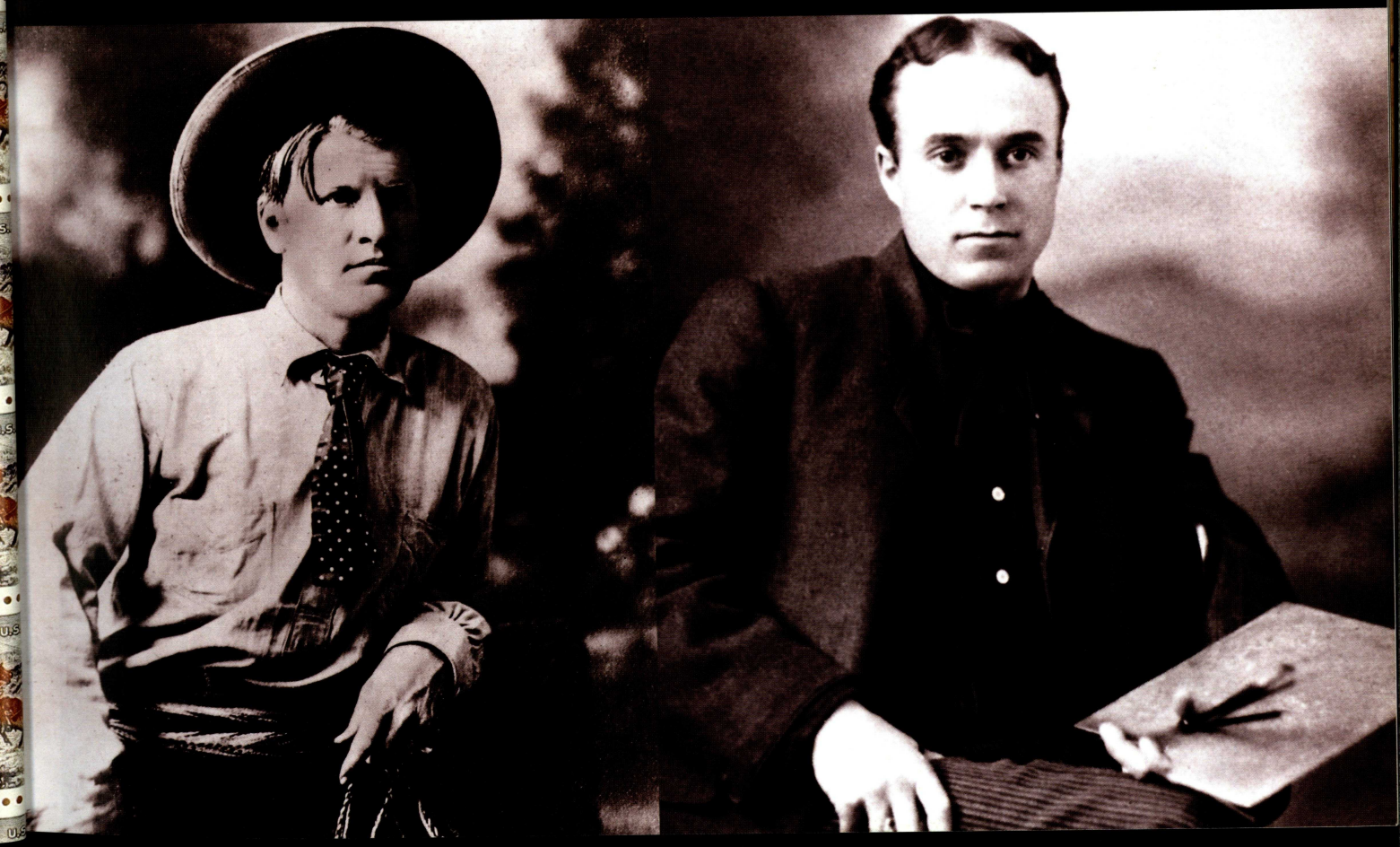
Artists Charles M. Russell (1864–1926) and Olaf C. Seltzer (1877–1957) were dedicated to preserving the Old West. Painting it into the collective memory, they contributed to the reality and the myth of a bygone era. Their paths converged in Great Falls, Montana. They knew one another for more than twenty-five years. With personalities as different as night and day, each created uniquely valuable visual records of the Old West, leaving trails and telling tales.



Previous page: Charles Russell at left. Olaf Seltzer at right. Photos courtesy of CM Russell Museum, Great Falls, Montana.

Previous facing page: A sheet of postage stamps with the painting *Jerked Down* by Charles Russell. 5317.76b.

It was not an accident that Russell became a fixture in the mythos of Montana. As a child he always dreamed of going west. Born to a wealthy family in St. Louis, he cared little for school but longed for adventure. His parents allowed him to go to Montana as a teenager to work for a family friend on a sheep ranch, thinking one year might be enough to satisfy him. But Charlie stayed forever, immersed himself in the Montana way of life, and became part of the West he painted. Arriving in the Judith Basin of Montana in 1880, just a few days after his sixteenth birthday, he followed his dream. After tending sheep for a brief time, Russell spent two years with Jake Hoover, a local hunter and trapper, in a cabin on the South Fork of the Judith River. Seeking yet more adventure, he found work as a night wrangler for the Judith Basin Roundup, a schedule that allowed him the daytime hours to observe and sketch cowboys at work. For eleven years Russell was employed as a cowboy. Even though he was successful at selling art and illustrations and cowboying at the same time, he decided to retire from his wrangling career in order to devote full time to art. He remained in the Montana he loved for forty-six years, becoming the most widely recognized painter of the American West. Today, the north central part of Montana is called "Russell Country" in honor of the artist's life and work there.

Fate would bring Danish immigrant Olaf Seltzer to Montana at the age of fourteen. When he and his mother, Julie, arrived from Copenhagen, they settled near family in Giant Springs, about eight miles east of Great Falls on the south bank of the Missouri River. It is unclear whether Olaf's father died or simply disappeared, but he was out of the boy's life from childhood. Olaf and his mother looked forward to a new life in America as they booked passage June 21, 1892. Once in Montana, young Olaf roamed the countryside



Russell's home. 991.72.368. Photo courtesy of CM Russell Museum, Great Falls, Montana.



Bull Head Lodge. 975-12-155c.27. Photo courtesy of CM Russell Museum, Great Falls, Montana.

looking for deer, antelope, and buffalo, and falling in love with the new landscape. At fifteen he worked for Pete Hansen, who supplied horses for the Yellowstone Park Stage Line, then subsequently worked for other horse outfits. In his spare time he sketched horses, the details of horsemanship, wildlife, and the landscape.

In 1893, in an effort to help support his mother, Seltzer became an apprentice machinist in the locomotive shops of the Great Northern Railway that lay across the river from Great Falls. Excellent at drawing, detailed and accurate in his work, he soon became a locomotive repairman and then a foreman. For some years he traveled back and forth across Montana, in high demand as a skilled machinist.

Russell and Seltzer met in 1897, as Seltzer happened upon a birthday celebration for Russell at the Silver Dollar Saloon in Great Falls. Russell was thirty-three and Seltzer nineteen. Russell was gregarious, convivial, extroverted and easygoing, with a legendary sense of humor. His laid-back demeanor and frequently rumpled appearance made quite a contrast with the introverted, quiet, and disciplined Seltzer, always dressed impeccably. Olaf would later tell his family that he regarded his meeting with Russell as life-changing. It gave him confidence in his own dream of becoming an artist. The two artists' mutual interest in portraying the West created an immediate rapport as they shared ideas about preserving western tradition. Russell became a mentor of sorts to the younger Seltzer, who frequently visited the Russell home. Russell shared tips of the trade as they talked about painting, materials, and techniques. They occasionally modeled for one another's paintings. They backpacked into the wilderness with other friends, observing wild game and telling stories around the fire. They painted and sketched together at Bull Head Lodge, Russell's cabin on Lake McDonald.





Facing, top: *Salute of the Robe Trade,* Charles Russell, 1920, oil on canvas. 0137.1625. Facing, bottom: *Meat's Not Meat Til It's in the Pan,* Charles Russell, 1915, oil on canvas. 0137.2244.

Charles Russell created scenes of the daily life of cowboys and Indians and represented the interchange between the two cultures. His details of gear, clothing, and accessories are authentic. He gained firsthand knowledge of Indian life by living for some months near the Blood Indians in Canada. He sympathized with Native tribes and had great respect for their cultures and ways of life.

Russell's finest works exhibit characteristics of a confident and mature artist. The compositions are strong and dynamic and evoke a sense of drama. His use of light contributes to the three-dimensional depth of figures and objects. His hues reveal a balanced palette, blues and purples complementing oranges and yellows. His use of linear and atmospheric perspective, with blurred objects in the distance and hazy blues and purples in the background, give the illusion of deep space.

Russell portrayed the vitality of everyday life as well as a sense of the place that is Montana, with its open skies, mountains, and vistas of great distance which look today much as they did in his time. He would undoubtedly be pleased that there are still some unspoiled places to be painted in Montana. The Square Butte outside Great Falls, represented in many of his paintings, can still be seen rising from the earth, today surrounded only by farmland. The Charles M. Russell National Wildlife Refuge preserves over a million acres, and Glacier National Park provides nature lovers with trails, wooded vistas, and glacial lakes, including Lake McDonald, where Russell's cabin still remains.

Jerked Down, Charles Russell. 0137.2246. Below: First day issue of the stamp bearing the image.





What set Russell apart from other Western artists was his ability to spin a tale in his paintings, a counterpart to his gift for verbal storytelling. The cowboys loved Russell, but not because he was a top hand. They loved his humorous tales, his sketches, and the fun and friendship he brought them daily. Art lovers continue to be intrigued by the narrative quality of Russell's paintings. His engagement of the observer universalizes the experiences he describes. His characters are human and believable, and their predicaments become visceral to the viewer who is invited to finish the story Russell tells. With painterly conviction, Russell captured dynamic action and orchestrated the elements of the painting to a focal point. He created emphasis by using stronger color, heightened contrast, and more detail in the crucial area—the high point of the action or the point of the story.

Russell was aware of the importance of using good materials in his work. His oils, brushes, canvases and mediums came from quality manufacturers and therefore his paintings remain vibrant and in good physical condition. Seltzer also knew that sound materials and good craftsmanship resulted in lasting paintings. He was more scientific in his approach, perhaps a reflection of his background as a machinist. He became interested in the properties of pigments and their

Prowlers of the Prairie, Olaf Seltzer, 1926, oil on canvas. 0137.899. Bottom: *Herald of the Fur Traders,* Olaf Seltzer, 1928, oil on canvas. 0137.884.



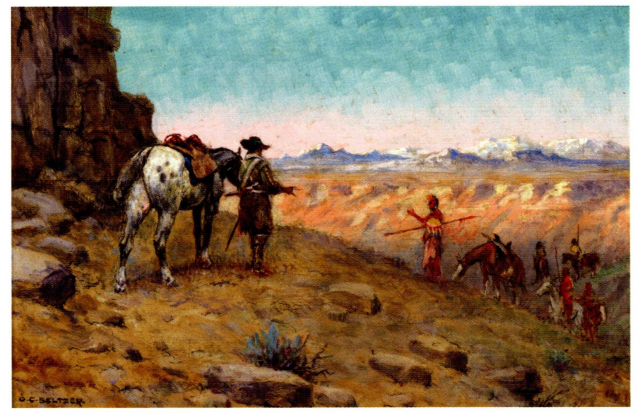


chemical makeup. He performed tests and made notes as to his findings. When he acquired new paints he exposed them to direct sunlight for months in order to determine their ability to hold their color before he would use them in his paintings. He studied pigments adjacent to each other and mixed together. He sought to avoid the "muddying effect" that some combinations acquire as time elapses.

