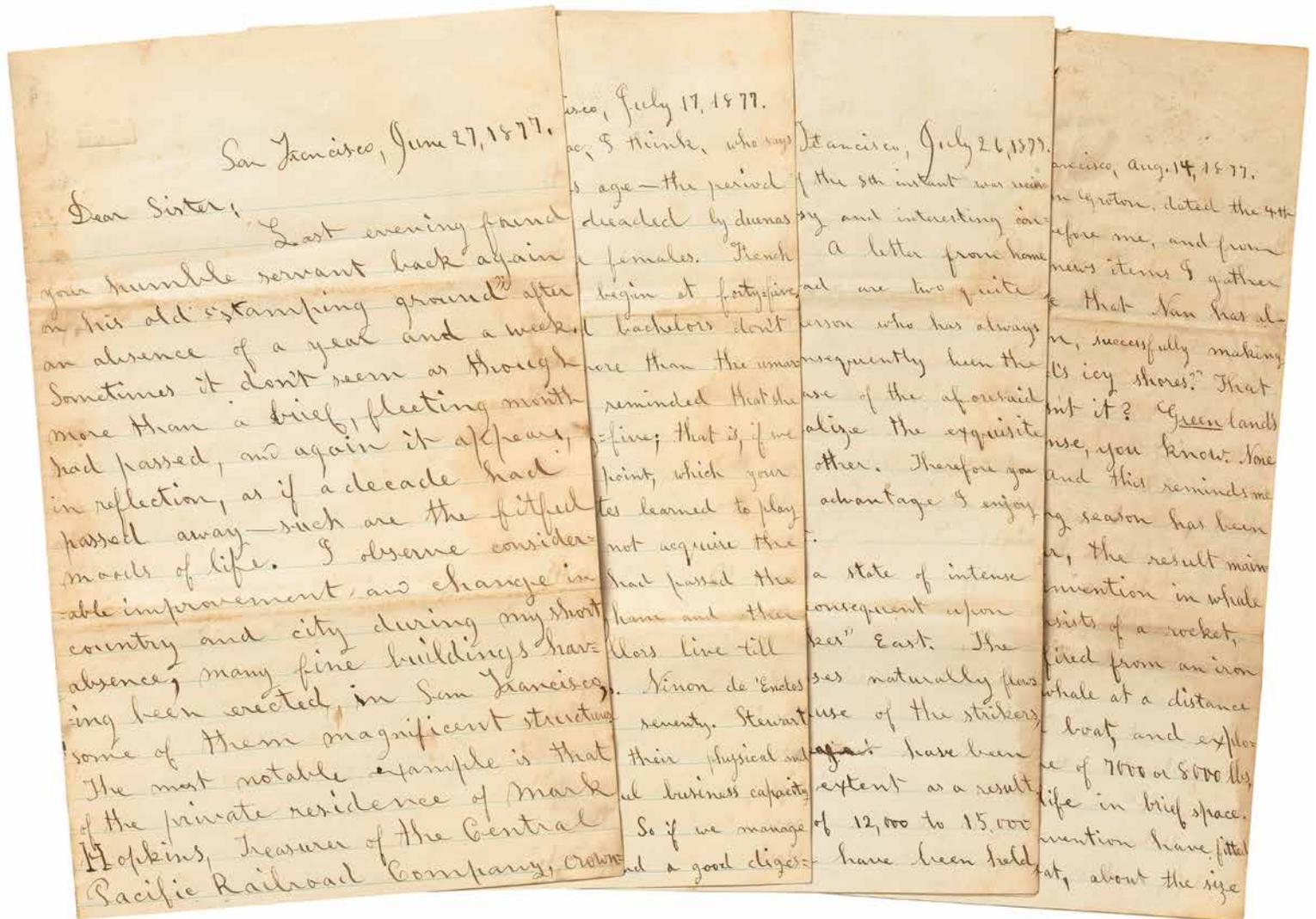


## Nathaniel Kimball Stoddard

*Four Holograph Letters by a San Francisco Printer, including his Eyewitness Account of the Anti-Chinese San Francisco Riot of 1877*

San Francisco: 1877

\$5000



A series of four holograph letters from Nathaniel Stoddard of San Francisco, written to his sister between June and August, 1877. Each of the four letters consists of four densely written and very legible octavo pages. Toning and some scattered staining, near fine.

