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THE POSTAL AGE

THE Emergence of MODERN COMMUNICATIONS IN NINETEENTH-CENTURY AMERICA

THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO PRESS • CHICAGO AND LONDON
For R. S., friend and correspondent
FOUR
EMBRACING OPPORTUNITIES
THE CONSTRUCTION OF THE
PERSONAL LETTER

Shortly before the 1845 postage reduction took effect, Frederick Clapp of Worcester wrote to his brother in another Massachusetts town; this is the earliest of Frederick’s surviving letters to bear a postmark. Whereas their previous correspondence appears to have been occasioned by news of illness, Frederick underscores the decidedly quotidian status of this particular missive: “Dear Brother, / Having an opportunity to write you and hapning to think of the promise we made each other before you left, I have concluded to take my pen in hand and see if I could not manufacture one of those little things which the man at the Post Office sometimes hands out to the man of letters.”

Thrusting himself wary into a world of elite status (“the man of letters”), Clapp also imagines participating in the familiar ritual of post office life. Such gestures registered some of the challenges and ambiguities associated with entering the postal network after 1845. The post had been many things in the memory of mid-century Americans—a news source, a medium for business communication, a resource for making special (typically tragic) announcements—but it had not been a broadly interactive network, and its rites and rhythms had no fixed place in everyday experience. As a newly accessible and increasingly indispensable communication network took root in the 1840s and ‘50s, American correspondents sought to articulate new models for postal relationships. A great deal of cultural work went into the production of the codes and ideals of intimacy that shaped epistolary communication. What emerged most generally during this period was a set of practices, discourses, and beliefs—a postal culture—that redefined the very status of mail. More specifically, Americans began producing and circulating in massive numbers something that had never before been an instrument of everyday sociability among ordinary people: the personal letter.
To write, receive, post, or expect a letter in the newly inclusive U.S. mail network was to engage a system that had been, for some time, deeply linked to the transmission of news and the spread of the market. New users of the post both adopted and adapted these associations in an effort to make sense of what it might mean to conduct interpersonal relationships through the mail. In an 1854 transcontinental letter, for example, Benjamin Wingate directed his son to think in new ways about the value and purpose of writing letters:

It is a very good plan for you to correspond with your relatives in Wis[consin]. It will do you, and them, good, in several ways. Do not neglect it. Do not fall into the notion, that you cannot write, unless you have some news to tell. Items of news may be gathered from the newspapers; but a friendly correspondence has, or should have, another purpose—to express sympathy and good feeling, and to keep up an acquaintance with and a pleasant remembrance of, each other. Write as you would talk to them.\(^2\)

The distinction between news and “friendly correspondence” was not, of course, an innovation, and the epistolary ideal of writing “as you would talk” enjoyed an established pedigree. At least since the sixteenth century, English-language guides to letter-writing had defined the craft as “Oration written,” a trope that had become a well-worn cliché by the time of Wingate’s letter.\(^3\) What was new to this period was the notion that a young person of middling income and status no longer needed to model his correspondence on news or justify his use of the post by the announcement of an extraordinary occurrence or the sharing of some recent intelligence. The post could be used to cultivate and sustain “an acquaintance” over long distances. In an 1859 letter to his son in Alabama, Iowa minister and land speculator J. H. Williams opened by acknowledging that he was “sitting down to write to you from habit rather than from any thing important, I have to communicate.” For family and friends living at a distance, it was precisely this “habit” that characterized the new postal connection.

While mid-century correspondents negotiated the relationship between letters and news, they also wrestled with a closer model for interpersonal postal exchange—the business letter. Despite a long tradition associating letters with polite society, despite a continual emphasis in etiquette books on letter-writing as an act of personal self-presentation, and despite the construction of letters as windows into the soul in popular epistolary novels, Americans at mid-century understood that the prototypical letter-writer was a businessman. Postal reforms gave ordinary Americans access to a mode of communication that had previously been

the province of bankers, merchants, and clerks. In the same 1845 letter in which Frederick Clapp imagined himself as a “man of letters,” his wife Sarah mobilized a more current metaphor. “I have been thinking about writing to you, for some little time,” she explained, so she and Frederick “entered into partnership, to write you a letter.” Sarah had little news to report, she added, as “F. has had a little more than his share.” To understand the attitudes that new users had to their postal relationships, one must begin by taking such business metaphors seriously. “The day has gone by when the post-office was thought to be only for the merchant,” a Massachusetts magazine announced in 1850, but that day was not so distant, and its imprint remained palpable.\(^5\) Mid-century correspondents were entering a terrain stamped by the culture of the market.

The link between letters and commerce transcended the fact that business correspondence, as contemporary observers acknowledged, accounted for most of the letter volume of the mail even after the postal reductions. Letter-writing was in many ways the paradigmatic activity of the business world. While cargo might ride on railroad cars or steamboats, and while crucial messages might pass along expensive telegraph wires, much of the conduct of long-distance trade took place via the post, and much of the labor associated with the mercantile economy consisted of writing, copying, and filing letters. The antebellum workplace, with its compartmentalized desks and grids of pigeonholes, was organized around postal correspondence.\(^6\) Decades before achieving infamy as a financier, a young Jay Cooke spent his days in the 1840s as a clerk composing such correspondence, “some days fifteen or twenty letters to all parts of the United States.”\(^7\) Clerks like Cooke were part of a new breed of white-collar employee, for whom entry-level, salaried positions—dissociated from artisanal traditions or productive skills—served as badges of middle-class status and promised upward mobility. Their jobs were increasingly defined in the public eye as mental rather than manual labor, but the responsibilities of a clerk were in a literal sense intensely manual. Clerks and businessmen handwrote letters for a living.\(^8\)

What this meant is that the skills associated with correspondence were also the qualifications for entering middle-class professional life. Guides to success in business emphasized the importance of composition, orthography, and penmanship, not only because those features of correspondence (especially penmanship) would be taken as reliable signs of character, but also because so much of commercial life revolved around the production of letters. An 1872 manual told the story of a Philadelphia clerk whose road to success was paved with proper attention to business
correspondence. The Liverpool branch of his firm “noticed how admirably his letters were written, and had him transferred to that city, where he rapidly rose to a partnership, and retired with a fortune of $800,000.” Significantly, the title character in Horatio Alger’s *Ragged Dick* (1867) begins his journey up the social ladder by learning how to write a good letter. When Dick ultimately lands a promising position as a clerk, mid-century readers would recognize that his voyage has reached its terminus.

Letters exchanged among friends and family were profoundly (if ambiguously) linked to the world of business. As new users joined the postal network after 1845, they wrestled with the question of how their mail related to the dominant model of correspondence. One especially illuminating illustration of this struggle appears in evolving attitudes toward composing letters on the Sabbath. Sunday Sabbath observance had been at the heart of two major political controversies before the first postal reform, and both controversies focused on mail. In the 1820s, and then again in the late 1830s, powerful Sabbatarian movements had organized in opposition to the transmission of mail on Sundays. As Richard R. John has argued, Sabbatarians targeted the post not simply because it was the most visible embodiment of the federal government, but in large part because the U.S. mail represented the government’s role in the market economy and the conduct of commercial and financial transactions.

The Sabbatarians failed to close down the postal system on Sundays, but their identification of the post with business was broadly shared (many of their opponents simply felt that the market could not afford to be hamstrung by a day of rest). As letter-writing became more common, correspondents who observed the Sabbath faced a dilemma. Was the medium they were using inherently worklike? Bradford Morse, a young clerk in San Francisco during the 1830s, acknowledged this quandary in a letter to his mother in Massachusetts. “I intended to have replied to your letter last evening,” he explained, “but knowing your ideas about using the Sabbath for such purposes I delayed until this morning.” Morse invokes his mother’s Sabbatarian concerns to excuse a breach of filial piety, but he also distances himself from those concerns, leaving open the possibility that he might have written letters to someone else on Sunday. Morse and his mother may have found themselves on opposite sides of a generational divide. Seven years later, teenaged Lucy Breckinridge of Virginia noted in her diary that although the minister’s wife “considers it very wrong to write letters on Sunday...I cannot see any harm in writing to people that you love.” Much of the conflict hinged on a crucial but slippery distinction between different types of letter-writing. Breckinridge conceded that “it would be sinful to write formal business letters,” but cited “love” as a mitigating factor.

For a new generation of Protestant postal users, especially those far from home, letter-writing came to shed its associations with business and to acquire affinities with the proper observance of the Sabbath. William Allen Clark, a soldier in the Union Army in 1862, proudly claimed to his Baptist family in Indiana that he had written them “each Sabbath since I left home except when marching.” For soldiers, travelers, and migrants, letters from far away offered the promise of an absorptive reading experience linked both to Bible study and, moreover, to the imaginative recreation of idealized home life in the midst of a transient and frequently acquisitive existence. This was especially true during the Gold Rush, when letters from home were celebrated and even fetishized as symbolic counterpoints to the worldly preoccupations and the money-making ethos that governed everyday life. Recalling the frenzy that greeted the arrival of a mail steamer in the 1850s in California, Hubert Howe Bancroft reminded his readers that letters had provided the sole bridge to a distant world “of civilization, of Sabbath and home influence, of all the sweet memories and amenities that make life endurable.”

Letters, in this view, were themselves tokens of Sabbath observance. Historian Alexis McCrossen cites several examples of westward migrants who used Sunday as a day for writing, reading, and rereading letters, and she reaffirms their sense of letter-writing as a sacred activity. “Sojourners and settlers treated Sunday differently from the other days of the week,” McCrossen notes of the mid-to-late nineteenth century, “whether they engaged in more than usual gambling, drinking, and fighting, or in letter writing, introspection, and devotions.”