Whereas Russell lived through the closing of the cowboy era, the younger Seltzer missed the opportunity to witness the full breadth of the history he painted. He studied history, clothing, and accoutrements in the Great Falls Public Library and listened to stories of pioneers and old range riders. His paintings represent authentic stories of events, people, and places. They are objective, without the softening humor and feeling of Russell's. The hard and often violent life of the West was presented with realism and a concern for fact. Seltzer used subtle color to paint the light on landforms and in the atmosphere, capturing the air quality peculiar to the area. Cloud effects seen there are sometimes referred to as a "Seltzer sky." Seltzer felt that an important element of a painting was the foundation, the outline. His work is characterized as linear with careful detail, and the strength of his draftsmanship was admired by Russell himself.

In *Montana in Miniature,* a series of over 100 small-format oils commissioned by patron Philip Cole, Seltzer portrayed historical events, personal histories of prominent western personalities, and the customs and culture of the times. He left a trail back through time in these tiny paintings with their surfaces of faceted color. The series represents a pictorial history of Montana from early exploration to early statehood. Commentary Seltzer and his patron Cole composed for the works adds to the collection's documentary value. When the miniatures are viewed up close and intimately, one becomes aware of the care Seltzer took to render each of these glimpses into the past.



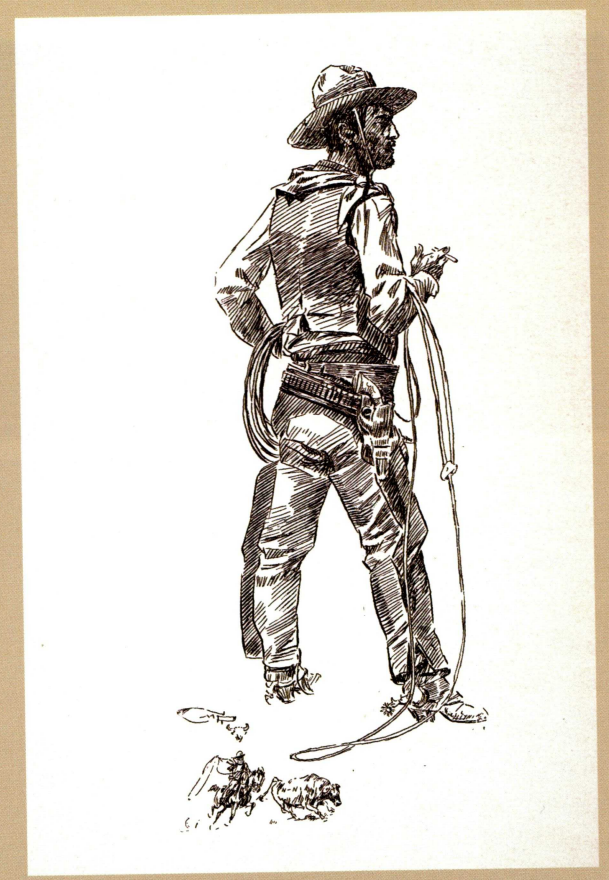


Above: *Chevalier Verandrye's First Sight of the Big Horn Mountains,* Olaf Seltzer, 1933, oil on board. 0137.841.
Left: *Rocky Mountain Forest Fire,* Olaf Seltzer, oil on board. 0137.799.

Seltzer admired Russell's work and the older artist's influence can be seen in his themes and subjects. His "Western Characters" have a direct relationship to a set of pen-and-ink character sketches Russell did in 1901 for the *Great Falls Leader*, later published by the Leader Company. Seltzer took the "characters" concept further and expanded it. He turned out some eighty watercolors, with associated action vignettes painted on their mats, representing the diverse ethnicity and occupations of many types of individuals who played a part in the development of the West.

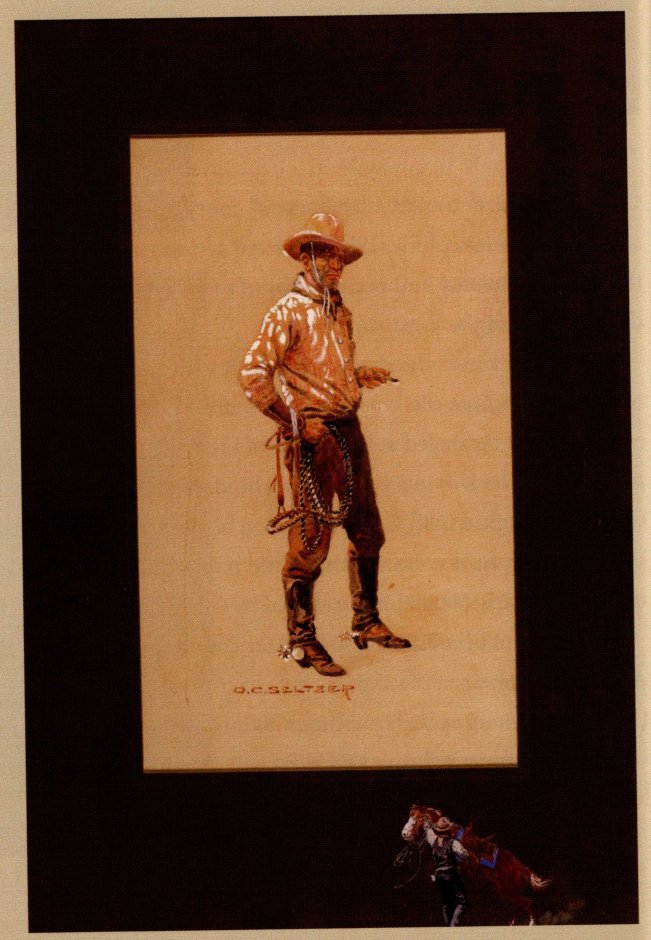
Seltzer lived in the shadow of Charles Russell, never achieving the fame or notoriety of Montana's iconic cowboy artist. His patron Philip Cole bought or commissioned almost everything he produced at the height of his artistic maturity. While this arrangement provided Seltzer a living, it somewhat hindered his exposure as an artist. When Thomas Gilcrease bought Philip Cole's collection of Western art, Seltzer's work, once hidden in the home of the private collector, came into public view. Seltzer's paintings comprised almost half of the nearly 600 items purchased by Gilcrease from Philip Cole.

The art of both Russell and Seltzer continues to allow today's viewer to go back in time. As Russell evokes feeling and spirit, Seltzer presents facts. Together they illuminate life in the Old West. As long as their paintings endure—Russell's visible stories and Seltzer's historic scenes—yesteryear's elusive Old West will remain immortal through the trails and tales they left behind.











The Illustrated Letters

Visual artists have illustrated their personal correspondence for hundreds of years. The inclination for them to leap from the verbal to the visual was likely irresistible. Sir Joshua Reynolds, James McNeill Whistler, Vincent Van Gogh, Winslow Homer, Thomas Eakins, Alexander Calder, Edouard Manet, Maxfield Parrish, and western artists Frederic Remington and Edward Borein are just a few for whom words were not strong enough to convey meaning.

Of particular note are the letters of Charles M. Russell and Olaf C. Seltzer, who embellished their personal letters, envelopes, and other writings with ink and watercolors. Their letters provide glimpses into their personalities and reveal aspects of their creativity. Words and images together on a page provide greater insight into the artist as a person than perhaps even a finished painting. The intimate nuances of the undulating line of handwriting and the rhythm of punctuation become visual elements in themselves that inform and add to the design of the page, just as the pictures inform the meaning of the words.

Embellished text is even older than illustrated personal letters. Ancient funerary texts created in dynastic Egypt were first cut in stone walls as hieroglyphs, and later painted on coffins. By the 18th Dynasty this text, known as *The Egyptian Book of the Dead,* was recorded on papyrus and illustrated in color. Also, medieval illuminated manuscripts, pages of text decorated with gold and silver, glowed with light reflected from the metallic leaf, "illuminating" the words on the page. The artists used paints made from earth substances, metals, stones, and plants. With such colors they created miniature illustrations, borders, and decorated initials. Integrated with script, these added meaning and emphasis, enhancing a reader's understanding of the written word.

Charles Russell's paint palette. Photo by Carole Klein. Courtesy of CM Russell Museum.

Facing, top left and right: Charles Russell's *Cowboy* and *Stage Driver,* reproductions 1927. 1637.127 and 129. Facing, bottom left and right: Olaf Seltzer's *Squaw* and *Bronco Buster,* watercolor. 0237.1297 and 1275.

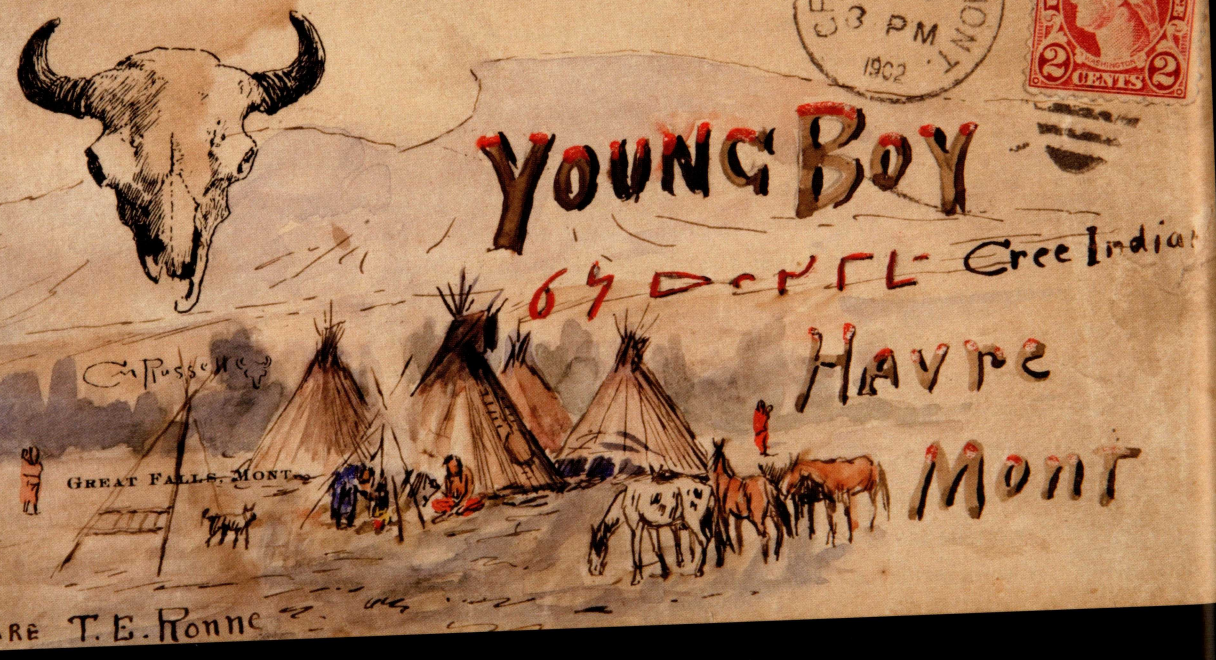
Overleaf: Illustrated letters from Charles Russell: I Savvy These Folks and letter and envelope to Young Boy, ink and watercolor. 0237.1585, 1584.1, 1584.2.

