
Register of the California Gold Rush Era Government Correspondence, 1850-1869

Collection number: Mss34

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Biography

Peter Burnett (1807-1895), California's first Governor (1849-1851), is represented by a document commissioning Ludlow Thomas as notary public for Shasta and Trinity counties (July 16, 1850). Burnett first came to Oregon (1843) where he was a member of the Oregon Supreme Court (1845-1847). He later moved to California (1848) where he was active, following the California Constitutional Convention, in seeking the Governorship. A Democrat, Burnett's administration was plagued by an inability to raise sufficient monies to carry on the business of

state government. He is remembered for his opposition to slavery in California. Burnett resigned in mid-ter to settle his own debts (1851). No "Ludlow Thomas" appears in the Index to the 1850 Census of the State of California in either Shasta or Trinity County, nor is a "Ludlow Thomas" mentioned in the Annals of Trinity County (1857).

John McDougal (1818-1866), California's second Governor (1851-1852), is represented by a covering letter for a shipment of the Acts of the 31st Congress from U.S. Secretary of State, Daniel Webster (January 22, 1851). The letter bears Webster's signature. Shortly after Democrat McDougal came to California he was elected President of the California State Senate (1849). From this position of influence he was chosen California's first Lieutenant Governor (1849-51) and thus succeeded to the Governorship upon Peter Burnett's resignation (1851). McDougal lost popularity early in his brief term by pardoning certain convicted murderers and by opposing the San Francisco Vigilance Committee of 1851. He was never elected Governor in his own right.

John Bigler (1805-1871), California's third Governor (1852-1856), is represented by three items. The earliest of these is a covering letter for a shipment of the "Synoptical Index to the Laws of the United States," from U.S. Secretary of State, Daniel Webster (January 16, 1852). This item is not signed. The collection also includes a covering letter for a shipment of the Acts of the 32nd Congress from Webster's successor, Edward Everett (December 20, 1852). The letter bears Everett's signature. A third item representing Bigler's governorship is a letter from Wisconsin Governor, William A. Barstow, acknowledging receipt of California Statutes for 1855 (September 17, 1855). Bigler came to California in 1849. A Democrat, he faced the same problems of state indebtedness as his predecessors. When he sought to relieve these through the sale of reclaimed San Francisco waterfront properties, he was accused of favoritism and corruption. Bigler attempted to help emigrants by establishing the Emigrant Relief Train (1852). In this, too, he was accused of corruption, supposedly diverting funds to himself and his cronies. Bigler was also known for his attempts to block Chinese immigration and his efforts to provide state lands for homesteading farmers. Personally popular and an astute politician, Bigler was the only 19th century Governor elected to a second term.

J. Neely Johnson (1825-1872), California's 4th Governor (1856-1858), is represented by a routine memo to Col. G.W. Whitman, State Comptroller (February 12, 1857). Johnson, like all early governors, came to California prior to statehood (1849). He holds the distinction of being the first elected Governor who was not a Democrat. Although nominally a Whig, Johnson was elected on the American Party (Know Nothing) ticket during the brief period between the death of the Whig Party and the birth of the Republican Party (1856). Johnson was elected on his promise to trim government spending. This he accomplished by reducing salaries (including his own) and eliminating some offices. Like his predecessor, Governor McDougal, Johnson opposed vigilantism in San Francisco (1856).

Frederick F. Low (1828-1894), California's 9th Governor (1863-1867), is represented by two items. The earlier of these is a letter from the Governor to Col. A.H. Markland of San Francisco (November 14, 1865) that discusses arrangements for the latter to meet W.H. Parks. The second item is a letter from the Governor to B.B. Redding, land agent for the Central Pacific Railroad, regarding the appointment of John P. Johnson as notary for San Mateo County (January 5, 1869). Both letters are signed by Frederick F. Low. The future Governor came to California in 1849, worked in transportation for a time and achieved the merger of all steamer lines on the Sacramento River. He then became a banker in Marysville, was later a successful capitalist in San Francisco and was also active in founding the California Republican Party. He was briefly a member of the U.S. House of Representatives (1862-63) and was then appointed by President Lincoln Collector for the Port of San Francisco (1863). As Governor, Low was friendly both to the Chinese and to the Native Americans. He was a major advocate of a state university and also facilitated the California's acquisition of the Yosemite Valley as the nation's first State Park. William H. Parks (1824-) was doubtless a close friend of Frederick Low. He was a Marysville freight transport magnate and Republican State Senator (from 1859). Benjamin Bernard Redding of Sacramento (d. 1882) was the Douglas Democratic State Central Committee chairman and was elected is Secretary of State (1863-1867). He is presently best known as the man who laid out the town of Redding in Shasta County.

Tennessee Democrat and personal friend of President Polk, William Van Voorhies (1823-1884) came to California when appointed California's first Postmaster General (1848). He quit this post because his salary did not pay expenses (1849), began a law practice and entered into a general merchandise store partnership in San Francisco. Van Voorhies became California's first Secretary of State under Peter Burnett and remained in the post under John McDougal, finally resigning under Governor Bigler when the Democratic Party split into pro-slavery and anti-slavery factions (1849-1853). Van Voorhies was well-known as a fiery and partisan orator. When the Civil War forced the Democrats from office he remained in California, becoming a freelance journalist and attorney in Alameda County. He is represented in this collection by two items. The earliest of these is a note from the U.S. Secretary of the Interior, Alexander Stuart, acknowledging a request for information about certain California swamp lands (1851). The second item is a standard acknowledgement of receipt of California documents from John L. Manning, Governor of South Carolina (1853).

