

Figure 1 (Right): San Francisco-headed letter stating that the writer is sending his letter by the kindness of the addressee's old friend Edward Stanley, recently appointed (U.S.) military governor of North Carolina.

Figure 2 (Below): Pages 2 and 3 of the subject letter describing the destruction in California from the Great Flood of 1862.

dreamed of as possible. The loss of property is incalculable, - ~~to~~ - Farms and gardens and orchards destroyed, houses, fences &c, &c almost entirely swept away. I do not know that there is a house left, except on the hills, between Sacramento and Placina. Sac. City itself has been under water most of the winter, and its prospects as the future Capital of the State, greatly damaged, and its continuance as a City, even, rendered somewhat doubtful. - I suppose you may have seen some accounts of the flood in the papers, - but whatever you have seen is not beyond the truth.

This is about all the news of general interest here, since I last wrote you.

Your old friends here often enquire about you, but of course I am unable to give them any information, not having heard from you for so long. I earnestly hope, however, that you are well and happy, and sincerely wish I could reasonably expect to see you here very soon. Of course you will let me hear from you by the very first opportunity, and don't forget to say when you are coming back.

All the very well with me, and Mrs. Thomas desires me to give you her kindest regards.

All your other friends here, so far as I know, are well.

Again expressing my earnest desire to see you here as soon as possible, I subscribe myself, as ever, most truly

Yours
R. R. Thomas

San Francisco
April 15th 1862

Nathan K. Davis Esq.
My dear friend,

I avail myself of the kindness of your old friend Edward Stanley, recently appointed Military Governor of North Carolina to let you hear once more from your California home. I am exceedingly sorry that circumstances should have prevented your return to it, as you intended long ago.

We have had a most disagreeable, and what is far worse, a most disastrous winter. The whole country, but particularly the Sacramento Valley, has been deluged to an extent never before

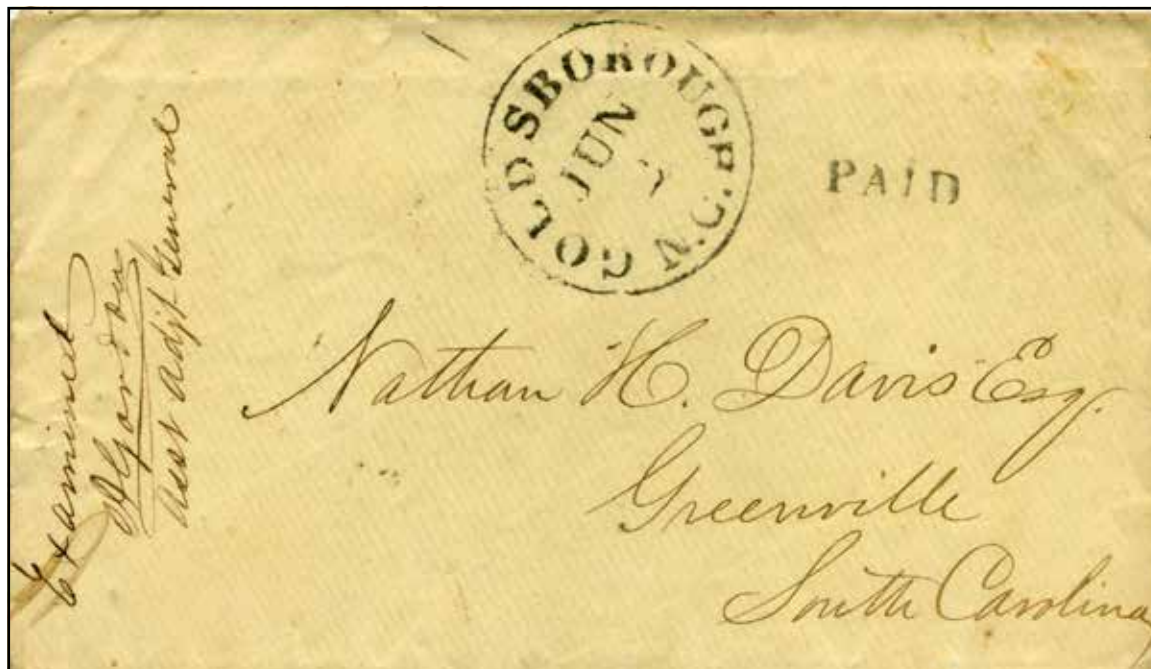


Figure 3: An inner civilian flag-of-truce cover sent to Greenville, S.C., in care of the U.S. military governor of North Carolina, postmarked in Confederate-held Goldsborough, N.C., with prepaid five cents postage after it was exchanged between New Bern and Goldsborough.