During the middle decades of the nineteenth century, the tension between the transmission of mail as the classic transgression of the Sabbath and the personal letter as an apt symbol of Sabbath observance reflected deeper uncertainty about the meaning of postal contact. To resolve this tension, cultural commentators and epistolary guides were quick to insist upon the validity of Lucy Breckinridge’s distinction between business mail and personal mail. Business letters should be particularly “brief, plain, and straightforward,” advised a “practical guide to business,” and Godby’s recommended that “business letters should be as brief as is consistent with perspicuity.” Such correspondence was not to be confused with other kinds of letters. An 1856 issue of *Ladies’ Repository* offered a taxonomy of the varieties of mail, stigmatizing business letters as if they were a marginal, regrettable category of postal material: “In this world of material interests we must have business letters too. There is not an
atom of genuine love to be picked out of one in a thousand of these necessary documents. It is a trade to write them. Good penmanship and correct arithmetic qualify the writer.” In a similar vein, some postal users emphasized the relative triviality of business letters. Bancroft spoke of savoring a missive “that breathed of tender memories and pure affection” amid a “pile of business correspondence.” Others accepted grudgingly the priority that business mail claimed. Forty-niner Henry Dewitt informed his mother that her other son Alfred would have no time to write, “as he can hardly answer his business letters.” “He is now writing,” Henry reported. “I expect it will be daylight before he gets through.”17 In both formulations, the distinction seemed clear enough. As categories of correspondence, business letters and personal letters took discrete forms and marked separate practices.

In practice, however, the line proved blurry. Drawing upon many of the same skills, competing (as Henry Dewitt acknowledged) for the same time and attention, and arriving in the same mail bags, business letters were not always easy to distinguish from personal letters. Unlike that of later times, mid-century business correspondence was handwritten, authored (if not always written) by a person familiar (at least by name) to the addressee. Letters between friends and family, for their part, often dealt with financial matters and routinely enclosed money. To which camp—business or personal—does one assign a letter from a forty-nine: to his wife offering detailed instructions about the collection of a debt or the management of a store? Under which rubric belongs the correspondence between an Alabama slave and her absentee master, providing crop reports and detailing family news?18

If the business and personal categories were not as mutually exclusive as critics pretended, letter-writers themselves nonetheless grappled with the division. In his recent study of the literate habits of young clerks in antebellum America, Thomas Augst has observed subtle (and perhaps unconscious) differences in the way young, middle-class men wrote when their audiences or subjects belonged to the emerging world of white-collar work. Augst finds that handwriting, for example, might be more elegant when a clerk wrote about domestic topics or corresponded with female relatives than when he wrote to colleagues about business.19 Inevitably, however, there was overlap. Jay Cooke apologized to his brother in 1840 for a slippage between what he knew ought to be distinct modes of epistolary address: “I write so many letters that I almost lose the form and spirit of a private one,” he observed, speculating that his “business way for expressing things,” must frequently intrude upon the intimacy of his brotherly exchange.20

Distinctions between what was business and what was personal in the steady stream of mail transmission were part of the complex project of constructing epistolary intimacy. At the broadest level, more widespread and frequent use of the mail required some negotiation of the boundaries between public and private in the new postal culture. The ostensible privacy of the sealed letter was—and remains—the subject of a great deal of earnest discussion and mystification. Antebellum Americans inherited a deep ideological faith in the privacy of letters, though a number of different concepts were subsumed under that rubric. The right of confidential correspondence was in fact a centerpiece of English notions of liberty and English suspicions of government tyranny. In 1844, accusations that the government spied on the private correspondence of Joseph Mazzini, a well-connected Italian exile living in England, precipitated a major crisis in British politics.21 The immunity of the mail to government inspection and interference had been a legal cornerstone of the American postal system since 1792—though an important exception was made in the antebellum South in the case of abolitionist literature. And while Americans did worry on occasion about the vulnerability of letters to unwanted third-party intrusion, their concerns usually focused on postal theft.22 But the insistence upon the privacy of correspondence in antebellum America was more than a matter of political or economic rights; letters were private because their contents were intimate.

During the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, an elaborate mythology of epistolary privacy surrounded the exchange of letters. Though they were hardly the first to formulate the connection, epistolary novelists such as Jean-Jacques Rousseau and Samuel Richardson produced popular celebrations of the personal letter as a uniquely authentic and sincere form of expression. Correspondence, according to a false etymology peddled in Richardson's Clarissa, was “coeur-responsence,” communication from the heart.23 Characters in epistolary fiction might send letters through messengers, but mail bags were public repositories of private expressions. As a German cabinet official put it in 1814, “What is locked up most carefully in the heart, in one’s own living room, is entrusted without hesitation to the postal service by everyone, by hundreds of thousands every day. The postman’s satchel thus holds incomparably more secrets, and no less securely under proper administration, than the seal of confession, and the symbol of discretion is none other than that of the postal service.”24

Americans paid frequent homage to the integrity and reliability of the postal confession booth. The popular mid-century novel Reveries of a Bachelor dubbed letters "the only true heart-talkers . . . a true soul-print,"
unsullied by the distortions of other forms of social interaction. “As in a
mirror one shows his face to himself, so in a letter one shows his heart to
his friend,” journalist Theodore Tilton wrote to his wife in 1866, before
the scandal surrounding her relationship with the Reverend Henry Ward
Beecher turned the intimacy of their founding marriage into a public
spectacle.25

Even as cheap postage democratized correspondence, the personal
letter retained its sacred status as a private text in popular literature, the
periodical press, and the flurry of epistolary guidebooks that were pub-
lished during the antebellum period. In innumerable texts and contexts,
authors elaborated a series of clichés that were central to the ideology
of epistolary privacy. Calling letters “the treasured mementoes of the ab-
sent, the loved, and lost,” an 1868 guide published in San Francisco and
“peculiarly adapted to the requirements of California” invoked many of
the stock images and terms with which an increasingly ordinary activity
was sanctified:

[H]ow they are read and re-read, wept over and kissed; how they are
locked away in secret cabinets, to be taken forth only in solitude, as
a miser gloats over his gold; how they are worn almost illegible by the
throb of soft, white bosoms, and how often they are hidden in the still
folds of the winding sheet. . . . Letters of friendship, love, and affection
are sacred things, and should be so imbued with the spirit of the writer as
to render them worthy of the devoted attention they call for.26

Letters were secret (in several senses), they bore metonymic traces of
the (typically female) bodies that composed them, and they dealt in the
currency of human intimacy. Items of personal correspondence, in the
words of Hubert Howe Bancroft, “breathed of tender memories and
pure affection.”27

Lest new postal users find such an enterprise a bit daunting, com-
mentators and advisers reminded them continually of the old saw that a
letter was still nothing more than written conversation. An 1841 com-
pilation textbook defined the epistolary genre as “a conversation carried
upon paper between friends at a distance,” while one guide after another
assured readers that “letter-writing is but speaking by the pen.”28 When
Horatio Alger’s Ragged Dick contemplates the task of composing his
first letter, he doubts his abilities. “Like a good many other boys,” the
pedantic narrator of the 1867 novel explains, “he looked upon it as a
very serious job, not reflecting that, after all, letter-writing is nothing
but talking upon paper. . . .”29 There was a tension, of course, between
the mystifying claim that letters were treasured revelations composed in
solitude and the ostensibly demystifying claim that letters were simply
ordinary conversation. The analogy between correspondence and speech
did, however, have its own mystical resonance, implying that a properly
composed text might somehow incarnate an absent friend. At any rate,
both descriptions of the personal letter were extremely common in mid-
century writing, and both were crucial to the cultural construction of mail
as an intimate social exchange that could form the basis for an ongoing
relationship between correspondents who did not see each other.

New postal users encountered the ideology of epistolary privacy at
every turn during the middle of the nineteenth century, whether or not
they purchased letter-writing manuals. Prevailing assumptions about the
personal letter surfaced in a number of major news stories, for example,
in which correspondence was introduced into public view. One of the
most famous concerned the New York prostitute Helen Jewett, whose
murder in 1836 was a foundational event in the formation of a popular
daily press in urban America. Jewett had used the post office frequently
to conduct business and to negotiate personal affairs, and an elaborate
 correspondence between her and Richard Robinson, later her accused
murderer, was seized at the time of the crime. Though they played little
part in the trial that exonerated Robinson and figured only marginally in
the flood of press coverage surrounding the case, the Jewett-Robinson
letters made a public appearance more than a decade later (in the period
of postal reform) when the National Police Gazette published them in full
as part of an elaborate serial story on Jewett. George Wilkes, the editor,
drew no sensational conclusions from the letters, but simply offered them
to his readers as a point of access to the life of the victim.

