GENERAL WILLIAM TECUMSEH SHERMAN of Civil War fame was a voluminous letter writer, and as he was much away from home and traveled far his letters are unusually revealing and of great interest. The Historical Society of Pennsylvania has recently acquired one of unusual interest through the generosity of Mrs. Arnold G. Talbot.

This letter was written at a significant period in Sherman’s career. Born in 1820, he was now, at thirty, just ten years out of West Point. His military career had not developed to his satisfaction. At the outbreak of the Mexican War he had been assigned to recruiting duty and then sent to California to serve as quartermaster at Monterey. He spent the war years there “without smelling gunpowder,” and while his West Point friends were winning promotion on the field of battle he remained a first lieutenant without any citation. After the war was over he was transferred to San Francisco where he became adjutant to the commander, Major General Persifor F. Smith, to whom this letter was written.

Finally, there came welcome news. In the election of 1848 General Zachary Taylor had been elected President. He appointed Thomas Ewing, Sherman’s foster father, Secretary of the new Interior Department. Ewing moved to Washington where he settled his family in the Blair house across Pennsylvania Avenue from the White House. Sherman was now ordered back to the Capital, and at long last he could marry Ellen Ewing to whom he had long been engaged.

He arrived in Washington in the midst of the great struggle over the admission of California as a state. The people of that far-off region had held a convention, which Sherman had attended, and had drawn up a constitution organizing themselves as a free state. This had aroused southern opposition, however, because the admission of California would give the free states a majority in the Senate and the control of Congress. So great was the opposition to
this move that there was even fear that the Union might be broken up.

Skilled statesmen finally worked out the Compromise of 1850 in the debates described by Sherman. This was a complex arrangement whereby all questions before Congress involving slavery, the admission of new states, and the organization of new territories were settled in a series of five laws. California was admitted as a free state. The remainder of the territory received from Mexico was organized into two territories, New Mexico and Utah, with no provision as to slavery save that the people of these regions might accept or reject the institution when the time came for their admission as states into the Union. The claims of Texas to the upper Rio Grande River valley were denied and assigned to New Mexico, and in recompense the debts of Texas incurred while the state had been an independent republic, 1836–1845, were assumed by the Federal Government. The slave trade was abolished in the District of Columbia. A new fugitive slave act was passed putting the return of runaway slaves in the hands of Federal officers who, being under orders from Washington, would be expected to carry out the law better than state officials who hitherto had had the responsibility.

During this eventful summer the army was enlarged and Sherman was at last made a captain. He was assigned to St. Louis, and there he and Ellen set up housekeeping.

University of Pennsylvania

ROY F. NICHOLS

Washington D. C.
August 4, 1850.

My Dear General,

Shall I apologise for again addressing you, or shall I confess simply that I think I may scribble a few lines that will prove interesting to you where letters at least do not come too often, if too plenty.—Immediately after my wedding,¹ which by the way was a stylish affair, attended by President Taylor, all the Cabinet, Senate, Supreme Court & 300 Gentlemen & ladies of historical fame, I made a tour through the Northern Cities and West to Ohio, where we remained

¹ May 1, 1850.
till July when we again came East, to remain here, till the time sh'd come for me to go on duty. We reached the City July 4—on the day following called upon the Presidents family. Saw Col & Mrs. Bliss and learned that General Taylor had spent a very bad night, in consequence of his having attended the 4 July Celebration which kept him, in a hot Sun till 4 o.C. in the afternoon, much beyond his usual hour of dining—Upon getting home he ate a hearty meal of vegetables &c which caused a severe Cholera Morbus, ending in fever and death. All the particulars you have of course seen, and I can only assure you that a feeling of gloom and sadness followed, that words will not describe. You knew the General and can probably imagine what a hold his honest nature had made upon the Citizens generally, and the characteristics of the man seemed the very ones needed in the Chief Magistrate during the peculiar Crisis that existed at the time; Congress appeared alarmed as though some Providence was working mysteries in their midst and partizans of every type hesitated in their usual course of vituperation and abuse—his death seemed to work a change of feeling in the Political World, and even yet it has not quite recovered from the shock.—But all this you can understand: from the papers that reach you:—The House of Reps at the very time of the President's illness, were considering the Galphin business, and after voting Censure to Crawford for be'g the Attorney for the Claims—Meredith for paying the interest, and Johnson for giving his legal opinion that Interest was due on the Claims, voted also that President Taylor was blameable for saying that he saw no reason for Crawford [not] remaining in the Cabinet pending the settlement of a Claim (in which he was interested,) in another Dept of the Govt.; General Taylor never knew of this vote—Yet he was waiting for the decision of the house to

2 William W. S. Bliss had married Taylor's daughter Mary Elizabeth, and had served as the General's principal aide during the Mexican War.

3 He ate not only vegetables, but ripe cherries and cold milk as well.

4 The Galphin matter was an old claim upon Georgia antedating the Revolution. George W. Crawford, Taylor's Secretary of War, had been attorney for the claimants on a contingent fee of one half the proceeds since 1835. In 1848 Congress directed the payment, and during Polk's administration Crawford secured his money, $43,518.97, but no interest. In 1850 Crawford prevailed upon his colleagues to allow interest from May 2, 1777, which decision netted him an additional $94,176.44. A scandal resulted.