All four letters are of considerable interest, written by a typesetter active in the printing industry in California, and sympathetic to the laboring classes throughout the country. Of particular importance is his eyewitness account of the two-day pogrom against Chinese immigrants during the San Francisco Riot of July 23-24, in a letter dating from July 26, 1877:

*... San Francisco is in a state of intense excitement at present, consequent upon the great railroad 'strikes' East ... Outdoor mass meetings of 12,000 to 15,000 working men and women have been held, addressed by both male and female orators, at which stirring resolutions were adopted in sympathy with the strikers, denouncing the continual encroachments of capital upon labor ... On Monday night about a dozen Chinese washhouses were raided and nearly demolished, and one set on fire and totally destroyed, together with two other houses adjoining, occupied by white people. Tuesday night witnessed a repetition of these scenes in different parts of the city, and the burning of another Chinese laundry, in which a Chinaman was burned to death, and another Celestial committed suicide in consequence of these depredations. Last night the riotous demonstrations were continued, and a disastrous conflagration on one of the lumber docks as the result ... A state of anarchy exists, and we are on the verge of a declaration of martial law ... .*

Stoddard describes efforts by the police, military forces, and civilian authorities to regain control, and continues:

*... Pistols were freely used by both parties at the lumberyard fire, and from where I stood, on an eminence overlooking the scene, at one time it sounded like a Fourth of July fire-cracker fusillade. One of the special police was shot dead, and a number of the rioters and spectators wounded. Bands of rioters paraded the streets, raiding the Chinese washhouses ... The presence of the Chinese here in such swarms is the grand disturbing element on this coast, and will continue to be until the matter is ultimately brought to an issue ... The aggregation of wealth in the hands of the few and the consequent impoverishment of the many is another vital cause of the present fearful times ... Our moneyed aristocrats should heed the lessons of the French Revolution ... It is said we have already 125 millionaires in California ... .*

Born in 1830, an obituary published in *Inland Printer* described Stoddard as a typesetter of marked ability: he came to San Francisco in 1849 and for 57 years he was active in the printing business in the West. In a letter dating from August 14, 1877, he gives an eyewitness account of the brutal nature of the whaling industry:

*... our California whaling season has been a very brilliant one so far, the result mainly of a new Californian invention in whale murder. The invention consists of a rocket, about 18 inches in length, fired from an iron tube, which strikes the whale at a distance of about 200 feet from the boat, and exploding in it with a pressure of 7000 or 8000 lbs. which of course terminates life in brief space. The company owning the invention have fitted up a Lilliputian steamboat ... and have been operating off the mouth of San Francisco Bay, 10 or 15 miles out, since the 4th of July, during which time they have killed 10 whales up to date ... They have had one whale on exhibition at the foot of Fourth street nearly a week, charging two bits admission. Crowds go to see it, the receipts on Sunday amounting to over \$700. This whale is of the "fin-back" species, about 60 feet long, and will probably yield 40 barrels of oil and 300 pounds of bone. It begins to smell "loud" already, almost rivaling the infernal stench of the Pine Island stink factory. The name of the whaling steamer is the 'Bouquet' ... They towed in another whale alongside the other today ... .*

On a lighter note, Stoddard describes California fruits, the "looming" California wine interest, and the newly built "private residence of Mark Hopkins, Treasurer of the Central Pacific Railroad Company, crowning California street hill ... It is an immense affair ... So you see it pays to be a railroad magnate ... ." He also gives a detailed account of a night out at the Alhambra theatre, where he was "a witness ... of the finest rifle marksmanship I ever saw ... the Austin brothers ... ."