Purportedly intimate letters appeared on the public stage two decades
later in a bizarre episode involving the disposition of Mary Lincoln’s
clothes. Res tet by staggering debts accumulated while she was in the
White House, Lincoln traveled incognito from Chicago to New York
in an attempt to raise money by selling off her wardrobe. As part of
her fund-raising strategy, the former first lady wrote a series of letters
to a jewelry broker describing her poverty, which he then threatened to
publish (and ultimately did) in the newspapers. None of this succeeded in
selling the goods (or otherwise raising funds), but the circulation of
Mary Lincoln’s letters was central to the “Old Clothes Scandal” of 1867,
paralleling the unseemly exhibition of her personal belongings. In a final
twist to the scandal, Lincoln’s seamstress and confidante, the former
slave Elizabeth Keckley, printed several of Lincoln’s letters to her in a
memoir. Keckley propounded various defenses for her actions (which
carried her widespread condemnation in the press as well as the ire of her
friend), claiming among other things that she "excluded everything of a personal character from her letters" and excerpted only those portions that "refer to public men." But Keckley recognized at the same time that the value of the documents as evidence was that they "were not written for publication." Mary Lincoln's letters, Keckley pointed out, were "the frank overflowings of the heart, the outcropping of impulse, the key to genuine motives." Far from being public papers, these letters were distinctively private, and uniquely revealing. They would enable Keckley to defend Mrs. Lincoln in public by "lay[ing] her secret history bare." 30

Similar confidence in the sincerity and veracity of unguarded intimate correspondence underlay the publication of letters in the Beecher-Tilton scandal that captivated metropolitan readers in the mid-1870s. Theodore and Elizabeth Tilton had conducted and preserved an extraordinarily rich correspondence during the late 1860s, and many of these letters were introduced (by both sides) as evidence in court in 1875 during civil proceedings against Henry Ward Beecher for allegedly seducing Elizabeth and alienating her affections from her husband. During the previous year, however, Theodore Tilton had taken the unusual step of having the journalist George Alfred Townsend, his principal advocate in the press, publish 201 letters between the couple in the columns of the Chicago Daily Tribune. The correspondence was intended to vindicate Theodore Tilton's depiction of a happy marriage disrupted by a fiendish intervention and thereby to discredit the story that Elizabeth was then telling of an oppressive and unsatisfying relationship. Elizabeth Tilton's letters in particular provided "testimony," in Townsend's words, of her emotional state "before she had any occasion to submit such testimony to the manipulation of lawyers bent on crushing her husband for the sake of saving Mr. Beecher. 31 Decoupled from the question of Beecher's culpability, the Tilton letters were also a major literary sensation whose merits were debated throughout the nation. In the process, large numbers of readers digested what was essentially a collection of testimonials to the power of romantic correspondence. Letters, this remarkable act of publication seemed to suggest, were repositories of the secrets of the conjugal bedroom and the human heart. 32

The Jewett, Lincoln, and Tilton episodes confirmed what was popularly understood to be intimate about the mail, even as they raised the specter of the eventual publication of ostensibly private communication. Letters emerged in these news stories as material artifacts of private emotional life that might be used to violate the very privacy they registered. But the power of that violation depended, of course, on widespread belief that letters were sincere and confidential disclosures made in the insulated context of an intense emotional relationship. At a time when the post was becoming a broadly participatory network, the implications of this ideological assumption were considerable. Almost everyone, it might appear, from ministers to prostitutes, from ex-slaves to the wives of presidents, conducted these intense and intimate emotional relationships and left a paper trail of sincere confessions.

In reality, of course, postal relationships conformed rather imperfectly to the model of a sealed intimacy between two correspondents. Whether or not letters were published in the press, postal users encountered daily evidence that the status of personal mail was far more complex. Letters were frequently addressed to more than one person, and even when addressed to a single person, they were commonly shared. This might take the form of showing a letter prior to sealing it. The surviving correspondence of Helen Jewett reveals that she would occasion mail a letter to a more intimate third party, with the instruction that he read, seal, and reposit the letter to its putatively intended recipient. 33 More typically, however, the circulation of personal letters took place after the initial posting and with the presumed consent of all parties. Mary Paul, writing from Vermont to New Hampshire in 1851, explained her enclosure of a letter from one of her brothers in a way that nicely captures the circuits along which family correspondence might travel. "I received a letter from Henry last night inclosing yours from William," she opened, referring to two of her brothers. "He (Henry) said you wished me to send it back to you as you were going to send it to Julius," yet another brother. 34 Letter-writers often explicitly authorized and encouraged this practice in order to save time or postage. Overland migrant Louisa Cook made such a suggestion to her mother and sister in an 1862 letter from somewhere in Nebraska. "I do not have time to write to any one but you & if any of the friends wish to hear from me they can do so through you. If you go over to the Debolt neighborhood give my love to the friends there & if you like you can let them read my letters." 35 In other cases, writers might renounce confidentiality in order to avoid the impression that they had something to hide. "I am perfectly willing for you to show Mother my letters," Franklin Buck wrote from New York to his sister in Vermont. "I don't intend to do anything that I am ashamed to have her know." 36

Despite the rhetoric surrounding intimate correspondence, letters were often written for larger audiences. If a writer had journeyed to a distant location, his or her mail could serve as a travel guide or as a kind of sensational literature, and many letters from the West reflect this awareness. 37 Letters from European immigrants to their communities
of origin were especially likely to be circulated—partly because of high rates of international postage, which persisted well into the second half of the century and made writing separate letters to different friends and family members a costly proposition. Mail from new arrivals during the antebellum period also played a prominent role back home in collective discussions and deliberations about migration, and were often so clearly composed for communal consumption that historians have dubbed them “America Letters” and classified them as a species of public literature.38

Even under more ordinary circumstances, letters were typically displays of writing skill and performances of good taste. Frequent comments about spelling mistakes in the epistolary admonitions of parents and siblings, as discussed in chapter 1, reinforced this point. Adults were not exempt from such pedagogical direction, especially women. A San Franciscan writing to his sister in the East expressed, “strictly entre nous,” a wish that she might develop “a less careless habit of letter writing; for as a young lady, you may presently be called upon to write letters, which you would not like to contain errors.” While men might send “letters of a very indifferent appearance” (his own compositions, he admitted, were “monsters of deformity”), a young lady could ill afford such carelessness. “So pray read over your letters after they are written, and supply such words as you have left out.” In an 1861 letter to his wife Pamela, James Fergus commended her improvement: “This is the best you ever wrote me and contained the most interesting news,” he wrote, though her spelling and writing were found wanting. Dismayed by the errors, James instructed her on the proper way to compose correspondence. “Write your letter first out on your slate,” he directed, “rub out alter and correct until you think the spelling is all right, and [the letter] is as good—as you can get it. Then write it on paper with a pencil, correcting any further errors you may have, then copy it in ink, and your letters will certainly look better than they do now.” An intimate communication between a husband and a wife was still an occasion for care in one’s self-presentation.40

For some postal users, the imagined readership for personal letters extended to future generations. Theodore Tilton, after exclaiming to his wife that letters approximate and register a moment of physical contact (“there is something in the exchange of letters that ranks next to the greeting of palm to palm”), confessed a desire to save her letters, put them in an iron safe, and bequeath them to their children, in order to show future grandchildren “how much their grandfather and grandmothe:

loved one another in the olden time.” Earlier that month, Elizabeth had praised his letters as “a legacy to my children when I no longer live to preserve them.” Though the fate of the Tilton correspondence would take an uncommon twist, preserving letters was a common practice. Louisa Cook asked her correspondents to save her letters, “as I have written a great deal that I have not in my journal & when I come back I should like to have them to refer to.” In asking his wife to “preserve all my letters carfully on file,” James Fergus cited their value as business records (a useful reminder of the merging of letter types), but he saved all letters from her, whether or not they dealt with business matters.41 Merchants and clerks routinely kept copies of the letters they sent (late-eighteenth century innovators, including Thomas Jefferson, had even experimented with mechanical devices that created a duplicate copy of a letter), a practice taken up by postal users who were not in the business world. A business guide recommended that “not merely the merchant, but the farmer, mechanic, and even those engaged only in private affairs, should keep a copy of every business letter they write,” but some correspondents also copied letters to friends and family, either to send duplicates to others, or for some other purpose.42 Immigrant correspondence, for example, might be copied for circulation, a practice that compounded the self-consciousness of unpracticed postal users. An 1857 letter from a Norwegian immigrant asked that the recipients take advantage of the copying process to correct his mistakes. Another letter home to Norway assumed that letters were ordinarily copied for precisely such purposes—and perhaps also to censor inappropriate discussions of intimate life. “You do not have to copy this letter and make omissions,” he insisted. “[Let every] iota and let anyone see it as it is, for it is written by a soldier.43

Whether or not correspondents imagined the future utility or interest of their mail, they understood that their letters, once posted, lay beyond their control and often circulated outside the one-to-one relationship that the form of the sealed epistle seemed to imply. Some worried, understandably, about the fate of their letters. Abigail Malick, who moved to the Oregon Territory at mid-century and corresponded regularly with her daughter and son-in-law in Illinois, asked her daughter to avoid discussing a certain man in her letters as he “Always wants to see All the Letters that you write to me.” In 1859, James Stuart of Mississippi warned his sister to be careful in her letters home, as “Aunt Mary always takes the letters and reads them and at the table makes it a point to comment upon anything she pleases.” Edwin Horton, a soldier in the Union Army,
asked his wife not to show his letters to anyone and admonished her for having done so in the past.