A California Letter Describing the Great Flood of 1862 Sent by Flag-of-Truce Mail to the Confederacy

By Patricia A. Kaufmann

The San Francisco-headed letter shown in Figures 1 and 2, describes:

“a most disastrous winter...the Sacramento Valley has been deluged to an extent never before dreamed of possible. The loss of property is incalculable. Farms and gardens and orchards destroyed, houses, fences, etc. etc. almost entirely swept away. (Sacramento’s) prospects as the future Capital of the State greatly damaged.”

The cover in Figure 3 shows the inner envelope that is postmarked Goldsborough, North Carolina. It was sent to “Nathan H. Davis, Esq./Greenville/South Carolina,” in the care of the U.S. military governor of North Carolina, Edward Stanly, who hand carried it to Union-controlled New Bern, North Carolina, where he was assuming his new Lincoln appointment.¹

In 1862, New Bern was the Union-controlled exchange point and Goldsboro was the North Carolina Confederate exchange point where incoming mail was placed into the Confederate mail stream.

General instructions for flag-of-truce mail were that letters were to be enclosed in an outer envelope and were to be addressed to the commander at the exchange point.

Both prisoner-of-war and civilian flag-of-truce mail was subject to censorship. They usually bear a manuscript or handstamped censor marking. Nonetheless, envelopes showing frankings of both sides on a single cover are greatly prized by collectors.

Letters are most often seen with Old Point Comfort, Virginia, postal markings via the federal postal system where they then passed under flag of truce to the Confederacy and were taken to Richmond for entry into the Confederate postal system for delivery to their ultimate destination.

Those markings comprise most of exchanged mail and span the June 1863 to March 1865 period. Covers that entered both the United States and Confederate postal systems had to pay postage in both systems. The subject cover is a rare and early civilian flag-of-truce use.

The manuscript “Examined/A. Gordon/Asst. Adj.

General” censor marking was applied up the left end of the cover, which entered the Confederate mails with a “GOLDSBOROUGH/N.C./JUN/2” (1862) circular datestamp and matching “PAID” handstamp.

Civilian mail sent by exchange points other than those in southeastern Virginia is rare. Note that it took nearly two months to reach its final destination as Stanly traveled from California to North Carolina.

The letter from R.R. Provines, datelined “San Francisco April 18th 1862,” fervently describes the horrendous situation in California at that time.

Provines was the Police Court and Office of Police judge for the city and county of San Francisco in 1868. He is considered an early pioneer of San Francisco.² Nathan H. Davis was also an attorney who owned property in California.

Edward W. Stanly

U.S. Military Governor of North Carolina

Edward Stanly (1810-1872) is shown in the Figure 4 portrait of him taken by famed Civil War Photographer Matthew Brady.

Stanly was the son of esteemed congressman and Federalist John Stanly, the namesake of Stanly County.

A native of New Bern, North Carolina, Edward Stanly moved to California in 1853 and unsuccessfully ran for governor in 1857.

He was a lawyer and a life-long politician, who served in the U.S. House of Representatives for five terms before the war. When war broke out, Stanly offered his services to President Abraham Lincoln, who appointed him military governor of North Carolina with the rank of brigadier general.

By early summer 1862, much of eastern North Carolina had been captured, including New Bern. Travel from west to east was not as simple as taking the next flight out, like today. Although he did not travel back east to begin his term until his arrival on May 26, 1862, the subject letter makes mention of his appointment more than a month before.

During Stanly’s brief term as military governor from May 1862 to early 1863, he was in constant disagreement with Union authorities, vocally opposing the Emancipation Proclamation.