James William Denver (1817-1892) was Secretary of State under Governor John Bigler (1853-1856). Denver administered Bigler's Emigrant Relief Train and felt obliged to fight a duel with the editor of the Alta California, Edward C. Gilbert, to defend the Governor's honor against charges of corruption. Denver killed Gilbert and Governor Bigler promoted him to the State Supreme Court. He later served in Congress (1855-57) and became Territorial Governor of Kansas (1857-58). The city of Denver is named for him. The collection contains five items of Denver's correspondence; with one exception, all are routine acknowledgements of receipt of government documents addressed to Denver. The exception is a letter from Thomas Cox, Attorney General of Plumas County, deploring disorganized conditions in the newly established County (1854).

David F. Douglass (1821-1872) served as Secretary of State under Governor J. Neely Johnson (1856-1858). Douglass, a Whig and later a member of the American Party, had been Brigadier General of the State Militia (1850), U.S. Marshall (1851) and an Assemblyman from San

Joaquin County (1855) before becoming Secretary of State. He is represented in this collection by a single letter from one W.A. Whitaker requesting a report of the State Geologist.

Henry Lambard Nichols (c1824-) was Secretary of State under California's 10th Governor, Henry Haight (1867-1871). Nichols, a Democrat and physician, settled in Sacramento (1853) where he became active in politics and was elected Mayor (1858) before being chosen Secretary of State. He is represented in this collection by a covering letter from Dr. Lorenzo Hubbard accompanying the U.S. Grant Mining Company certificate of incorporation. Hubbard, a physician and naturalist, studied and published reports during the 1850s on the Indians, earthquakes and the San Francisco water supply.

Box Box 1 **California Gold Rush Era Government Correspondence**

- Folder Folder 1 **Peter Burnett, 1st Governor (1849-1851)**
-Notary public commission for Shasta & Trinity counties to Ludlow Thomas(7-16-50) [ms w/ seal signed by Governor and Secretary of State, W. Van Voorhies] (formerly MS2.T458)
- Folder Folder 2 **John McDougal, 2nd Governor (1851-1852)**
-Covering letter for transfer of public documents from U.S. Secretary of State, Daniel Webster (1-22-51) [printed, italics; not signed] (Formerly MS2.W378)
- Folder Folder 3 **John Bigler, 3rd Governor (1852-1856)**
-Circular announcing distribution of "Synoptic Index to Laws of the United States" from U.S. Secretary of State, Daniel Webster (January 16, 1852). [printed, italics; not signed] (Formerly MS2.U58S797)
-Covering letter for transfer of public documents from U.S. Secretary of State, Edward Everett (December 20, 1852) . [signed] (Formerly MS2.E93)
-Letter acknowledging receipt of California Statutes of 1855 from Governor William A. Barstow of Wisconsin (September 17, 1855). [signed] (Formerly MS2.B282)
- Folder Folder 4 **J. Neely Johnson, 4th Governor (1856-1858)**
-Memo to State Comptroller, Col. G.W. Whitman (February 12, 1857). [signed by J. Neely Johnson] (Formerly MS2.J67)
- Folder Folder 5 **Frederick F. Low, 9th Governor (1863-1867)**
-Letter to Col. A.H. Markland, San Francisco (November 14, 1865). [signed by Frederick F. Low] (Formerly MS2.L912)
-Letter to Benjamin Bernard Redding (January 5, 1867). [signed by Frederick F. Low] (Formerly MS2.L912)
- Folder Folder 6 **William Van Voorhies, Scty. of State (1849-1853)**
-Letter from Alexander H. Stuart, Secretary of the Interior (October 20, 1851). [signed by Alexander H. Stuart] (Formerly MS2.U58I61)
-Letter from Governor John L. Manning, South Carolina (January 22, 1853). [signed by John L. Manning] (Formerly MS2.M283)
- Folder Folder 7 **James William Denver, Scty. of State (1853-1856)**
-Letter from Thomas Cox, District Attorney of Plumas County (June 5, 1854). [signed by Thomas Cox] (Formerly MS2.C878)
-Letter from U.S. Post Office Department, Washington, D.C. (February 1, 1855). (Formerly MS2.U58P857)
-Letter from A.H. Reeder, Governor of Kansas Territory (April 3, 1855). [signed by A.H. Reeder] (Formerly MS2.R327)
-Letter from C. Cushing, U.S. Attorney General, Washington, D.C. (September 13, 1855). [signed by C. Cushing] (Formerly MS2.U58A885)
-Letter from James Guthrie, U.S. Secretary of the Treasury, Washington, D.C. (1855) (Formerly MS2.U58T784)
- Folder Folder 8 **David F. Douglas, Scty. of State (1856-1858)**
-Letter from W.A. Whitaker, Pilot Hill (December 12, 1856). [signed by W.A. Whitaker] (Formerly MS2.W578)
- Folder Folder 9 **Henry Lambard Nichols, Scty. of State (1867-1871)**
-Letter from Lorenzo Hubbard, Alcatraz Is. (March 17, 1869). [signed by Lorenzo Hubbard] (Formerly MS2.H875)