Here's how to me and my friends
the same to You and Yours

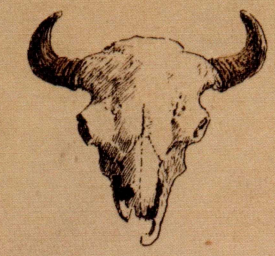


C M Russell 1907

I savoy these folks

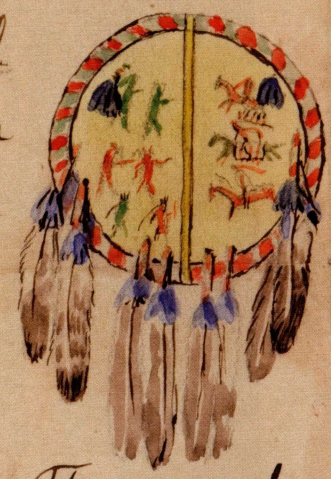






C M Russell

Friend Young Boy I received the shield and pictures they wer all fine and I thank you verry much I will paint your picture as soom as I can



Your Friend
C M Russell



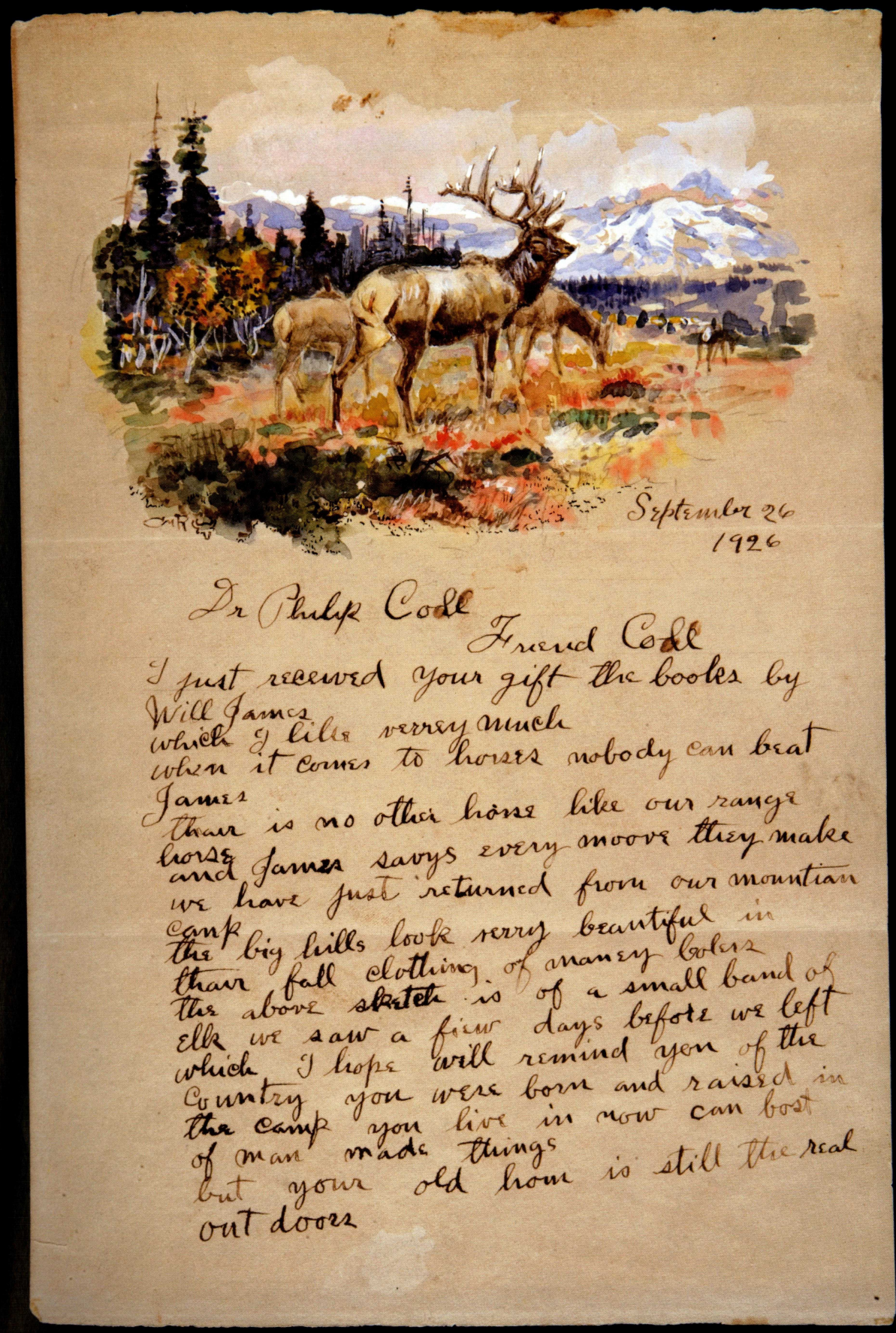
Young Boy, Olaf Seltzer, oil on board. 0137.897.

Facing: Letter from CM Russell to Philip Cole, ink and watercolor. 0237.1583.1.



Charlie Russell wrote letters to friends, neighbors, old school chums, and professional associates. He called these "paper talk." Peppered with humor, they were valued by all who received them. His thank-you notes, holiday greetings, and other writings were infused with his convivial nature and philosophy of life. The serendipitous, sometimes abbreviated, stream-of-consciousness writing combined with colorful drawings provided readers a delightful experience. Misspelled words and lack of punctuation only added to the rugged charm.

Russell's greeting *I Savvy These Folks* contains caricatures of the artist with various frontier residents he knew and had affection for—the cowboy, the stagecoach driver, and others. His illustrations were often personalized for the recipient, as in his letter to his friend Young Boy, a Cree Indian, postmarked March 1, 1902, on which he paints a picture of Young Boy himself. On the first page of another letter, one to Philip Cole dated September 26, 1926, Russell rendered a beautiful, peaceful autumn scene. This illustrated letter was Charlie's last, written a month before he died.

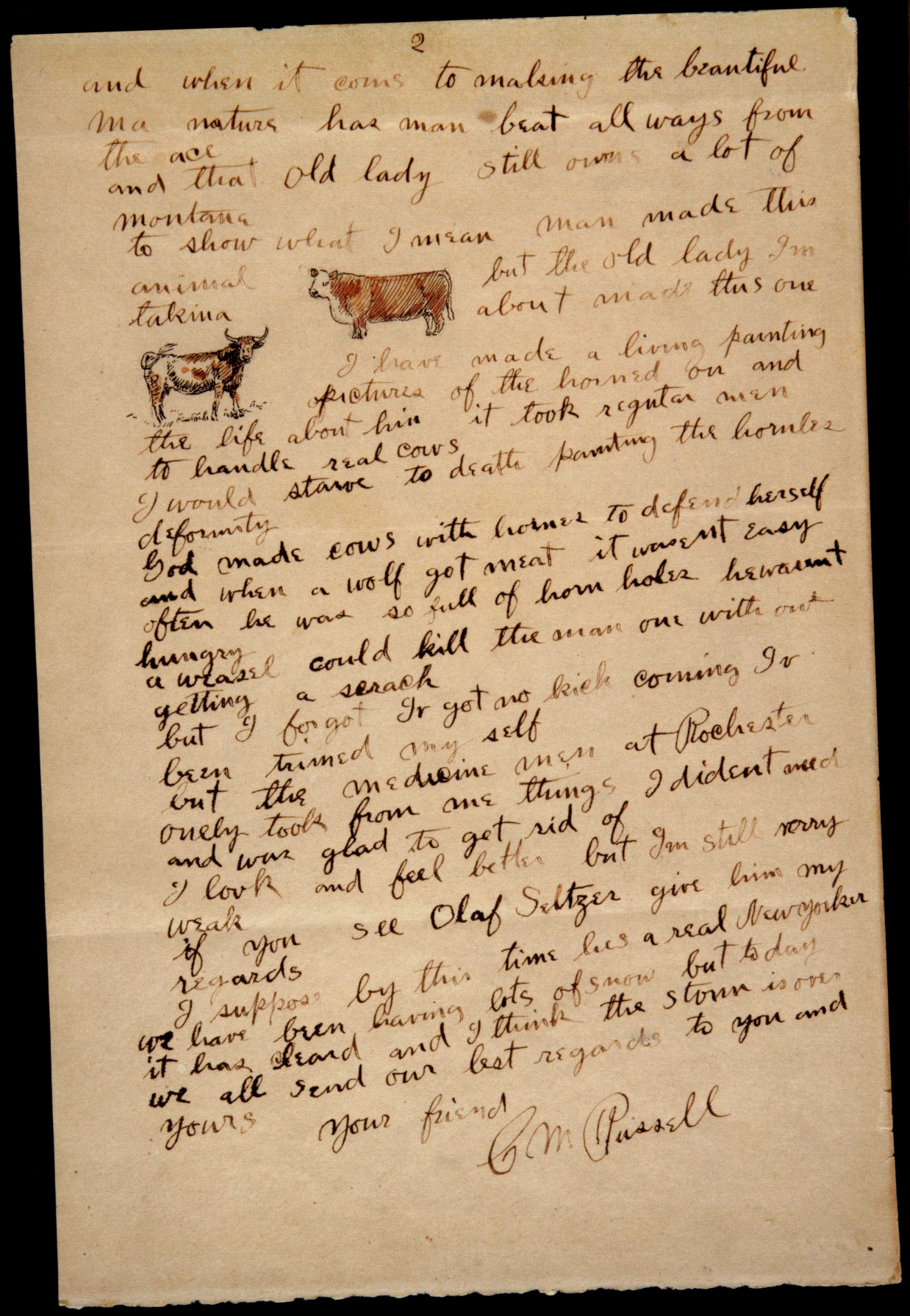


September 26
1926

Dr Philip Cole

Friend Cole

I just received your gift the books by
Will James
which I like verrey much
when it comes to horses nobody can beat
James
thair is no other horse like our range
horse
and James savys every moove they make
we have just returned from our mountian
camp
the big hills look verry beautiful in
thair fall clothing of manery colors
the above sketch is of a small band of
elk we saw a few days before we left
which I hope will remind you of the
Country you were born and raised in
the camp you live in now can boast
of man made things
but your old home is still the real
out doors



2

and when it coms to making the beautiful
Ma nature has man beat all ways from
the ace
and that old lady still owns a lot of
montana
to show what I mean man made this
animal but the old lady Im
takina about made this one
I have made a living painting
pictures of the horned on and
the life about him it took regular men
to handle real cows
I would starve to death painting the hornles
deformity
God made cows with horns to defend herself
and when a wolf got meat it wasent easy
often he was so full of horn holes he wasent
hungry
a weasel could kill the man one with out
getting a scrach
but I forgot Iv got no kick coming Iv
been trimed my self
but the medicine men at Rochester
onely took from me things I dident need
and was glad to get rid of
I look and feel better but Im still verry
weak
if you see Olaf Seltzer give him my
regards
I suppose by this time hes a real New yorker
we have been having lots of snow but today
it has cleard and I think the storm is over
we all send our best regards to you and
yours
Your friend
C M Russell

The bison, commonly called buffalo, skull that is seen in many of Russell's letters became his trademark. He used it as a signature icon on his art, also having it inscribed on personal belongings such as guns and bridles, and other objects. It was prominently printed as his letterhead. The rendering was first detailed and defined, but later became more cryptic, a colophon signature. Russell installed a real buffalo skull in a cement section of the stone wall in front of his studio in Great Falls, where it remains today. The trademark was symbolic of Russell's sensitivity to the dying life of the old West.



Russell's studio in Great Falls.
Photo by author, courtesy of CM Russell Museum.
Facing: Letter from Charles Russell to Philip Cole. 0237.1538.2.