I am real Sorry I rote such a lot of stuff in that letter since it has cause so much trouble but a better way is Nell not to show any of my letters I dont never show any of yours I always burn them up as soon as I read them I dont burn them because I am ashamed to keep or read them to others but I burn them because I dont think it is a good plan to keep a lot of old letters for others to read and chuckle about as soon as a mans back is turned.44

Requests to burn or burn letters became common during this period, though they were not always fulfilled. In an 1848 issue, a postal user from Boston instructed his aunt in Vermont to “tear this letter up... You never tore up my letters last summer when I was up as you promised did you.” Junius Newport Bragg, an Arkansas physician in the Confederate Army, refused his wife’s request that he destroy her letters, claiming he could not do such a thing to things she had written—“unless they were inevitably to be made public.” The threat of inevitable publicity haunted many who wrote personal correspondence. An etiquette guide from 1859 expressed a bizarre anxiety about letter-writing, counseling women against writing to men they did not know well, lest their intimate correspondent “show the superscription or the signature, or both to his idle companions and make insinuations much to her disadvantage, which his comrades will be sure to circulate and exaggerate.” The same guide also noted the practice of certain women with insatiable epistolary appetites who “ inveigle” gentlemen into correspondence and then profit by “ selling the letters for publication.”45

All of these practices and prescriptions reflected and confirmed a heightened awareness of the limits of epistolary privacy. Still, the seal on a letter or (increasingly after 1860) on the envelopes in which they were sent remained sacrosanct in the eyes of many Americans. The wise adult character in Mrs. John Farrar’s didactic The Youth’s Letter-Writer (1834) refuses to open a letter addressed to his son, reaffirming an older view of the sealed letter as “a sacred thing” and added that he “consider[ed] it very improper for one to break a seal belonging to another, or to read a letter without leave to do so, after the seal is broken.”46 In this strict view, the violation of the privacy of both the author and addressee of posted correspondence was an act of “trespass... which no intimacy can justify.” In common practice, however, people often invoked intimacy as a defense for breaching the walls of the private letter. Parents frequently regarded their children’s letters as properly subject to surveillance. In 1849, newspaper publisher Richard Cary Morse rationalized opening letters addressed to his daughter in the following terms: “I recognize the sacredness of a seal & the seal of [my daughter’s] letters no less than others... But I take it for granted that she has all confidence in me, & that her secrets...are safe in her father’s keeping. Yet children can never know the interest their parents take in them. We regard our children as part of ourselves.” This was hardly a unique or original line of defense: in 1798 another parent had explained, under similar circumstances, that “no one has a better right to know my children’s secrets nor more ardently wishes their happiness.” But it became a bolder claim after 1845, when more young people had frequent and independent access to the post.

Parents were especially vigilant in monitoring the epistolary practices of their daughters. The famous diary of Mary Chesnut records an incident in which the author was shown a letter “from a girl crossed in love” by parents who objected to the match (Chesnut cites orthographic errors in the letter and says that “for such a speller... a man of any social status would do”).49 Mary Akin informed her husband, a Confederate Congressman, that a young man had written to eighteen-year-old Eliza, his daughter and her stepdaughter, and that Eliza had asked for permission and advice. “[A]s it was John,” Mary reported, “I told her to write to him if she chose to do so that it was a correspondence she could drop whenever she thought proper, and she has written to him.”50

In consulting her stepmother, Eliza was respecting a powerful social norm. An 1837 guide to women’s conduct recognized the value of honoring a request to maintain a confidential correspondence, but insisted that a young woman “make an exception in favor of [her] mother... for young ladies under age should gracefully acknowledge their parents’ right of inspection.” In 1873, the “Young Woman’s Column” in the North Carolina Presbyterian took a harder line, decreeing that “a girl under nineteen or twenty should never be allowed” to correspond with a young man, “and certainly never without the inspection of her mother or some very much older friend.” The taboo against unsupervised correspondence by young women (a central theme in conduct guides and epistolary novels during the previous century) reinforced the notion that letters constructed intimate (and potentially transgressive) connections insulated from social scrutiny.52 Armed with such cultural ammunition, husbands would sometimes make claims against the privacy of their wives’ mail, a point raised in an earlier chapter. Caroline Loomis Edwards expressed her relief in 1841 that her brother’s wife was “not like some ladies of my
acquaintance who refuse to let their husbands see their letters and throw an air of mystery over their actions."

Discussions of the possibilities and perils of private correspondence in the new postal culture continually highlighted the distinctive letter-writing habits of women. "Ladies' epistolary" was even the name of a standard mid-century penmanship style. Many critics and commentators saw correspondence as a peculiarly feminine craft. "Letter-writing, particularly the lighter kinds," wrote Lucy Fountain in *Putnam's Magazine* shortly after the Civil War, "needs a delicacy and brilliancy of touch particularly feminine." An 1860 letter-writing guide "for the use of ladies" acknowledged that "our sex have been complimented as the possessors of a natural taste for epistolary composition." Other observers were more contemptuous of female correspondence, mocking their propensity to indulge in lengthy and numerous postscripts or the feminine impulse "to indite beautiful little notes, with long-tailed letters, upon vellum paper with pink margins sealed with sweet mottoes, and dainty devices, the whole deliciously perfumed with musk and attar of roses." Both critics and advocates affirmed a kind of two-sex model of letter writing, distinguishing male and female correspondence in clear terms. Letter-writing manuals often targeted one sex or the other, elaborating different styles and presuming different motivations for writing letters. Even modern historians, most notably Marilyn Ferris Motz, distinguish masculine and feminine epistolary modes during the nineteenth century. The important point, however, is not whether women and men wrote (or received) a fundamentally different kind of mail (an unlikely and oversimplifying hypothesis for which we lack sufficient evidence), but that the association between gender and particular modes of correspondence was quite popular at mid-century. Such gender stereotypes appear frequently in the writings of ordinary postal users, especially in the letters of men. Fred Worth, a nineteen year-old clerk living in San Francisco, apologized to his grandmother for the brevity of his 1859 letter. "If I had the favor of stretching out a letter, as some ladies have," Worth explained, "I might make this medley of a letter about twenty five pages in length, but not having that facility I must bring this letter to an abrupt termination, by filling the remainder with love." Claims about the epistolary practices of men and women, many of which were fairly old clichés by the time of the postal revolution, served some new and interesting cultural functions at mid-century. A popular discourse about gender and letter writing helped Americans map out boundaries between business and personal correspondence in everyday life and between the public and the private in the world of the post.

The personal letters that passed through the mails in unprecedented numbers during the middle of the nineteenth century were artifacts of a postal culture and not just expressions of individual needs and circumstances. Paradoxically, the collective insistence by published commentators that a letter is (or ought to be) a spontaneous effusion of sincere feeling from one person to another accomplished much of the cultural work that went into producing the modern personal letter. At least as important, however, were the letters themselves, which elaborated, reinforced, and circulated the principal themes of the ideology of epistolary intimacy.

Mid-century correspondents were as relentless as published guides in defining letters as a kind of intimate conversation. Lucy Smith of Michigan asked her mother in 1843 to reciprocate with "a real long letter just exactly as you would talk." At the close of an especially descriptive and rambling 1836 letter, Abigail Malick reflected "Dont I write guest As if you ware here And I was A talking to you." Confederate Congressman Warren Akin offered a related apology for a long letter to a friend in 1864: "Pardon my many words. When I commence writing to you I feel like I'm talking to you, and I hurry on without stopping to think much." Others cited the familiar analogy between letters and conversation to excuse informality rather than length. As Lethe Jackson, an enslaved woman living in Virginia, explained in an 1838 letter to her master's daughter, "I hope I have not made too free in any thing I said—I wanted to write as if I was talking to you." More often, letter-writers simply incorporated the analogy in their descriptions of the act of composition. A recent arrival in San Francisco in 1850, John McCracken introduced a letter to his sister Lotte in these terms: "I am seated... at the close of a very busy day, having just finished 'a glorious good dinner' to have a quiet chat, so now give me your hand and we will commence at once." Another forty-niner, Samuel Adams of Maine, explained to his absent wife, "[I] must talk a few minutes with my loving partner before retiring for the night." Mary Wingate wrote to her husband Benjamin that "the family have all retired and now I will finish my letter for I like to be alone when I talk with you." Warren Akin made the point more explicitly and provocatively. "Are you not mistaken when you sometimes say I dont talk to you?" he teasingly asked his wife. "I'm sure I have held sweet converse with you every day this week, to a considerable extent. And, indeed, it is a sweet converse, darling to sit down and thus speak to my dear wife."

By repeating the traditional trope of correspondence as conversation, ordinary letter-writers indulged and encouraged a fantasy about the bodily presence of distant persons. Built into this fantasy, however, was some
recognition of the frustrating gap that letters could never quite close. "It is with pleasure that I seat myself to converse with you a few moments today," Sabrina Swain began a letter to her husband in California, only to add "would that it were verbally." As a young law student, Charles Jones acknowledged that although he looked forward to the "regular receipt" of mail from home with "zealous anticipation," letters were still "not equal to positive conversation"—they were inferior to the bodily contact they evoked. [5] "These lines, traced although they be by your hand," he confided to his mother, "is not equivalent to beholding the form that dictated them." Captain Jacob Ritner's letter to his wife Emeline during the Civil War betrays a similar awareness of the way conversational letters stood for both presence and absence: 

Well, dear, it is late Sunday night and if you are not too tired and sleepy and will sit on my knee and listen, I will try to tell you what we have been about since I last wrote. I have a "bushel" of news to tell, but can't tell it all tonight, if I have to write it down. I wish I could sit down and talk to you till midnight, don't you! But I am very thankful that I have the privilege of writing to you—it is more than I expected sometimes through the week.