Among other things, North Carolina laws forbade teaching slaves how to read and write. Stanly opposed a school for African-American children, believing it would harm the Union cause. Not surprisingly, many

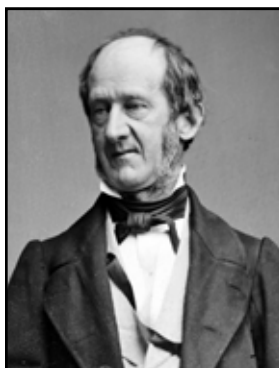


Figure 4: Edward Stanly, U.S. military governor of North Carolina in 1862. (Matthew Brady photo, Library of Congress)

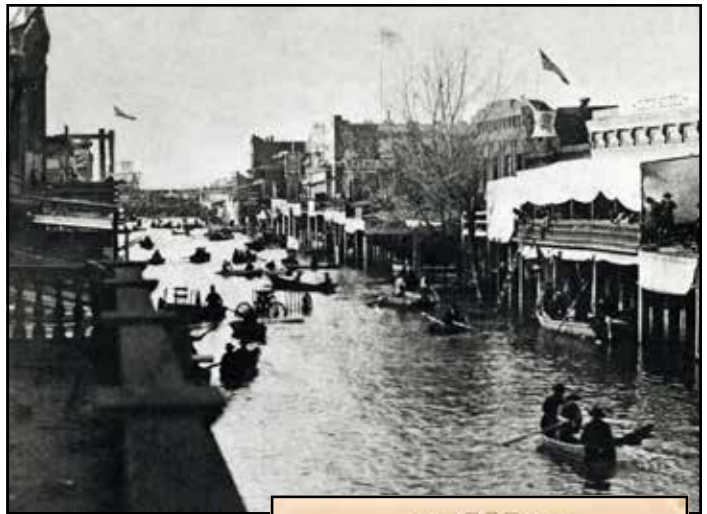


Figure 5 (Above): A photo of a flooded K Street in Sacramento in 1862.

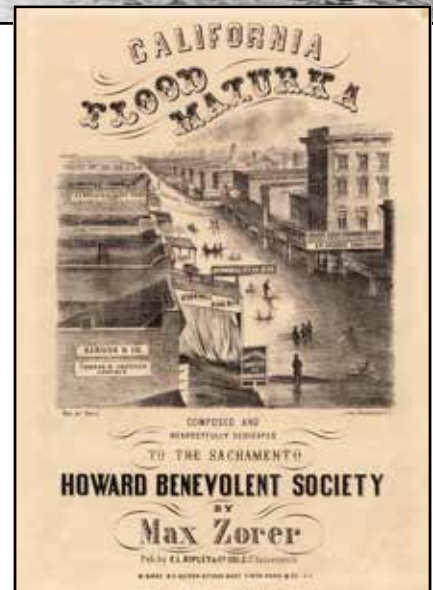


Figure 6 (Right): Sheet music for a mazurka composed and dedicated to Sacramento by Max Zorer. It pictures an 1862 flood scene on J Street in Sacramento.

runaway slaves fled to Union lines, including occupied New Bern. Stanly was in favor of returning slaves to their owners if the owners took the oath of allegiance to the Union. He held well-known pro-slavery beliefs. He was clearly a man with conflicting views.

Stanly was outraged by, and spoke against, the conduct of some Union troops in eastern North Carolina. His attempt to promote Union sentiment was not well received in Union-occupied towns in the Old North State. Secessionist sympathizers were not swayed; they judged him a traitorous oppressor. Conversely, Union allies believed Stanly was too lenient on Confederate citizens.

After the issue of the Emancipation Proclamation, Stanly believed the mission of his office had changed.

He resigned in 1863 and returned to California to resume his law practice. Two sources cited his date of resignation as January 15, 1863,^{3,4} while two other sources stated he served until March 2, 1863.^{5,6}

Both dates could be accurate if the first was the date he announced his resignation and the later the date it took effect. Lincoln did not appoint another wartime governor of North Carolina.



Figure 7: Noah's Ark, painted in 1846 by American folk artist and Quaker minister Edward Hicks (1780-1849).