Travelogue of the Prairie
"The Iron Trail"
(opus 7)

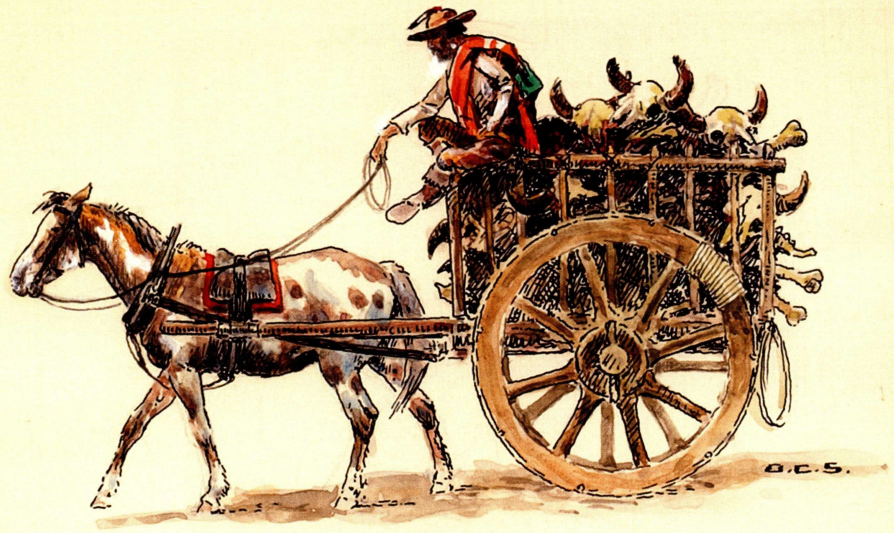
Great Falls, Montana
June 21st 1932

Dear Phil:—
Refering back to the small oil painting "The Iron Trail", I am sending you this little token in appreciation of your purchasing the picture, which means "Good Medicine" to me. The Indian in the foreground of the picture, giving the track a careful once over, will sure reverse the Good Medicine verdict when he reports his findings to the wise men waiting in the background, and will sure give a decision on the white man's devil work as "Bad Medicine". Throwing the switch on this little Railroad scene and closing with kind regards to you all at "Zeeview"
I beg remain
Sincerely your friend
Olaf.

Letter from Olaf Seltzer to Philip Cole, ink and watercolor. 0237.1210.

Early Western Travelogue
(opus 6)
– "The Red River Cart" –

Great Falls
Montana
Nov 7th 1932



Dear Doc:–
As the Buffalo in early days was the most important factor in the necessities of life of the Plains Indian, in fact his whole existence, so has this grand animal, in later years and after he vanished from the prairies, through his bleached bones, contributed to the livelihood of the Halfbreed, who gathered and sold these skulls and bones, and done his work so well, that Today you could'nt find a Buffalo skull anywhere on the Prairies of Montana

Your friend
Olaf.



In contrast to the wide scope of Russell's letters with their many recipients and myriad topics, Olaf Seltzer's letters are significant for their narrow focus. Fifteen written to his patron Philip Cole provide a stream of communication about his *Early Western Travelogue* series and are insightful companions to the paintings themselves. In one Seltzer thanks Cole for purchasing his oil *The Iron Trail,* and explains that the Indian in the foreground of the painting is about to report on the white man's "devil work" to those waiting in the background. In another letter, Seltzer describes how the Métis used the Red River cart to gather the bleached skulls and bones of the buffalo in order to sell them.

Additional letters comment on the bull boat, the overland stage, and more, as Seltzer communicates his dedication to presenting an accurate record of the evolution of transportation in the West.

More precise in wording, spelling, and punctuation than Russell's, and more serious in tone, Seltzer's letters mirror his organized, disciplined approach to both his work and his life. The neatly penned words around the pictures result in a well designed page, and the precision of his very level lines of handwriting contrasts with the scrawling, though charming disarray, of Russell's penmanship.

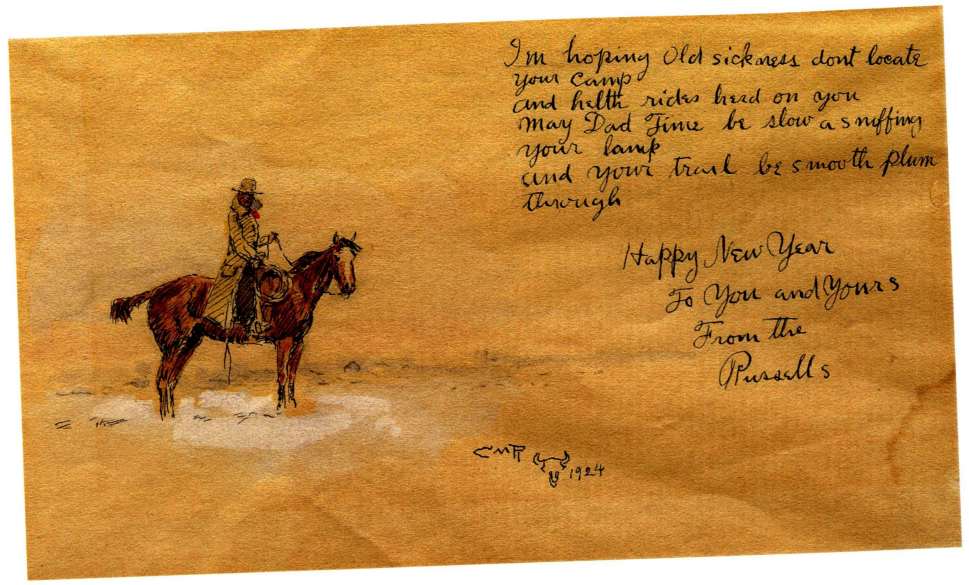


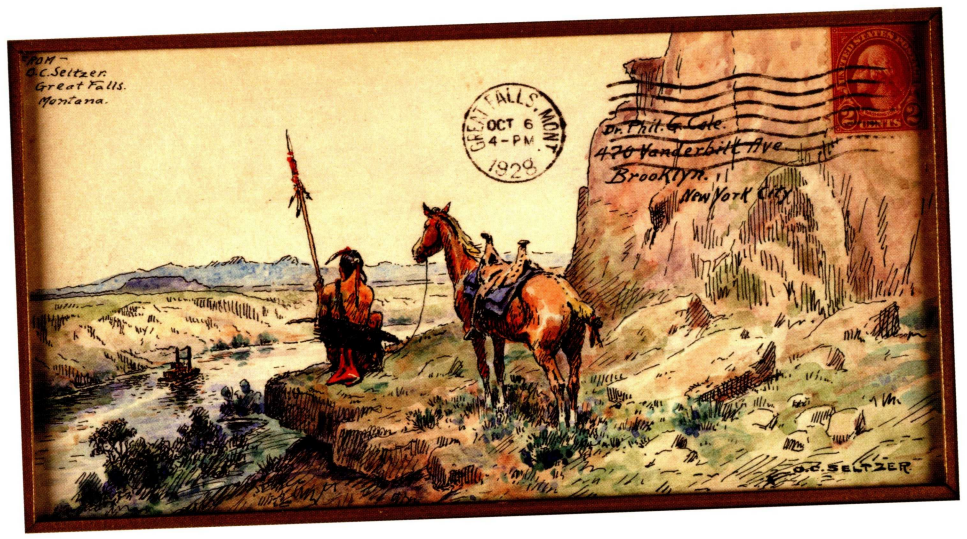
The Red River Cart, Olaf Setlzer, 1932, oil on canvas. 0137.875.
The Iron Trail, Olaf Setlzer, 1931, oil on canvas. 0137.870.
Facing: Letter from Olaf Seltzer to Philip Cole, ink and watercolor. 0237.1160.



I'm Hoping Old Sickness . . ., Charles Russell, ink and watercolor. 975.12-25. CM Russell Museum. Below: Illustrated envelope from a letter from Olaf Seltzer to Philip Cole, ink and watercolor. 0237.1209.

Facing: A poem by Olaf Seltzer, ink and watercolor. 0237.1166.





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Ladner, Mildred D. *O.C. Seltzer, Painter of the Old West*. University of Oklahoma Press, Norman, and Thomas Gilcrease Institute of American History and Art, Tulsa.1979.

Morand, Anne. *Your Friend, C.M. Russell, The C.M. Russell Museum Collection of Illustrated Letters*. C.M Russell Museum, Great Falls, Montana

Dippie, Brian. *Charles M. Russell, Word Painter*. Amon Carter Museum, Fort Worth. 1993.

Interview by author with Steve Seltzer, grandson of Olaf Seltzer, August, 2009, Great Falls, Montana.

Both artists wrote poems they illustrated. In poems like these, the concept of "trail" becomes metaphor. In a New Year's greeting of 1924, Russell sent good wishes to an unknown recipient: "I'm hoping Old Sickness don't locate your camp / And health rides herd on you / May Dad Time be slow a snuffing your lamp / And your trail be smooth plum through." Seltzer's poem "Passé," sent to Philip Cole in October, 1932, addressed the transient nature of life: " …time will tell, and day by day, / These trails will slowly fade away. / As did elusive – yesterday."

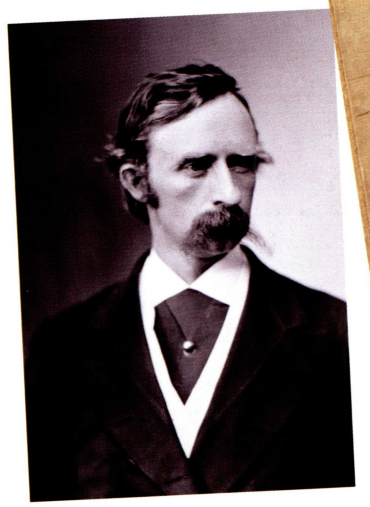
The illustrated letters of both these artists, as all letters left across time, remain valuable as important cultural materials that continue to inform and expand our capacity for remembrance.

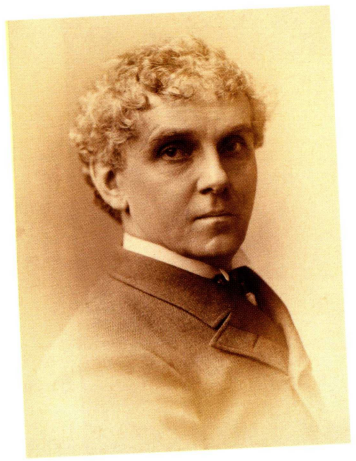


Randy Ramer
Director of Exhibitions
and Publications

Lives Transcribed

The Letters of Custer, Jackson, and Taylor





Top: George Armstrong Custer. TL2009.36.8; Immediately above: Lawrence Barrett. Photographs. TL2009.36.9.

Barrett (1838–1891) was born Lawrence Brannigan in Paterson, New Jersey. While still in his teens he began an acting career that continued with increasing success and acclaim for nearly four decades. He met George Custer in the late 1860s backstage after a performance. The two maintained a strong friendship over the years through letters, telegrams, and personal encounters. Custer (1839–1876) was born in New Rumley, Ohio, the son of a blacksmith. He entered the United States Military Academy at West Point in 1858. After service in the Civil War, he was assigned to enforce U.S. policy against Native peoples on the central and northern plains.

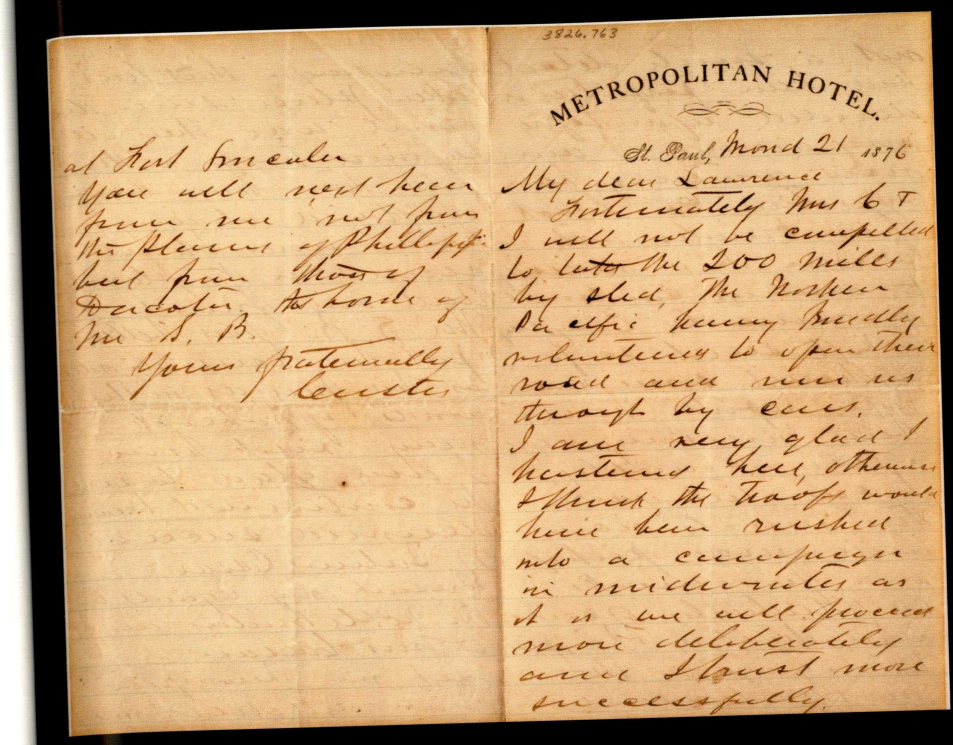
George A. Custer to Lawrence Barrett, 1876

ON FEBRUARY 21, 1876, George Armstrong Custer wrote a short letter to the actor Lawrence Barrett on stationery from the Metropolitan Hotel in St. Paul, Minnesota. The soldier updated his longtime friend on his current activities and extended greetings to other acquaintances in the East. Lt. Col. Custer was preparing to make the final passage from Department of Dakota Headquarters at St. Paul to Fort Abraham Lincoln in the Dakota Territory. After a brief vacation, he had recently been ordered back into the field to address American Indian rebellion and establish governmental authority across the northern Plains.