While the letter opens as an oral exchange embedded in an intimate physical encounter, the medium of writing winds up imposing time limits on what can be said, disrupting the analogy. Franklin Buck acknowledged a similar problem in one of his early letters to his sister after leaving Vermont. "It is hard work for me to write my thoughts," he admitted. "If I was with you I could talk more in five minutes than I can write on two sheets of paper." But in Jacob Ritner's case the fantasy of being able to "sit down and talk to you till midnight" reads less as a wish for more time than as a wish for more bodily contact. If only the image of correspondence as laptalk were real, he seems to suggest.

For Ritner, as for many mid-century correspondents, the conventional description of the personal letter as surrogate speech gave way to a complex fantasy that the mail might simulate bodily presence more generally. Perhaps encouraged both by the increasing speed and frequency of the mails and by the spread of the telegraph, letter-writers frequently imagined being brought into some sort of instantaneous communion with the people they addressed. "I wish you could be taken up bodily," journalist Joseph Lyman wrote from New York to his wife in Massachusetts, "and set down here with me a day and a night." Such erotic fantasies were fairly common in nineteenth-century letters, but the thought of being physically transported along with the mail went beyond the familiar expression of sexual desire; it called attention to both the possibilities and limitations of the personal letter as a bearer of physical presence. On a steamer bound for California in 1849, John Ingalls articulated a standard version of this observation to his foster brother. "I wish I had the power to bring you on board the ship Pacific by an effort of the will," he wrote in his letter. Warren Akin offered a slight variation in a letter to his wife. "If I could move with the speed of thought I would now be sitting by the fire with you and my dear children this cold night." Mollie Dorsey, who moved west with her family at the age of eighteen from Indianapolis in 1857, described in her diary three years later how one day, disconsolate at not receiving letters from home, she stared out eastward across the Colorado plains. "I wished myself a fairy or spirit," she recorded, "that I might fly away to the old home and see them all once more, and soon I transferred my longing to paper." Fantasies of simultaneity and instant travel reflected and reinforced heightened expectations of contact in a society transformed by increased use of the post. But they were also gestures by which ordinary postal users ratified the claim of the mailed letter to be an intimate act of interpersonal communication.

Everyday acts of correspondence were crucial to the cultural construction of the personal letter, and not simply because letters frequently affirmed the ideology of epistolary intimacy. Ordinary letters shaped popular understanding of interpersonal correspondence even when they did not articulate explicit views on the value of letter-writing. Every use of the post, of course, informed both the sender's and the recipient's sense of what it meant to correspond by mail, and the range of circumstances, exigencies, desires, anxieties, obligations, and pieties reflected or expressed in the daily mail was, as commentators were fond of emphasizing, unimaginably diverse. Yet much of what appeared in personal letters during the mid-nineteenth century (and no doubt subsequently) was highly formulaic. This was, in fact, one of the most important senses in which ostensibly private correspondence was conspicuously public. Broadly shared conventions of salutation, address, and expression forged a powerful link between the individual letter and a larger epistolary discourse. Letter-writing formulas and clichés were largely matters of propriety and habit. They provided reassurances that an author was qualified and experienced in the practice of correspondence, and thus they could be useful in enabling, excusing, or even disclaiming whatever intimacy might follow. Formulas, in other words, explicitly framed the intimacy of a personal letter as a particular instance of a popular practice subject to norms and conventions.
It would be an enormous task to catalogue the innumerable formulaic expressions that recur throughout the archive of mid-century correspondence, but many of them rehearse a few basic themes. As literary historian William Merrill Decker has demonstrated, popular letters in nineteenth-century America repeated a series of tropes about separation, absence, and death with which correspondents had been preoccupied for centuries. Standard assurances that the author is still "in the land of the living" or stock expressions of pious confidence that the parties might be reunited in some better future were not simply clichés, as Decker observes. Such formulas affirm, albeit in unoriginal and unself-conscious ways, the "transcendental principle of enduring presence" that underwrites epistolary intimacy, enabling correspondents to make sense of long-distance relationships. Another cluster of formulas relate to reciprocity, including typical opening lines that mark and date the arrival of an incoming letter ("Yours of the 9 inst came to hand last evening"); "I received your welcome letter yesterday evening"; "Your very affectionate letter of the 24th came to hand today"; "Your very kind and interesting favor of the 30th ult. was this moment received" or bemoan the addressee's failure to write ("To-day's mail in and no letter for me. I can't tell you how much I am disappointed; I am satisfied now that I shall get no letters from you by this mail").

Perhaps the most common opening in mid-century correspondence spun some variation on the following formula, adopted in this example by the Midwesterner Samuel Tripp. "Dear father and mother," he began in 1849 letter. "I now take my pen to write you a few lines to inform you that I am well at present sincerely hoping that these few lines will find you all enjoying the same blessing." Tripp started other letters to other correspondents almost identically ("Dear sir. I again take my pen to write you a few lines to let you know that I am well at present and enjoying good health and I sincerely hope [illegible smudge] enjoying the same good blessing") and read similar openings in the mail he received ("Dear sir I now take my pin in hand to let you no that I am well and I hope that these few lines may find you the same"). This formula obviously reflected an anxiety about health, but to read the astonishing recurrence of this greeting simply as a reflection of the fragility of life in nineteenth-century America would be to miss a major point. Ordinary correspondents resorted to formulaic expressions precisely because of their status as gestures whose semantic content was dulled by familiarity.

Personal letters began with references to taking "pen in hand," inscribing "these few lines," or having "an opportunity," not because such locutions necessarily captured the goals and values of correspondence, but because they marked a piece of writing as properly epistolary—in defiance of the edict that letters mimic ordinary conversation. The ubiquitous invocation of the "opportunity" to write, which was typically "embraced" or, slightly less frequently, "improved" (both expressions mean to capitalize upon), was a relic of an earlier era when letter-writing occasions were typically created by the fortuitous availability of a personal courier. It may not be coincidental that the words embrace and improve, which emphasized two different sets of values central to correspondence (interpersonal intimacy and literate upward mobility), loomed so large in the formulaic opening (on occasion the recipient might replace the opportunity as the direct object of the intended embrace), but surely for most users those terms had lost much of their edge.

The sheer volume of personal letter-writing during the early years of cheap postage makes generalizations hazardous, but formulaic expressions at the start of personal letters appear to have been particularly common among postal users for whom written correspondence was most unfamiliar. Enslaved African-Americans, recent immigrants from Europe, female mill workers just off the farm, Civil War soldiers from small towns, and rural migrants heading westward relied most frequently upon standard announcements about taking pens in hand, embracing opportunities, writing a few lines, and hoping the reader is enjoying the same blessing of good health.

The division between correspondents who resorted to these formulas and those who did not was not always predictable, however. Even within the same family, approaches to the epistolary formula could vary. David Lee Campbell and his brother James were born in 1824 and 1826 in Kentucky and moved to Adams County, Illinois, with their parents in 1831. They attended the same district public school in Brown County, both married (within three weeks of each other) in 1849, emigrated in tandem to California in 1850, and returned from there together two years later. Yet despite their shared background and experiences, the brothers' letters home to Illinois (first from the overland trail and then from California) reveal a striking difference. James, the younger brother, begins a typical letter to his wife with the conventional explanation that he has "taken another opportunity to inform you that I am well and in good spirits and hoping that you and John Sidney are enjoying the same blessing." Four months later, this time from California, James's letter to his wife's parents strikes the same pose: "I take this opportunity to inform you that I am well and hope these lines will find you all enjoying
the same blessing." Almost a year later he addressed his father in terms almost identical (save for the spelling): “I take this opportunity to wright a few lines to let you know that David and myself are well and hope you are all enjoying the same blessing.”

But while older brother David may have been enjoying that same blessing, he did not typically adopt the same formulas to say as much. “Dear Father, James & myself are in good health,” he begins abruptly in a letter to his father from Scott’s Bluffs. Other letters open similarly, announcing simply “We are well,” or “Brother James and & [sic] myself have finally arrived in California.” Once in California his letters occasionally refer to “tak[ing] an opportunity to inform you that I am well,” and one surviving letter to his father even indulges in James’s formulaic expression of hope about the shared blessing of good health, but this is a notable deviation from his ordinary pattern. In almost all cases David’s correspondence begins with either a direct report of his condition or the confirmation of receipt of mail.

James Campbell’s consistent and energetic preference for conventional openings may have reflected any of a number of influences and considerations, but as personal correspondence proliferated during the middle decades of the century, his practice ran the risk of being read as a sign of epistolary inexperience. The New Orleans Picayune mocked the inappropriate use of standard formulas by unsophisticated letter writers in an 1841 item purporting to be an actual “Western Love Letter” penned by one “Kathrun An Tilden.” Replete with misspellings and encumbered by several postscripts (a habit associated derisively with women’s correspondence) and bits of doggerel, the letter opens as follows: “My Dear Henry—I embrace this opporuncity to let you knough as I am had a spell of the aigur. And I hope theeas few lines may find you enjoying the same God’s Blessin!” Frank J. Webb’s novel The Garies and Their Friends (1857) uses the same joke to mark the dividing line of literary sophistication separating different strata of African American society in antebellum Philadelphia. Webb juxtaposes two letters addressed to young Charlie Ellis informing him that his home has been destroyed and his father injured by mob violence. Along with a proper, forthright epistle from his sister Esther, Charlie encounters the awkward, rambling, and orthographically irregular composition of his friend Kinch Sanders de Younge. Kinch, the son of an illiterate clothing dealer and a poor student, had been struggling for some time to produce the letter. “DEER SIR and HONNORED FRIEND,” it began. “I take This chance To Write To you To tell You that I am Well, And that we are all well Except Your father, who Is sick; and I hope you are Enjoying the same Blessin.”