One interesting sidenote is that Stanley was the uncle of Confederate Brig. Gen. Lewis Armistead who led Pickett's Charge at Gettysburg, waving his hat from the tip of his saber. He died from wounds sustained in that battle. Stabler and Armistead were born seven years apart in the same New Bern house.

The Great Flood of 1862

We all have seen current news of the dreadful fires in California in recent years with residents praying for rain. But there can always be too much of a good thing.

Weeks of continuous rains and snows began in November 1861 in Oregon and continued into January 1862. The Great Flood of 1862 was the largest in the recorded history of Oregon, Nevada, and California, extending as far inland as Idaho, Nevada, Arizona, New Mexico and Utah. In the space of 43 days, the calamitous weather event dumped an equivalent of ten feet of rainfall in California, in the form of rain and snow,

Figure 5 shows but a small part of the devastation on K Street in Sacramento, while Figure 6 shows a mazurka composed and dedicated to Sacramento by Max Zorer. It pictures a flood scene on Sacramento's J Street. A mazurka is a lively Polish dance in triple time. Although it is the Polish national dance, it was exceptionally popular throughout Europe in the nineteenth century. Frédéric Chopin composed 57 mazurkas between 1825-1849.

Note that I did not describe this flood as "unprecedented" because it isn't. Sad to say, this was one of a series of floods that cycle every 100 to 200 years. Thus, another is presumably overdue. Most anticipate the inevitable earthquakes on the west coast. But there are also the inevitable floods.

These cataclysmic flood events are known as "ARKstorms" for "atmospheric river 1,000 storm" – originally projected as a one in 1,000 event.

Such a mega-storm is sobering to contemplate. Figure 7 shows a bible view of Noah's Ark, painted in 1846 by American Folk Artist Edward Hicks (1780-1849), a distinguished minister of the Society of Friends (Quakers). The idea of Noah's Ark was doubtless inspired by such a harsh weather event.

Should such a storm take place today, the estimate of damages exceeds \$300 billion. Such mega-storms have occurred in the following years AD: 212, 440, 603, 1029, c.1300, 1418, 1605, 1750, 1810, and December 1861–January 1862 (the latest occurrence).

The largest event appears to have been the one in 1605, which left a layer of silt two inches thick, suggesting that flood was at least fifty percent more powerful than any of the others recorded.⁷

More detailed information is available from the United States Geological Survey, which provides scientific information to understand the earth to help minimize the loss of life and property from natural disasters.

Created by an act of Congress in 1879, the stated USGS mission is to "monitor, analyze, and predict current and evolving dynamics of complex human and natural Earth-system interactions and to deliver actionable intelligence at scales and timeframes relevant to decision makers."⁸

The California transcontinental cover and letter featured in this article are reminders of the inevitable deluge to come. It is sobering to contemplate.

Endnotes

- 1 Steven C. Walske, Scott R. Trepel, *Special Mail Routes of the American Civil War* (Confederate Stamp Alliance, 2008) p. 94.
- 2 Charles A. Tuttle, *Reports of Cases Determined in the Supreme Court of the State of California, Vol. 32* (San Francisco: Bancroft-Whitney Company, 1867/1906 editions) p. 503
- 3 "The forgotten governor," *The North State Journal*, December 14, 2017, <https://nsjonline.com/article/2017/12/the-forgotten-governor/> Accessed August 30, 2021.
- 4 Norman D. Brown, "Edward Stanley," *NCPedia*, <https://www.ncpedia.org/biography/stanly-edward> Accessed August 30, 2021.
- 5 Edward Stanley, *Biographical Dictionary of the United States Congress*. <https://bioguide.congress.gov/search/bio/S000799> Accessed August 30, 2021.
- 6 Edward Stanley, *Wikipedia*. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/EdwardStanly> Accessed August 30, 2021.
- 7 ARkStorm, *Wikipedia*, <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/ARkStorm/> Accessed August 30, 2021.
- 8 Who We Are, USCS: Science for a Changing World, <https://www.usgs.gov/about/about-us/who-we-are/> Accessed August 30, 2021.

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