The campaign Custer rejoined would eventually escalate into the Great Sioux War of 1876–77. The conflict began when the Black Hills Expedition of 1874 discovered gold on Lakota (Sioux) lands, which were subsequently invaded by white prospectors. After the Grant administration's offer to purchase the Black Hills was rejected by the Lakota, the region was declared no longer a part of the Great Sioux Reservation and was opened to mining interests. President Grant's policy also dictated that all Lakotas and Cheyennes living outside the reservation were to be considered hostile and subject to military reprisal. The deadline for their return to the reservation was set for January 31, 1876. Custer's letter to Barrett was written three weeks after the deadline had passed.

In 1876, only months after Custer's death, Lawrence Barrett contributed to Frederick Whittaker's *A Complete Life of General George A. Custer.* According to historian Robert M. Utley, Barrett's contribution remains a "genuine testament of friendship and appreciation and deserves consideration as an original source document." In a section titled "Personal Recollections of General Custer," Lawrence Barrett wrote fondly of his good friend:

> GEORGE ARMSTRONG CUSTER was of that great industrial class from which so many of our original men are springing. With no marked advantages of education, no influence to push forward his fortunes, or wealth to command situation, he yet passed through such a career, was so rapid in growth and development, that he was ripe in



Letter from Lt. Col. George Custer to Lawrence Barrett, 1876.3826.763.

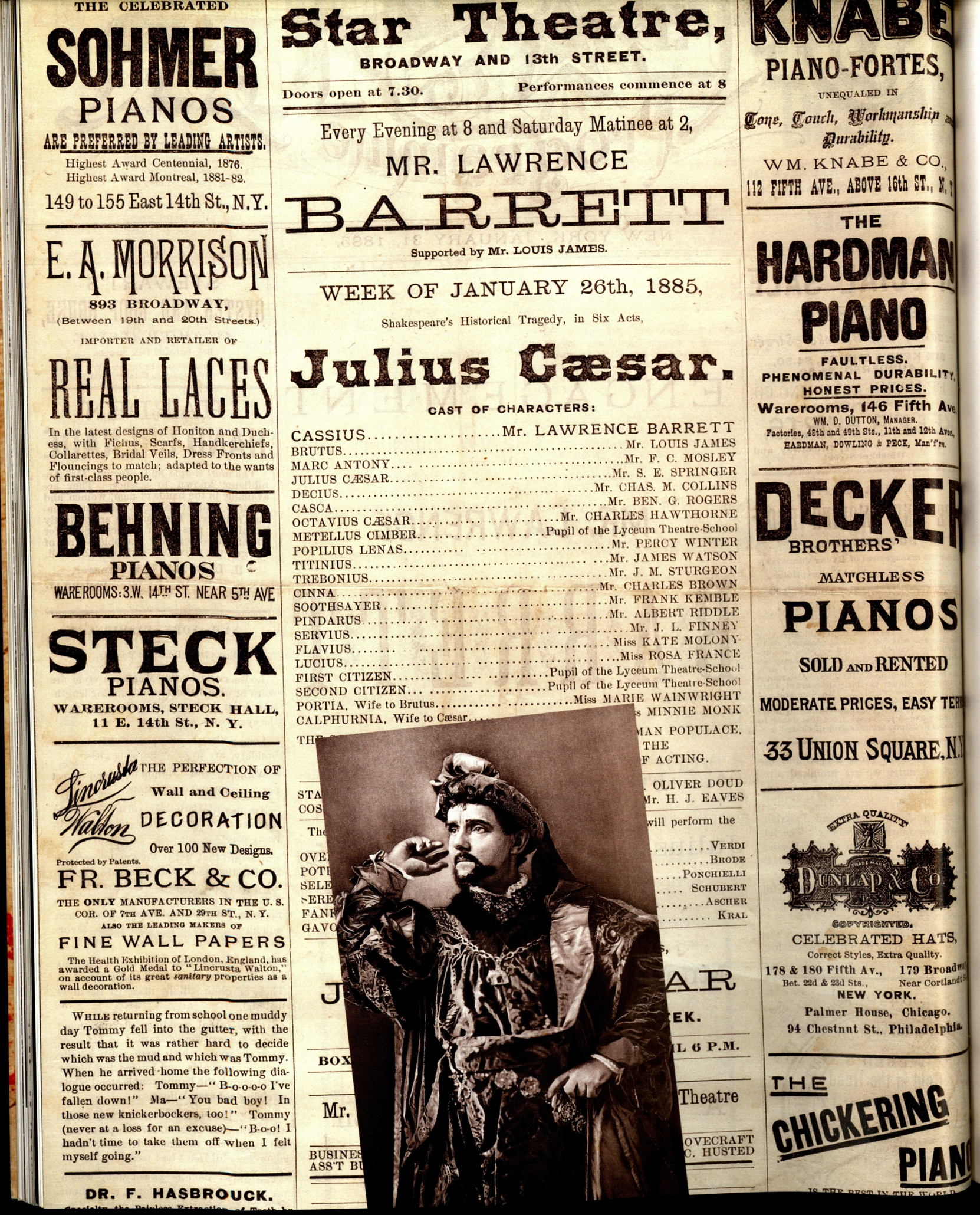
St. Paul, Mond 21 1876 (Feb 21, 1876)

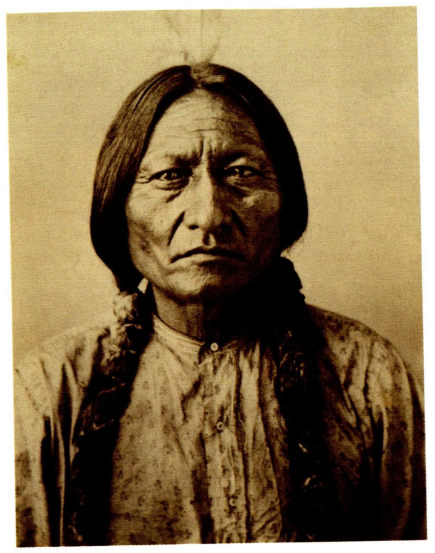
My Dear Lawrence,

Fortunately Mrs. C. & I will not be compelled to take the 200 miles by sled, the Northern Pacific having kindly volunteered to open their road and run us through by cars. I am very glad I hastened here, otherwise I think the troops would have been rushed into a campaign in midwinter. As it is we will proceed more deliberately and I trust more successfully.

Not a single detail had been perfected or decided upon before my arrival. I am now waiting here expecting Gen. Crook from Omaha with whom it is necessary to arrange combined movements. Everything is kept secret so far although some newspaper reporters have been guessing more or less accurately. I can tell you this much now and more perhaps in a few weeks, confidentially of course, and that is, I expect to engage in the most extensive campaign that has taken place since the Civil War. There will be more troops in the field than have been employed at any one time since I have served in the plains. And our friend Mr. S. B. had better put his house in order as his friends in the words of Babcock may visit him. I am glad to see the continued because deserved success of Julius Caesar. Present my regards to the noble Brutus and to Mrs. Caesar. Let me hear from you – address me at Fort Lincoln. You will next hear from me not from the Plains of Phillippi but from those of the Dacota the home of Mr. S. B.

Yours fraternally,
Custer







Sitting Bull. Photograph. 4326.4832; George Armstrong Custer. Photograph. 4326.1539.

In the Custer letter, "Mr. S.B." refers to Tatanka-Iyotanka, or Sitting Bull (1831–1890), the Hunkpapa Lakota leader who was later portrayed as Custer's primary nemesis in the battle that came to be known as Custer's Last Stand. While not a participant in the actual battle, Sitting Bull was a central figure in bringing Lakota, Cheyenne, and Arapaho warriors together in an effort to repel U.S. forces.

honors when the bullet of the Indian warrior pierced his heart. Advancement so swift, a career so brilliant that his deeds have become household words in the land… It is the misfortune of men in high public station that the brilliancy of their professional careers obscures the private character of the individual. They are seen through a misty veil and by their position shut out from the close observation of their fellows. It was my happiness to have known intimately, and to have enjoyed for many years the society of General Custer, and it may, therefore, be allowed me to record my impression of him as divested of the pomp of war, and mingling in the pursuits of social life.

"It was impossible for Custer to appear otherwise than himself. He had none of that affectation of manner or bearing which arises from egotism or timidity. Reticent among strangers, even to a fault, his enemies, if he had any, must have recognized his perfect integrity of character. Indeed, this reticence often caused him to be misunderstood, and he himself frequently complained that he could not be "all things to all men." It was only in the companionship of his intimates and close friends that the real joyousness of his nature shone forth. Then he was all confidence, his eye would brighten, his face light up and his whole heart seemed to expand. He had something of the Frenchman in his gayety, much of the German in a certain tenacity of purpose. Utterly fearless of danger, he seemed in private to become as gentle as a woman… Some have thought that Custer's courage was of the bulldog kind; that he knew no danger and feared none. Nothing can be further from the truth. He said to the writer that, the first few battles he was in, he was almost overcome with fear… The truth doubtless is that he was fully conscious that he possessed the ability to rise in his profession, and he had determined to do so at all hazards. He chose the post of danger at the head of his column, simply because he was aware that it was the place to obtain success… All this was the result of a deliberate plan. He had counted the cost of success and was fully prepared to pay it. He wanted honor and distinction among his fellow men, or death on the field…"



George and Elizabeth Custer. TL2009.36.10.

George Custer married Elizabeth Clift Bacon in 1864. Mrs. Custer spent much of her married life at frontier outposts with her husband. After his death in 1876, "Libbie" Custer became "the General's" greatest champion—writing three books that recounted her husband's exploits as a soldier on the Plains.



Above: Ulysses S. Grant. Engraving, TL2009.35.87. Right: General Grant and staff at City Point, Virgina, 1864. Photograph. TL2009.35.86. From left: Seated: Col. John A. Rawlins, Col. C.B. Comstock, Lt. Gen U.S. Grant, Maj. M.M. Morgan, Col. Ely S. Parker, Col. O.E. Babcock. Standing: Capt. Henry Janes, Capt. William S. Dunn, Maj. Peter Hudson

In his reference to "Babcock," Custer alludes to a key defendant in a "Whiskey Ring" trial that was prominent in newspaper headlines of the day. The scandal involved a conspiracy among government officials, distillers, and sellers in the illegal diversion of tax revenues in the sale and distribution of whiskey that spread across several states, ultimately linking to the White House staff of President Ulysses S. Grant. Orville E. Babcock (1835–1884) had been an aide-de-camp to the general during the Civil War and was appointed Grant's private secretary after the election of 1868. In 1875, Babcock was indicted in the Whiskey Scandal. At his trial, evidence included a series of telegrams that seemed to implicate Babcock and others. The Custer letter to Barrett refers to one of these telegrams that had been recently recounted in the popular press. "Put your house in order. Your friends will visit you." The cryptic words were not Babcock's, however, but those of John MacDonald, who was eventually convicted in the scandal. Though likely a conspirator, Babcock was acquitted after Grant testified in his defense.