A remarkable and historically important cache of letters. More extensive transcriptions of all four letters follows:

### **1. San Francisco, June 27, 1877**

Dear Sister,

[Kimball has just returned to San Francisco:] "... I observe considerable improvement and change in country and city during my short absence, many fine buildings having been erected in San Francisco ... the most notable example is that of the private residence of Mark Hopkins, Treasurer of the Central Pacific Railroad Company, crowning California street hill, one of the most prominent eminences in the city. It is an immense affair ... So you see it pays to be a railroad magnate ... I stopped in St. Louis ... and should have remained longer but for the infernal heat ... St. Louis is a dirty city; the streets are paved generally with pulverized limestone ... Some sections of the suburbs, however, are very beautiful, including the parks, botanical gardens ... But the one grand redeeming feature of St. L. is the great bridge ... "

## 2. San Francisco, July 17, 1877

“It is Balzac, I think, who says the fifty-two is a dangerous age – the period when man is most to be dreaded by duenas who have charge of susceptible females. French philosophers make old age begin at forty-five ... us old bachelors don't like to be told it any more than the unmarried female desires to be reminded that she is an old maid at thirty-five ... I was a witness, at the Alhambra theatre the other evening, of the finest rifle marksmanship I ever saw ... the Austin brothers, the shootists in question – two in number. They use the U.S. Springfield breech-loading rifle ... [describes their various acts] ... A lighted cigar stump, an inch long, is then held between the teeth of one, while the other take his position across the stage ... / ... Fruit in California is unusually abundant this year, and of a better quality than heretofore – especially peaches, apricots, nectarines, and plums ... California pears ... are unequalled. Grapes are beginning to make their appearance in market ... The wine interest of California is looming into huge proportions; in 1855 (22 years ago) the total product was less than 60,000 gallons, while this last year it amounted to upwards of 8,000,000 gallons ... The weather in the interior of the state has been intensely hot ... just fancy it, you who are enjoying the cool breezes of Long Island sound ... .”

## 3. San Francisco, July 26, 1877

“... San Francisco is in a state of intense excitement at present, consequent upon the great railroad strikes East. The sympathy of the masses naturally flows in accord with the cause of the strikers, and rioting and pillage have been indulged in to some extent as a result. Outdoor mass meetings of 12,000 to 15,000 working men and women have been held, addressed by both male and female orators, at which stirring resolutions were adopted in sympathy with the strikers, denouncing the continual encroachments of capital upon labor, and demanding that the rights of the laboring classes shall be better respected in the future than they have been in the immediate past. On Monday night about a dozen Chinese washhouses were raided and nearly demolished, and one set on fire and totally destroyed, together with two other houses adjoining, occupied by white people. Tuesday night witnessed a repetition of these scenes in different parts of the city, and the burning of another Chinese laundry, in which a Chinaman was burned to death, and another Celestial committed suicide in consequence of these depredations. Last night the riotous demonstrations were continued, and a disastrous conflagration on one of the lumber docks as the result, destroying hundreds of thousands dollars worth of property. A state of anarchy exists, and we are on the verge of a declaration of martial law. The police force has been augmented from 200 to upwards of 1200, the entire military force has been under arms for three days, and a Committee of Safety organized, numbering four or five thousand, to assist in preserving order and preventing the destruction of property. As a matter of course numerous collisions have occurred between the rioters and the authorities, those of last night being the most serious. Pistols were freely used by both parties at the lumberyard fire, and from where I stood, on an eminence overlooking the scene, at one time it sounded like a Fourth of July fire-cracker fusillade. One of the special police was shot dead, and a number of the rioters and spectators wounded. Bands of rioters paraded the streets, raiding the Chinese washhouses, to a late hour, but the police finally succeeded in dispersing them. Everything is quiet now as I write, but what the night may develop remains to be seen. The presence of the Chinese here in such swarms is the grand disturbing element on this coast, and will continue to be until the matter is ultimately brought to an issue, when the result will be terrible. When this will occur it is difficult to predict, but it cannot be postponed very long, unless the General Government applies the remedy, which at present does not appear probable. The aggregation of wealth in the hands of the few and the consequent impoverishment of the many

is another vital cause of the present fearful times. The rich are constantly becoming richer and the poor poorer. – There must of course be a limit to this state of things; it cannot continue always. Our moneyed aristocrats should heed the lessons of the French Revolution. History may yet repeat itself on this continent. As an illustration of how rapidly our money kings are accumulating riches I enclose a slip, containing a list of a few of them. It is said we have already 125 millionaires in California ...”