Even less comically inappropriate applications of the formulaic expression came in for criticism. An 1863 piece of serialized fiction in the Southern Illustrated News disparaged the embraced opportunity as a “trite and apologetic expression.” Earlier in the period, Mrs. John Farrar had advanced a far broader indictment. In Farrar’s popular epistolary guide for young readers, Anna, the most authoritative and accomplished of the book’s adolescent characters, makes the point that good letter-writers have no need for “any set phrase for a beginning.” Later in the story, a younger farmhand seeks Anna’s advice as he struggles to compose a letter, which he has begun with the familiar “This comes to inform you that I am well, and hope you are the same.” Anna explains that such an opening is unnecessary. “Every letter, she said, ‘comes to inform one of something; and therefore it is unnecessary to say that it does; and unless you have been ill, and there is great anxiety about your health, there is too much egotism in making that your first topic.” An 1852 article similarly criticized the appearance of stock phrases in business letters:

It is to be presumed that you do not write without a quill pen, or a metallic substitute, and there is therefore no particular necessity for informing your correspondent that “you take your pen in hand.” Nobody, except the remarkable personage without arms who was exhibited a few years since, takes the pen between the toes. Neither need you tell your friend that your letter “comes hoping,” It may leave you ‘hoping;’ but that any emotion of hope or despair can be predicated of a sheet of paper is hardly to be asserted.

By the time of the Civil War, formulaic openings may also have begun to seem old-fashioned, as teenager Mary Trussell implied in an 1860 letter to her foster sister, Delia Page. Trussell mocked the salutatory “I now take my pen in hand to let you know I am well, and hope you are the same,” as the standard fare of “old times,” though she conceded that “a good many” letters still adopted the deplorable practice. Formulaic expressions were recognizable icons of personal correspondence, but many letter writers took pride in avoiding them.

How James and David Lee Campbell, or anyone else for that matter, acquired the literary habits that framed their personal letters is of course difficult to surmise. Published letter-writing guides were enormously popular throughout the nineteenth century, but they probably played no major role in training readers in the use of formulaic salutations or openings. Though one 1839 guide published in New York offers two examples of letters that begin by marking “the opportunity of writing these few lines to you,” and expressing hope “that you are in as good
health as I am at present” (significantly, one of the letters is attributed to an apprentice), the overwhelming majority of model letters in epistolary manuals avoid such formulas.

More important, it is unlikely that many correspondents relied upon letter-writing guides for basic instruction. The appeal of these texts probably owed more to their status as conduct guides or as a kind of epistolary fiction. A remarkable number of the featured letters in antebellum epistolary manuals affirm norms of behavior among young men and women and describe the same sorts of familial conflicts and heterosocial dangers that dominate the popular epistolary novels influenced by Samuel Richardson. Richardson’s own venture into the genre of letter-writing guide, Familiar Letters on Important Occasions (1741), left a heavy stamp on American manuals more than a century after its initial publication. An 1853 Complete Letter Writer published in San Francisco, for example, recycled many of Richardson’s letters without citation, entertaining readers with virtually identical versions of the master’s “From an Uncle to his Nephew, an apprentice, on his keeping bad company, bad Hours, &c” or “From a Daughter to her Father, pleading for her Sister, who had married without her consent”—along with the father’s reply. There is little reason to assume that readers of The Fashionable American Letter Writer or The Ladies’ and Gentlemen’s Letter-writer were any more eager for (or susceptible to) practical letter-writing advice than were the consumers of Pamela or Clarissa.

Composition books used in schools were probably more influential than letter-writing guides in shaping the epistolary practices of ordinary people, and some of them may have contributed to the popularization of stock expressions and formulaic gestures. As Lucille M. Schultz has observed, composition textbooks taught by formal precept rather than by anecdotal model, and were probably more widely read (though fewer different titles have survived). And unlike epistolary manuals, composition books prescribed compulsory, mimetic exercises. At least one antebellum composition text instructed students in the use of formulaic openings to personal correspondence. The first skeletal model for a letter in Charles Morley’s 1839 A Practical Guide to Composition prefaced a letter to a sister with the familiar “I take this opportunity to write you a few lines.” Subsequent sentences were governed by guidelines rather than prescribed text. The first substantive line ought to “mention the state of your health, and that of your friends,” while the next should speak of progress in school. Additional letter models, one to a friend in Europe and another to a brother, open similarly with formulaic introductions before launching into news.

Undoubtedly, the most powerful influences on ordinary letter-writing habits came in the form of personal correspondence itself. As performances of proper penmanship and respectable character, personal letters were central exhibits in the larger didactic projects to which epistolary guides and composition textbooks contributed. Letters, as several scholars have demonstrated, were important sites for the elaboration and circulation of antebellum cultural norms, especially those of gender and class. But correspondents also exchanged something more specific about the construction of letters themselves. The personal, handwritten missive was not simply an instrument of cultural pedagogy; it was also, in some interesting ways, a pedagogical goal in and of itself. In admonishing their correspondents to write more frequently, more neatly, or more expressively, parents, siblings, and friends were not only encouraging the cultivation and display of skills and qualities that could be usefully deployed elsewhere. They were teaching and modeling the art of the personal letter at a time when postal correspondence was becoming both financially affordable and socially indispensable.

Americans during the middle decades of the century taught one another how to compose letters and how to recognize letters as gestures of self-expression. That they emphasized themes and images that had been, in many cases, familiar topeoi of epistolary discourse in previous centuries camouflages the novelty of this development. Codes of intimacy, reciprocity, and self-presentation that organized (and in some respects standardized) mid-century correspondence may have rehearsed older ideas about presence and absence, speech and writing, or words and flesh. But once those codes entered the everyday experience of large numbers of Americans who expected to maintain some of their most important relationships through the post, the stakes were much higher. The structural conditions of epistolary practice were now the structuring facts of everyday sociability.

The novelty of the personal letter as a model of intimacy in the antebellum period is easy to overlook. Though posted letters had in ancient and medieval times been paradigmatically public artifacts, in the early modern period new and ideologically charged associations emerged between the handwritten letter and privacy in its two fundamental senses: solitude and intimacy. Furthermore, letter-writing became central to the project of self-fashioning and self-improvement in the United States well before the arrival of cheap postage, but especially in the early national era, as aspirations and access to gentility spread among middling Americans. But as this process spilled beyond the borders of self-conscious pedagogical interventions and extended to a broader range of
the population, something different was emerging. Instead of simply teaching epistolary self-presentation as a mark of refinement or a badge of respectability, Americans valued and practiced epistolary intimacy as a basic mode of social and familial interaction. By the 1870s most Americans recognized the personal letter as a vehicle for everyday expressions of intimacy and everyday performances of the individual self.

—FIVE—

PRECIOUS AS GOLD
MOBILITY AND FAMILY IN THE GOLD RUSH AND CIVIL WAR

When Charles Stanton left Chicago in 1846, his brother Philip in Brooklyn received the news enthusiastically. After ten years in the fledgling Illinois city, the trip westward marked, at least from the perspective of an older sibling, a reawakening of Charles’s dormant ambitions. Recalling the events two years later under the pall of his brother’s tragic odyssey, Philip noted that he had learned of Charles’s plans only upon receiving a letter posted from St. Louis, followed “almost on [its] heels” by one from Independence, Missouri—a jumping-off point for the Overland Trail. From his home in Brooklyn, Philip proceeded to track his brother’s progress across the plains. “From the time my brother left Independence,” Philip remembered, “I had a map lying before me on my table, and whenever I received a letter from him, I would trace out his course on the map, and his letters being in full detail, I was enabled to travel along with him.” Separated by most of a continent from a brother traveling through unfamiliar territory, Philip followed along, reassured by the way the postmarks and datelines of arriving letters conformed predictably to the map of the aggressively expanding United States. Even as he crossed the Rocky Mountains (through territory not yet taken during the war that had officially begun a few months earlier), Charles corresponded frequently, incorporating his brother vicariously into the trek. “So much attention did I pay to this,” Philip wrote, “that the whole route became perfectly familiar to me.” Only when the letters stopped did Philip begin to lose his confident grip on Charles’s progress. Though he took some comfort from a warning in Charles’s last letter that a projected trip through the Bear River Valley might cause an interruption in communication, Philip grew “extremely anxious” for a report. Most of a year passed before a news item in the New York Tribune informed him of the grisly fate of Charles Stanton and the other members of the infamous Donner Party.1

As letter-writing became more common, and mail service more regular and extensive, the post allowed people to track mobile friends and
abundant in London. “The Londoner more than thinks of sending to the Post-office for his letters, than the New Yorker thinks of sending to the printing-office for his newspaper.”

63. Congressional Globe, 35th Congress, 2nd Session, 162.


66. Bruns, Great American Post Offices, 18. The documentary basis for this interpretation is not identified. Richard R. John characterizes home delivery, along with the introduction of outdoor mailboxes, as the logical culmination of efforts to improve women’s access to the post (John, Spreading the News, 164–67).


CHAPTER FOUR


2. Benjamin Wingate to Charles, March 1, 1854, Wingate Correspondence, Bancroft MSS 83/95c, BANC.


8. On the relationship of nonmanual labor to middle-class identity, see Stuart M. Blumin, The Emergence of the Middle Class (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989); and Augst, Clerk’s Tale.