Custer was killed along with some 260 members of his command during an attack on a large Lakota and Northern Cheyenne encampment along the Little Big Horn River on June 25, 1876. Accounts of the U.S. Army defeat emblazoned the newspapers, and sensational accounts of Custer's death were of particular interest to the American public. In a matter of weeks, his demise became a story of profound national significance. As the nation was in its centennial year, the recent events on the Little Big Horn River soon evolved into an allegory that became embedded in the larger realm of the American consciousness. Nearly a century and a half after his death, Custer continues to be seen largely as a symbol of the American western experience—an emblem of both patriotism and arrogance. It has become difficult to view him as merely an individual. The George Custer correspondence to Lawrence Barrett remains significant among American historical documents for what it reveals not only about specific events but also about the personality and life of the writer. Custer's friendship with Barrett reveals the soldier's human side. The George A. Custer we think we know is perhaps more often grounded in the symbolic needs of present circumstances.

Custer's fondness for Barrett was expressed in jesting references to Julius Caesar. Ironically, Custer's role as cultural icon can perhaps best be captured in words from Shakepeare's play about Caesar. The character Cicero, speaking in Act One, says it well: "Indeed, it is a strange disposed time, / But men may construe things after their fashion, / Clean from the purpose of the things themselves."



Lawrence Barrett as Cassius in Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar.* Photograph. TL2009.36.11.

In his note from St. Paul, Custer congratulated Barrett on his success in *Julius Caesar.* The production was considered among the most significant interpretations of the Shakespeare play during the 19th century in the United States. Barrett received particular acclaim for his portrayal of Cassius, a role he played intermittently throughout his career. The "Plains of Philippi" is a direct reference to Julius Caesar Act V, scene I.

Andrew Jackson to Rachel Jackson, 1813

IN NOVEMBER 1813, GENERAL ANDREW JACKSON of the Tennessee militia wrote home to his wife Rachel about events that had occurred during the early battles of the Creek War. At the time of his writing, Jackson was not a national figure. While he had been a lawyer, politician, merchant, and slave-holding planter, he had not yet achieved significant prominence beyond Tennessee. The events of the coming months would propel him into the national spotlight and set him on a course that forever changed American political and social life.

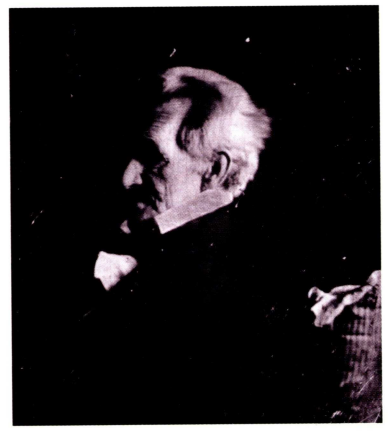
Jackson was writing from Fort Strother, a recently established military outpost along the Coosa River in Mississippi Territory at a place known locally as Ten Islands, now in the state of Alabama. Jackson was in command of some 2,500 men who had just made the march all the way from western Tennessee. In his letter, Jackson tells Rachel about events related to the Battle of Talladega, a major victory in the early months of the conflict.

The Creek War of 1813–14 began as a civil war within the Creek (Muscogee) Nation. The Creeks were divided over how to respond to American encroachment onto Indian lands. While many Creeks accepted white influence as inevitable, a growing faction, often referred to as the "Red Sticks," favored a return to traditional ways and open confrontation. The U.S. government feared Spain's involvement in the conflict from their outposts in nearby Florida. Suspecting that the Creeks had received munitions from the Spanish governor in Pensacola, American forces from Fort Mims in Mississippi Territory engaged a party of Red Sticks on July 1813 at the Battle of Burnt Corn. The following month, Red Stick warriors attacked Fort Mims and massacred all of the fort's occupants, including many women and children. The federal government summoned 5,000 militiamen from Tennessee; the troops were divided between Jackson and General William Cocke.



Andrew Jackson Medal. Bronze, 1819. TL2008.35.41.
This medal, struck in 1819, commemorates Jackson's defeat of British forces in the Battle of New Orleans in 1815.





Rachel Jackson. Engraving by J.C. Buttre, 1883. TL2009.36.12; Andrew Jackson. Daguerreotype, Matthew Brady Studio, ca. 1844-45. Library of Congress.

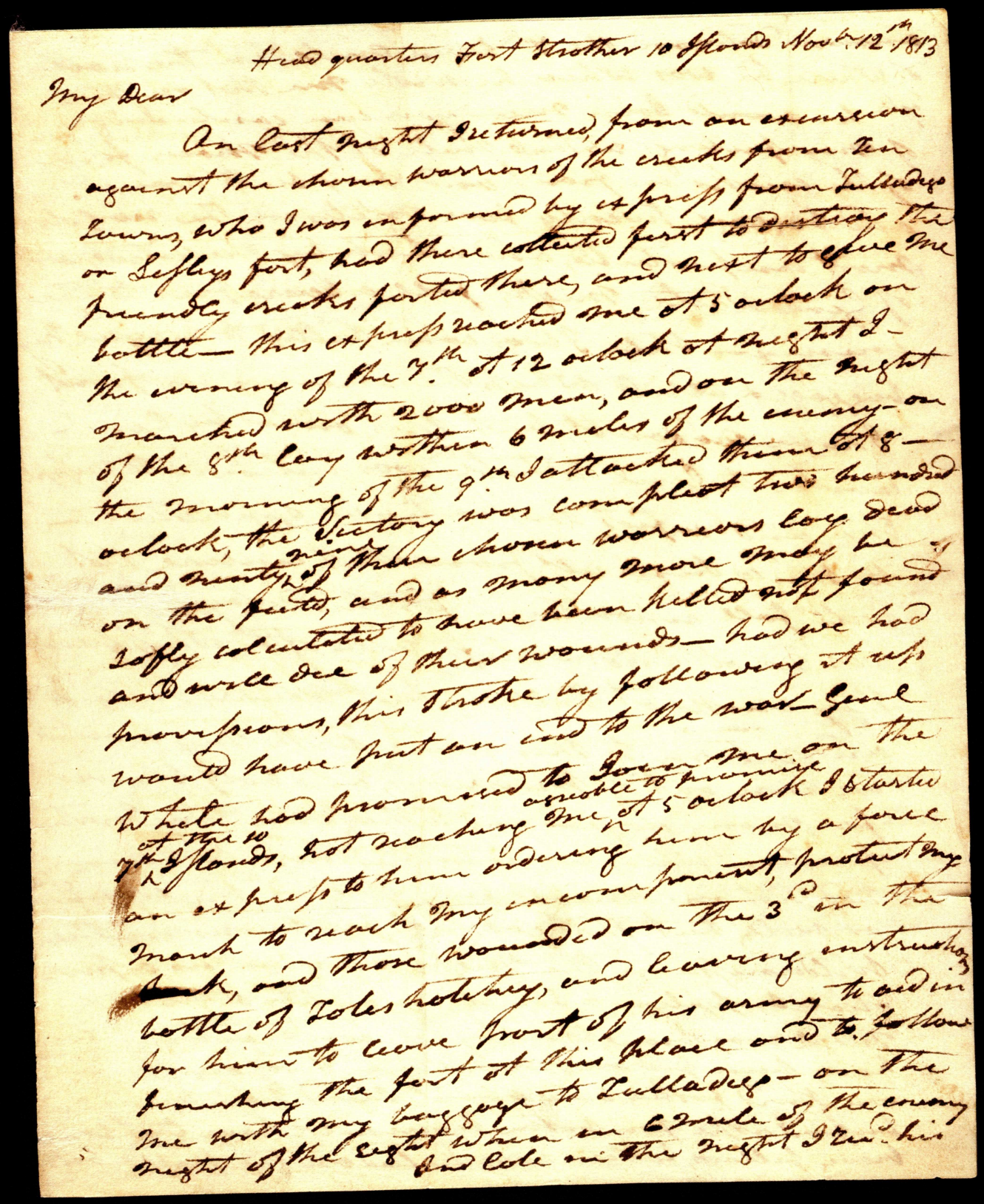
Rachel Donelson (1767–1828) and Andrew Jackson were married in 1791. Rachel's first marriage, to Lewis Robards of Tennessee, had failed, and Rachel fell in love with Jackson while he was a guest at her mother's boardinghouse in Nashville. The marriage was later proved invalid as Robards had not formally petitioned for divorce. Although the divorce was eventually granted and the couple legally married in 1794, rumors of adultery plagued them the rest of their lives. Jackson engaged in a number of duels in the public defense of his wife's honor. The claims surfaced again in the press during Jackson's 1828 presidential campaign. Rachel died of a heart attack in December of 1828, only a few weeks after her husband's election to the presidency.

Headquarters Fort Strother 10 Islands
Nov 12th 1813

My Dear,

On last night I returned from an excursion against the chosen warriors of the Creeks from Ten Towns, who I was informed by express from Tulladega or Lashley's fort, had there collected first to destroy the friendly Creeks posted there, and next to give me battle—this express reached me at 5 oclock on the evening of the 7th. At 12 oclock at night I marched with 2000 men, and on the night of the 8th lay within 6 miles of the enemy – on the morning of the 9th I attacked them at 8 oclock, the victory was compleat two hundred and ninety nine of their chosen warriors lay dead on the field, and as many more may be safely calculated to have been killed not found and will die of their wounds – had we had provisions, this stroke by following it up would have put an end to the war—Genl White had promised to join me on the 7th at the 10 Islands, not reaching me agreeable to promise at 5 oclock I started an express to him ordering him by a force march to reach my encampment, protect my back, and those wounded on the 3rd in the battle of Toleshatchey , and leaving instruction for him to leave part of his army to aid in guarding the fort at this place and to follow me with my baggage to Tulladego—on the night of the eighth when in 6 mile of the enemy and late in the night I recd his answer dated on the 7th . Seven mile in the rear of where he was when he wrote me that on the 7th he would join me – you can easily Judge of my feelings, within 6 mile of the main force of the Creeks in front, and my sick wounded and baggage twenty five miles in the rear, almost unprotected, and which by the retrograde of Genl White, might fall a sacrafice to the enemy – Still I was compelled to risque my baggage & all to whip the enemy in front. I have no doubt but this order by Genl Cocke to Genl White was intended to cripple me and defeat my entended opperations – to shield himself from that censure that will fall upon him for his delay – there was no other alternative left me – after whipping the Creeks at Tulladego, but to burry our dead and return to this place with my wounded. We were out of provisions, and half starved for many days – and to highten my mortification when we returned here last evening had not one mouthful to give the wounded or will; but that God that fed Moses in the Wilderness – in the night brought us a partial supply – a small quantity of meat & meal was brought in by the contractor – we have been fed on parched corn half our time: one third fasted and about third had bread & beef – I hope for better times – we have lost some brave fellows, fifteen were killed on the field of battle and eighty five wounded, two of whom are since dead the carnage of the enemy would have been much greater, I had formed a compleat circle around them, the Creeks were about one 1000 strong and when they approached the militia line it in part gave way, this occasioned me to dismount my reserve commanded by Colo Dyer composed of Capt Smiths Tyrrells, Hammonds & Edwards and Moltons Companies who met them like Bull dogs, and at two fires repulsed them killing 27 on the spot – had I had these men still on horseback in pursuit, not one of the 1000 would have escaped. The volunteers officers & men did there duty and the militia officers & men except as above stated also did theirs. As soon as the reserve checked them, the Militia that had broke, rallyed and pursued. There was at no time of the action more than one half of my men engaged and at every point my men beat them man for man & when my reserve met them there was at least three Indians for one white man – they reserve met them in eight yards of where I was standing & at two fires drove the enemy – I have not time to write to Colo Hays show him this letter – my mind for the want of provision is harassed—my feelings excoriated with the complaints of the men – I enjoy health & may god bless you forever.