#### 4. San Francisco, August 14, 1877

“ ... our California whaling season has been a very brilliant one so far, the result mainly of a new Californian invention in whale murder. The invention consists of a rocket, about 18 inches in length, fired from an iron tube, which strikes the whale at a distance of about 200 feet from the boat, and exploding in it with a pressure of 7000 or 8000 lbs. which of course terminates life in brief space. The company owning the invention have fitted up a Lilliputian steamboat ... and have been operating off the mouth of San Francisco Bay, 10 or 15 miles out, since the 4th of July, during which time they have killed 10 whales up to date. The powder used in the rockets is said to be the finest ever made ... They have had one whale on exhibition at the foot of Fourth street nearly a week, charging two bits admission. Crowds go to see it, the receipts on Sunday amounting to over \$700. This whale is of the “fin-back” species, about 60 feet long, and will probably yield 40 barrels of oil and 300 pounds of bone. It begins to smell “loud” already, almost rivaling the infernal stench of the Pine Island stink factory. The name of the whaling steamer is the “Bouquet” ... They towed in another whale alongside the other today ... / ... Matters here have resumed their normal condition, and everything is moving along as quietly as before the late striking eruption. I see by a report in a late New York paper ... that the fate of the poor miners in the coal fields of Pennsylvania is even far worse than I represented it in my last letter. I stated that men were required to work for ninety cents a day; this statement was made on the authority of a correspondent of the New York Herald, who investigated the matter of the time of the engineers strike on the Reading railroad last winter. It now appears that they are compelled to work for less than fifty cents a day, and support families of half a dozen persons and upwards. The only punishment I wish these devilish heartless cormorants, who have forced the wages of the wretched laborers to such starvation rates, is that they be yet compelled to exchange places with them ... / ... The Mechanics Industrial Exhibition is now in full blast here ... The music is the best part of it ... .”

A selection of images follows. [\[BTC#437123\]](#)

San Francisco, July 26, 1879.

Dear Sister: Your letter of the 8th instant was received yesterday, and its newsy and interesting contents duly appreciated. A letter from home and a letter from abroad are two quite different affairs. A person who has always resided at home, and consequently been the recipient of but one phase of the aforesaid correspondence, cannot realize the exquisite joy and pleasure of the other. Therefore you will perceive the great advantage I enjoy over you in this respect.

San Francisco is in a state of intense excitement at present, consequent upon the great railroad "strikes" East. The sympathy of the masses naturally flows in accord with the cause of the strikers, and rioting ~~roads~~ ~~pillages~~ have been indulged in to some extent as a result. Outdoor mass meetings of 12,000 to 15,000 workingmen and women have been held,

addressed by both male and female orators, and at which stirring resolutions were adopted in sympathy with the strikers, denouncing the continual encroachments of capital upon labor, and demanding that the rights of the laboring classes shall be better respected in the future than they have been in the immediate past. On Monday night about a dozen Chinese washhouses were raided and nearly demolished, and one set on fire and totally destroyed, together with two other houses adjoining, occupied by white people. Tuesday night witnessed a repetition of these scenes in different parts of the city, and the burning of another Chinese laundry, in which a Chinese man was burned to death, and another Celestial committed suicide in consequence of these depredations. Last night the riotous demonstrations were continued, and a disastrous conflagration on one of the lumber docks was the result, destroying hundreds of thousands dollars worth of property. A state of anarchy exists, and we

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The police force has been augmented from 200 to upwards of 1200, the entire military force has been under arms for three days, and a Committee of Safety organized, numbering four or five thousand, to assist in preserving order and preventing the destruction of property. As a matter of course numerous collisions have occurred between the rioters and the authorities, those of last night being the most serious. Pistols were freely used by both parties at the lumber-yard fire, and day from where I stood, on an eminence overlooking the scene, at one time it sounded like a Fourth of July fire-cracker fusillade. One of the special police was shot dead, and a number of the rioters and spectators wounded. Bands of rioters paraded the streets, raiding the Chinese wash-houses, to a late hour, but the police finally succeeded in dispersing them. Everything is quiet now as I write, but what the night may develop remains to be seen. The presence of the Chinese here in such

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Sorry to hear of Susie's poor health; perhaps she is growing too rapidly. This is often the case with children of her age, and who develop into strong and healthy persons eventually. I am not disappointed at the result of Lucius' new horse venture; I did not think he would fill the bill.

Regards to all.

Yours, etc.,

Nat.