9. Lewis G. Welsh, A Practical Guide to Business; Being a Handbook for the American Farmer, Merchant, Mechanic, Investor, and all Concerned in Earning or Saving Money (Philadelphia; PA: J. G. Fergus, 1872), 34. Welsh observes that writing qualities “are rightly considered to indicate the general tenor of the mind and habits.” For a larger discussion of the cultural meanings attached to handwriting, see Thornton, Handwriting in America.

10. Alger, Ragged Dick and Struggling Upward, 124–35.
a good letter. It is written just as you talk." The locus classicus of this trope in American literature appears in J. Hector St. John de Crèvecoeur, Letters from an American Farmer (1782; repr., New York: E.P. Dutton, 1957). The difference between this text and Alger's is telling, however. Crèvecoeur's farmer uses the analogy between corresponding and conversation to legitimate an act of vernacular publication. Reluctant to pick up a pen and write into polite discourse ("to pretend to send epistles to a great European man," in the words of his skeptical wife), the farmer is encouraged by his aristocratic correspondent's insistence that "writing letters is nothing more than talking on paper," a proposition that strikes the farmer at first as "quite a new thought." Faith in this new thought emboldens the farmer and underwrites a declaration of authorial legitimacy that is central to this foundational text in American literature. A century later, what is enabled is not the participation of hard-working, literate American farmers in the public sphere of letters but the admission of ordinary young men into the daily rituals of middle-class literate receptability.


32. Fox, Trials of Intimacy, especially 33-89, 231-54. Tilton charged at one point that he had seen "from one of [Beecher's] sisters a private letter" proving that Beecher's marriage was unhappy and loveless (60). In a similar but less famous scandal, spiritual medium Margaret Fox published her romantic correspondence with the late Arctic explorer Elisha Kane in 1865 after Kane's brother withheld a bequest to her. See David Chapin, Exploring Other Worlds: Margaret Fox, Elisha Kent Kane, and the Culture of Curiosity (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2005). For two other mid-century controversies over published correspondence, both of which were more public, see Shariat, Inexplicable Privacy, 159-60. In the later case, James W. Wayley v. Owen B. Judd (1854), the New York State Court of Appeals cited the exclusive property right of letter-writers to the contents of their correspondence in order to prevent the publication of letters that were designed to "remain forever inviolable secrets."

33. Cohen, Murder of Helen Jewett, 128.

34. Dublin, ed., Farm to Factory, 132-34.


36. Buck, Yankee Trader in the Gold Rush, 13. This letter was written before Buck sailed to California.

37. Even enthusiastic devotees of the cult of epistolary privacy recognized that letters from settlers to their communities of origin were occasions for public reading. An 1831
article in the Ladies' Magazine and Literary Gazette, after commenting on the power and sincerity of "private letters, . . . those quiet rills of affection from domestic springs, gliding so calmly on in the deepest shades of retired life," touts the role of migrants' mail and imagines a community at the other end of the correspondence: "Let a single member of a New England family settle at the South or West, and how soon will the State to which the wanderer has gone become familiar to his friends at home! How eagerly they can every scrap of intelligence his letters impart, and how solicitous they feel for the prosperity of the place where he, still their own, has fixed his abode." See "Letter Writing: in Its Effects on National Character," Ladies' Magazine and Literary Gazette, June, 1831, 341-42.

38. The classic contribution to the study of this genre of immigrant letters came from Theodore C. Blegen. See David A. Gerber, "The Immigrant Letter between Positivism and Populism: The Uses of Immigrant Personal Correspondence in Twentieth-Century American Scholarship," Journal of American Ethnic History 16, no. 4 (1997): esp. 3-6; Overland, "Immigrant Letters," 212-15. Elsewhere, Gerber draws a clear distinction between the personal correspondence of European immigrants to the United States in the nineteenth century and those letters studied by Blegen, but the line between intimate letters and those designed for communal readership is difficult to identify. Most postmortem correspondence between immigrants and home communities straddles the divide, containing expressions of intimacy and details of personal life while betraying an awareness that letters from America might be read by potential enemies who were not explicitly addressed. See, for example, the letters of Norwegian immigrant Gro Svendsen to her parents, which Blegen classifies as "America letters" despite their inclusion of intimate details about the family, in Blegen and Farneth, eds., Frontier. See also David A. Gerber, "Epistolary Ethics: Personal Correspondence and the Culture of Emigration in the Nineteenth Century," Journal of American Ethnic History 19, no. 4 (2000), 10.

39. Unknown author to sister Mary, September 14, 1854, San Francisco, Bancroft Letters, box 2, BANC.

40. Peavy and Smith, Gold Rush Widows, 92-93.

41. Theodore Tilton to Elizabeth, January 30, 1867; Elizabeth to Theodore, January 9, 1867, both in "The Tilton Letters," Chicago Daily Tribune, August 13, 1874; Louisa Cook to Mother and Sisters, June 20, 1861, in Holmes, Covered Wagon Women, 8: 38. Fergus is quoted and discussed in Peavy and Smith, Gold Rush Widows, 39, 247. As the next chapter discusses, injunctions to save the letters during Civil War were especially common.


43. Overland, "Immigrant Letters," 212.

44. Schissel, Gibbens, and Hampstein, Far From Home, 34; Michael O'Brien, ed., An Evening When Alone: Four Journals of Single Women in the South, 1827-1867 (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1995), 33; Silber and Stevens, eds., Yankee Correspondence, 152; For another example, see Mortz, True Sisterhood, 39.

45. Richard D. Brown notes that references to letter-burning "were almost so common as to be a typical ritual" (Brown, Knowledge Is Power, 180); "George" to Mrs. Mary A. Hindee, Pittsford Vermont, February 7, 1848, author's private collection; Goughan, Letters of a Confederate Surgeon, 146. For other examples, see Dublin, ed., Farm to Factory, 42-47; Breckenridge, Lucy Breckenridge of Grove Hill, 123; Cohen, Murder of Helen Jessee, 121. For an excellent discussion of the relationship between private letters and publication, especially among the literary figures of the American Renaissance, see Decker, Epistolary Practices, 18-56.


47. Farrar, Youth's Letter-Writer, 103-4.

48. Morse quoted in Gay, Naked Heart, 310-21.


50. Woodward, ed., Mary Chesnut's Civil War, 166 (entry for August 27, 1861). For another example of a parent infringing upon the privacy of his daughter's mail, see Breckenridge, Lucy Breckenridge of Grove Hill, 96.

51. Wiley, ed., Letters of Warren Akin, Confederate Congressman, 190. For another example, of struggles between mothers and daughters over correspondence, see the January 14, 1860, diary entry of twenty-two-year-old Emily Hawley, who was then living at her parents' home in rural Michigan: "Mother does not approve of letters from strangers," Hawley noted upon the arrival of a letter from a man. "[F]or another stranger is as good as some acquaintances," she added. See Lensink, ed., Diary and Life of Emily Hawley Gillespie, 27. In an 1835 Alice Cary story, a young girl makes a point of promising a boy that she will correspond with him without telling her parents; see "The Boys and the Men," Ladies' Repository 15 (August, 1835), 484.

52. The Young Lady's Friend (Boston, 1837), 281; North Carolina paper quoted in Louis R. Wilson, ed., Selected Papers of Cornelius Phillips Spencer (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1935), 382. See also Barbara Maria Zaczeck, Censored Sentiments: Letters and Censorship in Epistolary Novels and Conduct Material (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 1997); Mary A. Favret, Romantic Correspondence: Women, Politics and the Fiction of Letters (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993); Hornbeck, Complete Letter-Writer in English. Women's correspondence, like women's reading more generally, had been stigmatized within Anglo-American art and literature for some time as a practice of absorption into sexual fantasy and stealthy abdication of familial or conjugal duties. The letter-writer withdraws from public view into secret relationships that leave but a faint trace. Donald G. Mitchell's narrator in his popular mid-century fiction Reveries of a Bachelor, imagining a less-than-devoted wife, reinforces this association: "She is not slutish," he muses "unless a neglect till three o'clock, and an ink stain on the forefinger be slutish" (27). Hidden excesses of the pen, indulged within the secluded spaces of the middle-class bedroom, connote multiple intimacy and promiscuous sociability.

53. Caroline Loonis Edwards to her brother Elias, January 25, 1840, quoted in Pankratz, "New Englanders," 286. See longer discussion of husbands' access to their wives' letters in the previous chapter.

54. On the Ladies Epistolary, see Thornton, Handwriting in America, 56-59; Fountain, "Letter-Writing," 216; A New Letter-Writer, for the Use of Ladies (Philadelphia, PA: n.p., ca. 1860), excerpted in Decker, Epistolary Practices, 98; "Thoughts on Letter-writing," reprinted in John Pierpont, The American First Class Book; or, Exercises in Reading and Recitation (Boston: Carter, Hendee, 1832), 241; Tuckerman, "Letter-Writing and Madame de Sevigne." One letter-writing manual published originally in 1834 but reprinted through the antebellum era noted that "ladies have been accused, probably with some reason, of reserving the most important part of a letter for the postscript," a practice derided as "needless, and in bad taste" (New Universal Letter-Writer, 11). For a parody of the excessive use of postscripts in women's letters, see for example "A Western Love Letter," in the New Orleans Picayune, April 19, 1841.