Andrew Jackson



Letter from Andrew Jackson to Rachel Jackson, 1813.3826.1634.



Andrew Jackson. Engraved from an 1815 painting by John Wesley Jarvis, 19th century. TL2009.36.13.

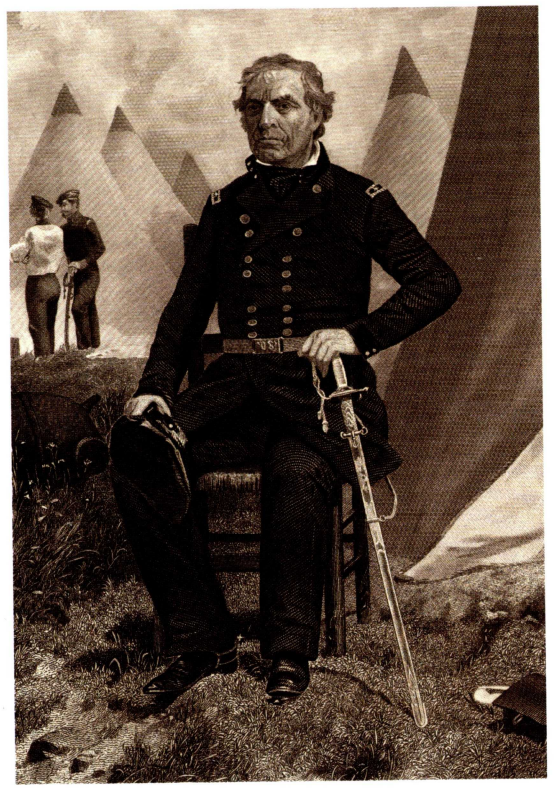
Depicted here as a young military officer, Andrew Jackson (1767–1845) was one of the most significant influences of early 19th-century American life. He was elected president of the United States in 1828 and served two terms. Both as soldier and statesman, Jackson dominated and shaped the American political landscape, leaving a legacy that reaches even into the modern era.

In his letter to Rachel, Jackson's writing is hurried. Compared to his other letters written at the same time about similar events, Jackson's thoughts here are set down in rapid and often confusing succession. Composed only a few days after the Battle of Talladega, the letter perhaps reflects the mental fatigue and physical weariness of the aftermath of combat. Jackson was also still recovering from injuries received in his near fatal confrontation with brothers Jesse and Thomas Hart Benton only weeks before in September. A physically and emotionally weary Jackson expresses only subtle sentiments to his wife. He is more consumed with thoughts of the moment and the dire situation for his men and the stability of his command.

The Creek War ended with the signing of the Treaty of Fort Jackson in August 1814. The treaty resulted in the cession of some 20 million acres of Creek lands to the U.S. government. Jackson went on to further military success at the Battle of New Orleans in 1815. His continued achievements as a soldier and politician led him into the national spotlight and his eventual election to the White House in 1828. Jackson served two terms, leaving a contentious but indelible mark on American life. He died in 1845 at the age of seventy-eight.

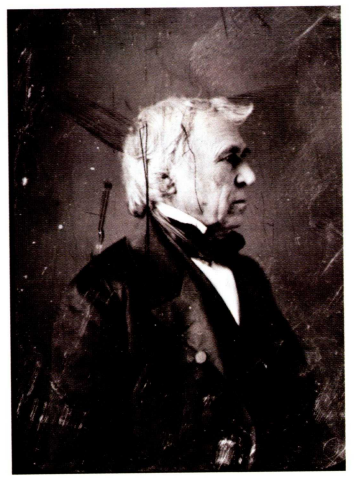
Colonel Zachary Taylor to Captain William Boyce, 1836

ZACHARY TAYLOR WAS BORN IN ORANGE COUNTY, VIRGINIA, IN 1784. His father had served under the command of George Washington during the American Revolution. Taylor entered military service in 1808 and received a commission in the U.S. Army from his second cousin James Madison. Later known to his men as "Old Rough and Ready," Taylor served in the War of 1812, the Black Hawk War, and ultimately became a national figure with his victories at the Battles of Monterrey and Buena Vista during the Mexican War. Taylor served in the army some four decades before his election to the presidency in 1848.



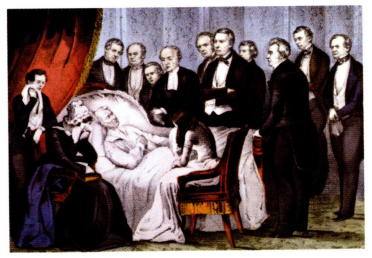
Taylor wrote the following letter to his friend and fellow army officer William Boyce, who was at the time in Burlington, New Jersey. While much of Taylor's military service had been dedicated to enforcing the will of the U.S. government against Indian peoples, the Boyce letter clearly indicates the future president's disdain for governmental policy during the removal period of the 1830s. As an army officer, Taylor's political views were largely unknown until his 1848 campaign for the White House. The Boyce letter offers a rare glimpse into Taylor's cynical perspective regarding the government's treatment of Native Americans as well as President Jackson's handling of military affairs.

William M. Boyce graduated from the United States Military Academy at West Point in 1822. He was appointed aide-de-camp to Major General Alexander Macomb in 1828. Boyce resigned from the United States Army in November 1836, only months after receiving his letter from Taylor. That same year, Boyce became a topographer for the U.S. Coast Survey. He died from injuries sustained in a railroad accident in New Jersey in 1856.



Above: Zachary Taylor. Daguerreotype by Matthew Brady, ca. 1844-49. Library of Congress; Left: Zachary Taylor. Engraved from a painting by Alonzo Chappel, 19th century. TL2009.36.14.

Gen. Taylor is shown seated in camp during the Mexican War. His victory at the Battle of Buena Vista in 1847 brought him national recognition and propelled him into the presidential campaign the following year.



Death of Gen. Zachary Taylor. Nathaniel Currier, 1850. TL2009.35.88A.

President Taylor died in July 1850 after sixteen months in office. The cause was given as gastroenteritis.



Zachary Taylor presidential campaign poster. Thomas W. Strong, 1848; Zachary Taylor-Millard Fillmore Campaign Poster. Nathaniel Currier, 1848.

In 1848, Taylor became the Whig candidate for president against Democrat Lewis Cass and former president Martin Van Buren of the newly-formed Free Soil Party. Taylor and running mate Millard Fillmore won the election with 47 percent of the vote.

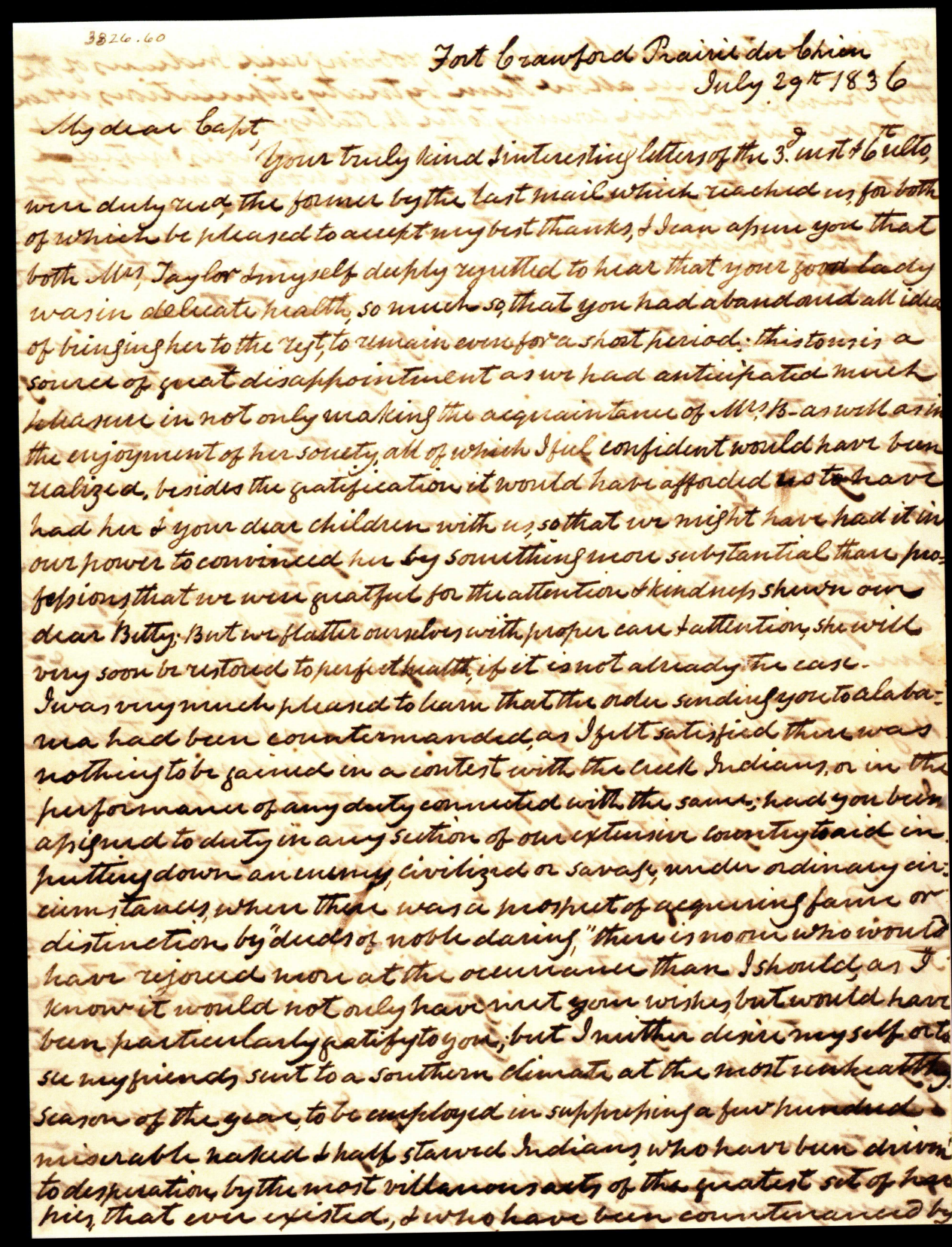


GRAND, NATIONAL, WHIG BANNER - PRESS ONWARD

Left: Zachary Taylor. Engraved from an 1848 painting by Joseph Henry Bush, 1901. TL2009.36.16; Right: Alexander Macomb. Engraved from an 1829 painting by Thomas Sully, 19th century. TL2009.36.15.







3826.60

Fort Crawford Prairie du Chien
July 29th 1836

My dear Capt

Your truly kind & interesting letters of the 3d inst & 6th ultº were duly rec'd the former by the last mail which reached us, for both of which be pleased to accept my best thanks, & I can assure you that both Mrs Taylor & myself deeply regretted to hear that your good Lady was in delicate health, so much so, that you had abandoned all idea of bringing her to the West, to remain even for a short period. This to us is a source of great disappointment as we had anticipated much pleasure in not only making the acquaintance of Mrs B- as well as in the enjoyment of her society, all of which I feel confident would have been realized, besides the gratification it would have afforded us to have had her & your dear children with us, so that we might have had it in our power to convince her by something more substantial than professions that we were grateful for the attention & kindness shown our dear Betty. But we flatter ourselves with proper care & attention, she will very soon be restored to perfect health, if it is not already the case.

I was very much pleased to learn that the order sending you to Alabama had been countermanded, as I felt satisfied there was nothing to be gained in a contest with the Creek Indians, or in the performance of any duty connected with the same, had you been assigned to duty in any section of our extensive country to aid in putting down an enemy, civilized or savage, under ordinary circumstances, where there was a prospect of acquiring fame or distinction by "deeds of noble daring," there is no one who would have rejoiced more at the occurrence than I should, as I know it would not only have met your wishes, but would have been particularly gratifyto you, but I neither desire myself or to see my friends sent to a Southern climate at the most unhealthy season of the year, to be employed in suppressing a few hundred miserable naked & half starved Indians, who have been driven to desperation, by the most villainous acts of the greatest set of harpies, that ever existed, & who have been countenanced by

Letter from Lt. Col. Zachary Taylor to William Boyce, 1836.3826.60.

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July 29th 1836
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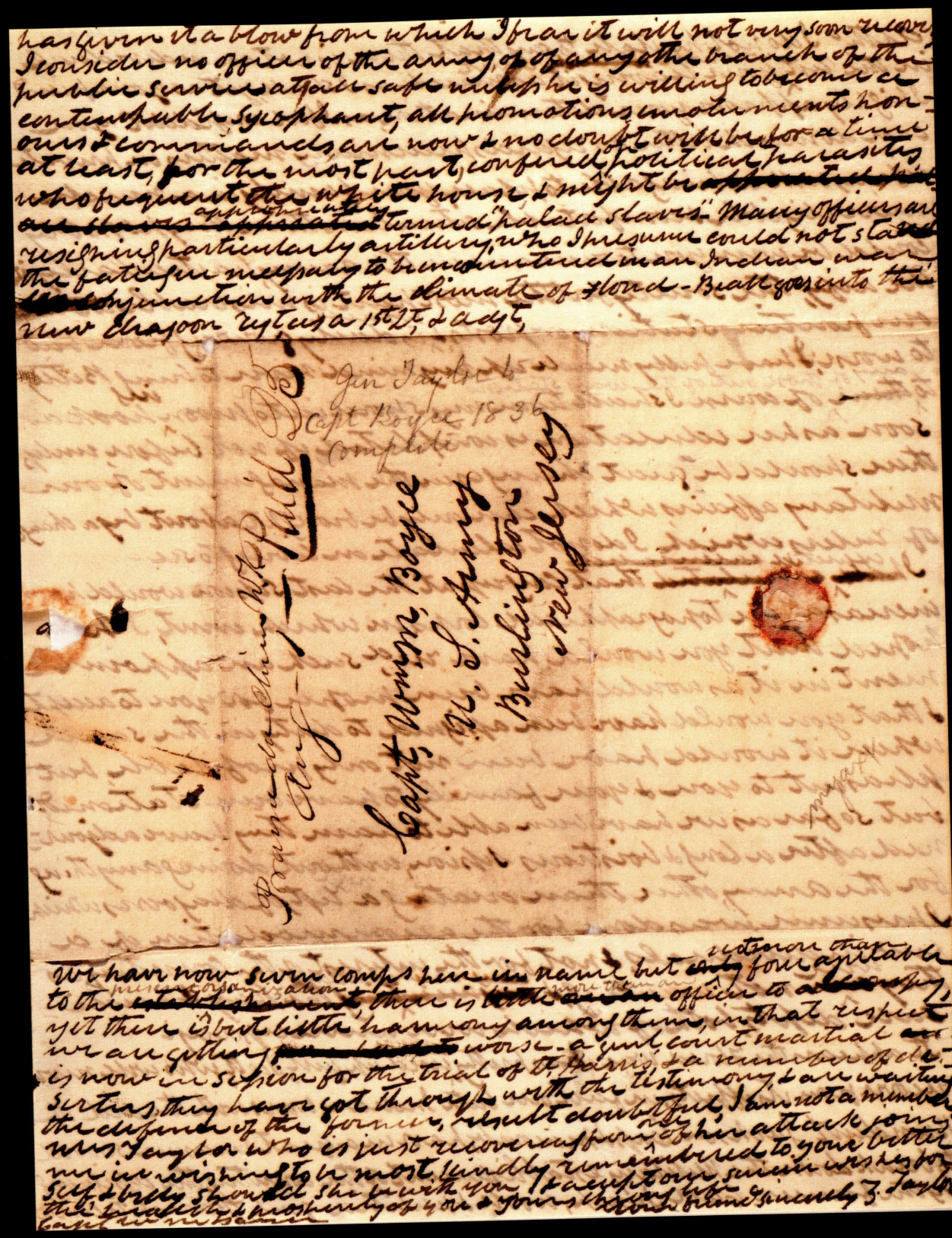
I make no doubt the order sending you to Alabama was given by the direction of Macomb immediately on his return to Washington from the South, with the view and intention of harassing you, he is aware that he has injured you, + will therefore neglect no opportunity of subjecting you to every possible inconvenience, such a course is natural to weak minds and I am only surprised at his changing his determination on the subject and am of the opinion that you may expect very soon to be placed or assigned to some more disagreeable duty. On the receipt of your letter of the 6th of June, I wrote Madam Greland that in consequence of your having been ordered to Alabama, I did not expect it would be convenient for Mrs. Boyce to take Betty during her vacation, and as I understand she was in the habit of leaving Philadelphia during that time. I would prefer her taking Betty, that I would most cheerfully pay any additional expenses that might be incurred in consequence of doing so, but should Mrs. B wish to take her for that period, I would be glad for her to do so, as we would feel as well satisfied while under her charge, as if she were under our own roof. I must therefore say that we were delighted on knowing that you had taken a house at Burlington & would invite Betty to spend the vacation with your family, which I know will be so gratifying to her; But I fear we shall never have it in our power to remunerate you and your good lady for all your kindness to our dear child,



Letter from Lt. Col. Zachary Taylor to William Boyce, 1836.3826.60.

but can assure you that we are most grateful for the same and shall lose no opportunity of convincing you that it is duly appreciated.

Altho, I do not hesitate to say that there is not an individual in the regt. who will regret your leaving it as much as I shall, yet as your friend I highly approve your determination as I confident you can do much better as regards pecuniary matters in private life as well as being able to place your family in a much more eligible and comfortable situation than they probably could be were you to remain in the army, particularly in the infy; the society for the most part is miserable at all our frontier stations or forts, which is daily growing from bad to worse. I have fully made up my mind never to bring Betty to any of those out of the way stations, of course I shall turn my sword into a ------____ _____ hook as soon as her education is completed if not before, unless there should be great changes in the management of our military affairs, which can only be brought about by a change of rulers which I do not calculate on living to see. I expected that Congress at the last session would have increased the topographical corps in which event I had hoped that you would have rcd. such an appointment in it, as would have been proper for you to accept and that you would have been assigned to duty in the same where it would have been not only profitable but pleasant to you and your family to have been stationed, but so far as we have been able to learn they have adjourned after a long and boisterous session without doing anything for the army, other than create a new rgt of dragoons which I presume was done for the accommodation of a few individuals & not for the interest of the country… in fact our late Indian Wars with the aid of President Jackson, Capt. Macomb have in a great measure served to break down the military establishment of the country...I consider no officer of the army or any other branch of the public service at all safe unless he is willing to become a condemnable sycophant, all promotions, emoluments, honors and commands are now & no doubt will be for a time, at least for the most part, confirmed political parasites who frequent the white house & might be appropriately termed "palace slaves".



Left: Zachary Taylor peace medal, ca. 1849. 65.48. Facing: Map of the Seat of War in Florida, from the collections of the Geography and Map Division, Library of Congress. TL 2009.85.90.



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Gilcrease Museum and The University of Tulsa owe a special debt of gratitude to the following individuals and organizations whose five-year unrestricted commitments form the foundation upon which we build a stronger, more vibrant museum.*

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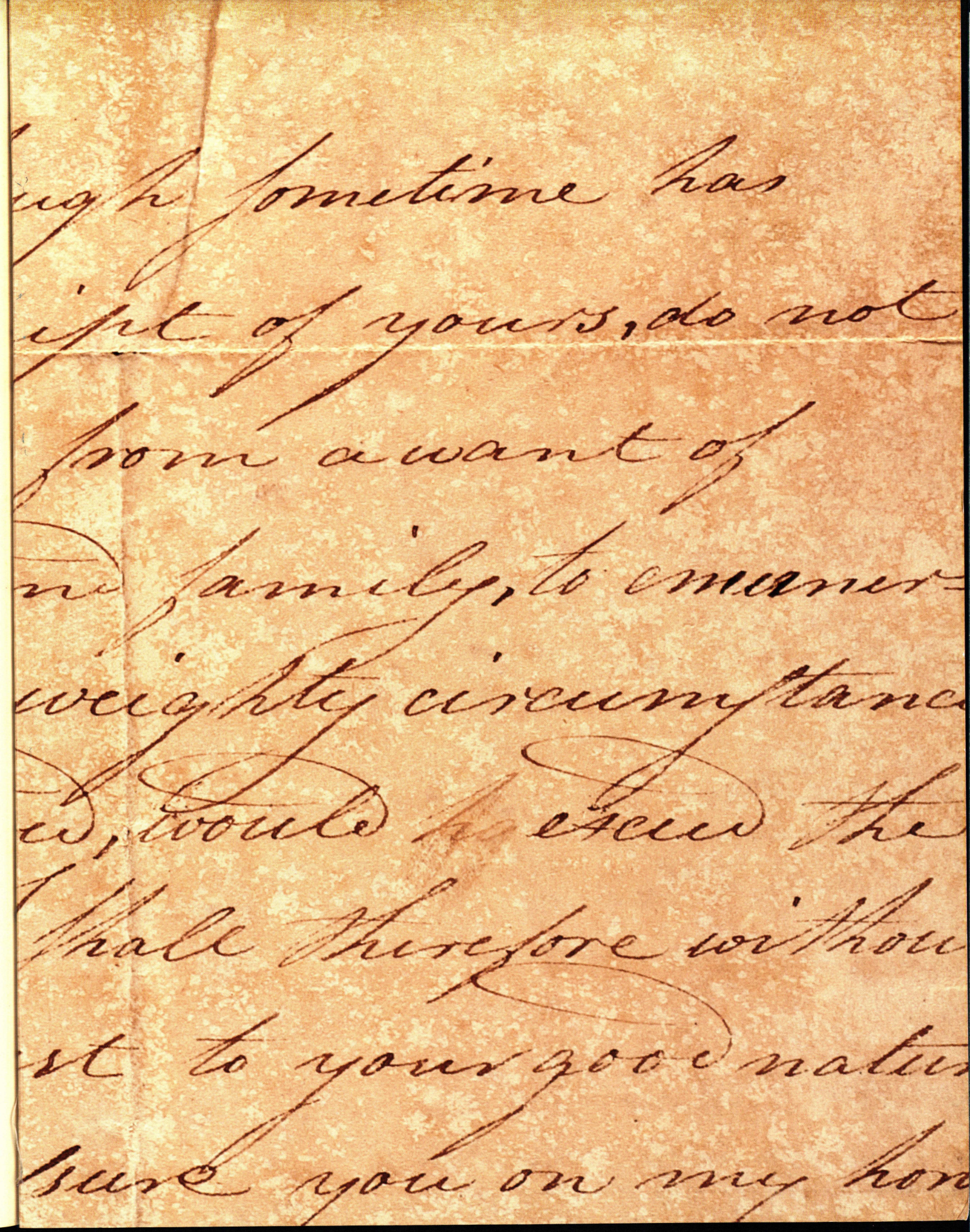


ZACHARY TAYLOR PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES 1849
ANDREW JACKSON MAJOR GENERAL
RESOLUTION OF CONGRESS FEBRUARY 27, 1815.
BATTLE OF NEW ORLEANS JANUARY 8, 1815.
AND PEACE