55. Mortz, True Sisterhood, 53-81. Carroll Smith-Rosenberg's landmark article on friendships between women in the nineteenth century implies some similar claims about their distinctive brand of epistolary intimacy; see Carroll Smith-Rosenberg, "The Female World of Love and Ritual: Relations Between Women in Nineteenth-Century America," in Disorderly Conduct: Visions of Gender in Victorian America (New York: Oxford
University Press, 1983), 53–76. Lillian Schlissel glosses a particular line in an 1850 letter from an Oregon correspondent by citing "a masculine discomfort with letter writing," reinforcing the identification between the personal letter and femininity; see Schlissel, Gibbens, and Hampstein, Far From Home, 44. For an alternative view, see Zboray, Fictive People, 259–40.

56. Fred Worth to his grandmother, January 19, 1859, in Worth, Private Letter Book, Bancroft Library MSS, BANC.

57. The word conversation had not always referred exclusively to oral communication. In the eighteenth century one might speak of having conversation with the sea, and the phrase criminal conversation might denote nonverbal forms of contact and interaction. Still, the uses of term in the nineteenth-century sources cited here appear to be employing conversation in a new, more restrictive sense. David Hancock, Commerce and Conversation in the Eighteenth-Century Atlantic: The Invention of Madeira Wine, "Journal of Interdisciplinary History," 19, no. 2 (Autumn, 1989), 197–219.

58. MOTZ, TRUE SISTERSHOOD, 62; ABIGAIL MALICK, quoted in Schlissel, Gibbens, and Hampstein, Far From Home, 54; WILEY, ed., Letters of Waren Akin, Confident Congressmen, 34–35; STORABIN, ed., BLACKS IN BONDAGE, 76. Samuel Birney of Georgia, serving in the Confederate Army, apologized to his wife for "very dull letters," but explained that "what I write springs from my heart with no study of arrangement." Then, as if to add a literary assessment, he observed that "these honest hearted letters written in plain language, tell of a soldier's strong love for his wife and little one." Nat S. Turner III, A Southern Soldier's Letter Home: The Civil War Letters of Samuel A. Birney, Cobb's Georgia Legion, Army of Northern Virginia (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 2002), 93–94.

59. Benemann, ed., Year of Mud and Gold, 43–44; Samuel Adams, quoted in Roberts, American Alchemy, 166; Mary Wingate, Meiden, December 23, 1850; WILEY, ed., Letters of Waren Akin, Confident Congressmen, 63. For other uses of "talk" or "chat" by correspondents to describe their personal letters, see Elizabeth Titon to Theodore Titon, February 24, 1868, in "The Titon Letters," Chicago Daily Tribune, August 23, 1874; LAAS, ed., WARTIME WASHINGTON, 55; Doody, ed., Yours in Love, 73; BUCK, YANK TRADER IN THE GOLD RUSH, 2; ROZIER, ed., Granite Farm Letters, 139; DECKER, Epistolary Practices, 40, 249; Lystra, Searching the Heart, 21–22.

60. Holliday, The World Rushed In, 83. The inadequacy of the letter as a form of contact was, of course, a more widespread trope. See for example Emma Randolph's letter to her wounded cousin in the Union Army, in which she laments that she must write two letters this morning with something besides the pen, or the assurances of an ardent lover thirty years earlier that his next epistle would be "written not with ink," in Judith A. Bailey and Robert I. Cottom, ed., After Chancellorsville: Letters from the Heart: The Civil Letters of Private Walter G. Dunn and Emma Randolph (Baltimore: Maryland Historical Society, 1998), 143; Lystra, Searching the Heart, 23. For a related discussion of the centrality of Emily Dickinson's interest in the paradoxical relationship between intimate correspondence and corporeal presence, see Hewitt, Correspondence and American Literature, 158.

61. Myers, ed., Children of Pride, 106. There was, on the other hand, some reason to suppose that physical absence facilitated intimacy. In an 1826 letter to a woman he was courting, Robert Conrad of Virginia observed that he "should be rather more at ease, here, in my office, with pen, ink and paper—than if we were full face to face... I can hold freel converse with you in this way than in another." Quoted in Brenda Stevenson, Life in Black and White: Family and Community in the Slave South (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), 57.


65. DECKER, Epistolary Practices, 57–103. The phrase about enduring presence in quotation marks appears on p. 60 and then, in slightly contracted form, on p. 95.

66. SIBLEY and STEVENS, eds., Yankee Correspondence, 85; DRAKE, The Mail Goes Through, 40; Judith Lee Hallock, ed., The Civil War Letters of Joshua C. Calloway (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1997), 77; MYERS, ed., Children of Pride, 1434. Civil War soldiers appear to have been especially fond of this standard opening, as these examples (and countless others in Sibley and Stevens) attest, but the formulaic opening of a letter with a dated acknowledgment of receipt appears in letter collections of writers of every social description by mid-century. The letters of artist Henry Inman present an interesting example of a writer who turned to this formula with increasing regularity in the 1840s; see Henry Inman letters, AAS. On the codes of epistolary reciprocity that underlay this formula, see GERBER, Epistolary Ethics.


69. DECKER, Epistolary Practices, 58. For an eighteenth-century instance of this usage, see DIERKS, "Let Me Chat a Little," 244. By the antebellum period, the opportunity embraced was far less likely to be an unexpected private conveyance. A letter from gold miner John Allan of Nevada City in 1850 illustrates the change nicely: "I embrace the opportunity of again writing to you, through the medium of a post office that is now
established in our single city"; see California Gold Rush Letters, 1849-1859, BANC-MSS C-B 547, box 1, BANC.

70. See, for example, the 1850 courtship letter of John D. Biles to westward migrant Rachel Malick, in Schissel, Gibson, and Hampstein, eds., Far from Home, 18.


72. Jackson, ed., Direct Your Letters to San Jose, 74, also 91 and 93.

73. Ibid., 145, 210; see also 146, 215.

74. Ibid., 26, 127. David's sole use of the formula appears on p. 188. An intriguing parallel case to the Campbell brothers appears in the wartime letters home of Daniel and Alexander Chisholm, two young Pennsylvania brothers who fought in the Union Army. There too, correspondence of the slightly younger sibling routinely begins, "I take this opportunity of writing to you to let you know I am well, and hoping you are the same" (or some close approximation), while the older son typically began with a direct acknowledgment of the receipt of his parent's letters; see W. Springer Menge and J. August Shimrak, eds., The Civil War Notebook of Daniel Chisholm: A Diary of Daily Life in the Union Army 1864-1865 (New York: Ballantine Books, 1989), 103-65.


78. For another instance of self-consciousness about formalicla openings, see Emily Sinkler's expression of concern that acknowledgments of receiving mail tend to degenerate into "small talk" in LeClercq, ed., Between North and South, 71.


80. Samuel Richardson, Familiar Letters on Important Occasions (1741; repr., London: George Routledge & Sons, 1928). The Complete Letter Writer: containing a great variety of letters... selected from judicious and eminent writers (San Francisco: Mariton and Hitchcock, 1853). Occasionally, some minor modification was in order. Richardson's Letter 9, for example, "An elder to a younger Brother, who is in Love with a young Lady of great Gaiety, &c.," reappeared in San Francisco as Letter 40, "From an elder to a younger Brother, cautioning him in the choice of a wife." Richardson's letters appeared as well in guides published in other cities. See the letter from a daughter to a father on behalf of her sister in The fashionable American Letter Writer: Or, the art of polite correspondence. Containing a variety of plain and elegant letters on love, courtship, marriage, relationship, friendship, &c. (Hartford, CT: Ezra Strong, n.d.), 86-8; The fashionable American Letter Writer: Or, the art of polite correspondence. Containing a variety of plain and elegant letters on love, courtship, marriage, relationship, friendship, &c. (Boston: James Loring, 1832), 111-21; The Letter-Writer's Own Book, or, The Art of Polite Correspondence. Containing a variety of plain and elegant letters on love, courtship, marriage, relationship, friendship, &c., with forms of complimentary cards, and directions for letter writing (Philadelphia, PA: John B. Perry, 1846), 202-5.


82. Charles Morley, A Practical Guide to Composition, with progressive exercises in prose and poetry (Hartford, CT: R. White, 1839), 46-48. The formulaic opening to the letter to the brother ("Although it is several years since I saw you, yet time has not at all lessened, but rather increased my affection for you.") exactly mimics a line from a sample letter appearing a few pages earlier in a letter from a niece to her uncle (41).

83. Dierks, "Letter Writing, Gender, and Class in America."

CHAPTER FIVE

1. Letter from Philip V. R. Stanton (Brooklyn NY) to George McKstry (Sutter's Fort, CA), February 14, 1848, McKistry Papers, BANC. The letter is printed in Morgan, Overland in 1846, 2: 466-69. For some samples of Charles's letters to his siblings, see ibid., 311-33, 611-20.

2. For another example of the use of maps to track migrating family members, see the letter of John Everett to his brother Robert, October 21, 1854, in "Letters of John and Sarah Everett, 1854-1864," 4. Writing from Kansas City, Missouri (a temporary stop on his westward journey), John instructs his brother to look up the county name of his provisional residence on a map in order to address a reply.


5. LeClercq, An Antebellum Plantation Household, 37, 47.

6. Roxana Brown Walbridge Wats to Augusta Gregory, may 39, 1853; Dustin Walbridge to his sister Sarah Walbridge Way, March 14, 1863, both quotations appear on the epigraph page in Bonfield and Morrison, Roxana's Children.


10. Williams's letter appears in Holmes, ed., Covered Wagon Women, 313; Cook's letter appears in Holmes, Covered Wagon Women, 8: 45. Delano is quoted in Richard T. Stillson, "Golden Words: Communications and Information Dispersal in the California..."