5 William Meredith, Secretary of the Treasury.

6 Reverdy Johnson, Attorney General.
change his Cabinet—Crawford was certainly to leave and Clayton too. But his death precipitated all, and he was hardly cold before the entire cabinet resigned—Several was requested to remain, but it was deemed better that all should go out and a new Cabinet organized.—You have heard of the new Cabinet—Ewing has gone into the Senate, whilst Corwin is the Sec'y of the Treasury. Bates of Missouri was appointed Secretary of War, but declines and it is not known who will be appointed—Mr. Fillmore is very successful in keeping his own Counsel—Gentry of Tennessee is spoken of but the fact is the Whig party acted so bad toward Gen Taylor and his Cabinet, in withholding a Support to which they were entitled makes it difficult to get Gentlemen of known abilities to accept Cabinet appointments. General Scott is now here Acting Secretary of War, and I do not know but that the President will take his time in filling Crawfords vacancy, to let General Scott have a chance of putting things in proper trim. I wrote to Col. Hooker that I had spoken to Bliss in March last, upon the subject of giving you the Breth Com mand of Maj Gen and of his promise. It was fulfilled but partially, viz giving you the rank to date with the order 17 of April, and had Crawford been at all liberal he would have given it retrospective effect to date with your assignment to the Comd of the Division. So long as he remained in Office, I did not pretend to apply or represent the necessity of any change, but as soon as Crawford went out and General Scott came in, I called on him and represented to him, the true state of the case, and asked him as an act of pecuniary justice to you, to rectify the error: he told me that he was from the outset, determined that you should have the rank of Maj Gen during your Command of the Division, and if it depended on him he would have it done: but it will depend upon President Fillmore, and how far he will be willing to go behind his installation to power, to give Military

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7 John M. Clayton, Secretary of State.
8 Thomas Ewing, Secretary of the Interior.
9 Thomas Corwin, Senator from Ohio, now to become Secretary of the Treasury.
10 Edwin Bates, later Lincoln's Attorney General.
11 Millard Fillmore of New York, Vice-President, who succeeded Taylor.
12 Meredith Gentry, Member of Congress.
14 Col. Joseph Hooker, later the Civil War general defeated at Chancellorsville, now adjutant at San Francisco, succeeding Sherman.
orders is a question which I am yet unable to solve. I consulted with Scott's aid, and certain officers who advised me if I could, to find some application from you on the subject, and thinking you had made an application to that effect from Panama I examined the file of your letters in the Adjutant Generals office but could find none to that effect. I then addressed a letter in my own name, saying that it was entirely without your knowledge or authority, representing the fact that you had commanded the Division from Feb 23, 1849, until April 17, 1850, with the rank and pay of Brig Gen, which was entirely insufficient during that very period of time, and urged, for obvious reasons, that the order of April 17 should have retrospective effect to the 23 Feb 1849.—Now it is a way officious and impertinent for me to make an application in your behalf, especially as I am interested in the result, and the chief reason for my doing so was that I honestly think you fairly entitled to the increased pay, and that it is my duty to accomplish it if possible. My letter to Gen Scott as Secretary of War will have no effect save to bring the subject before him officially, which you know is of some importance. . . .

The General impression is, that when a Secretary of War is installed General Scott will move his Head Qrs to this City, considerable difficulty having been experienced by the division of the Office. As yet however Col Freeman is at New York City, and that is nominally the Head Qrs.—

A Bill has passed the Senate and is likely to pass the House, making four Captains in the Subsistence Dept. If I can get one of them I will, but doubt my chance. The fact that I passed through the war without a Brevet is quoted as evidence of want of zeal, courage or efficiency—it is a load about my neck, and I might as well sink to an obscure corner first as last. —A Bill has also passed the House, by a strong Majority, granting to officers and soldiers of every war, the Last war with England, all Indian wars &c bounty lands—If this pass the Senate, I do not know but that I'll renew my old plan, of buying some land in Iowa, and try my hand at farming.—to this

15 William G. Freeman.
16 One of Winfield Scott's peculiarities was his aversion to having his headquarters in Washington, in the same city as the Secretary of War, and he had set up for himself in New York.
17 Sherman did receive one of these captaincies.
18 Sherman was always buying land, but he never became a farmer.
end I have preferred and obtained orders for St Louis, and shall start in that direction the day after tomorrow.—My leave expires the 31st of August, but as the Cholera is still on the Ohio River and at St Louis, I shall delay my departure from Ohio, until it is safe at St Louis—I suppose you have learned that General Mason died of the Cholera some days ago—we have the telegraphic Report, but not the detailed account by Mail. He was always subject to Bowel complaint, and such predisposes to the Cholera.—General Wool was prominently spoken of, in several Conventions as Candidate of the Democratic party for Governor of New York, but he has positively declined being a candidate, doubtless trusting to be the successor of General Scott, but I take great pleasure in saying that to all appearances General Scott has many years before him yet—he looks remarkably well, especially since his installation as Acting Secretary of War.—he too has much more influence now than under Gen Taylor, and his appearance as to health seems to depend much upon his official position. I dined with Gen Wool one day, and he seemed very well satisfied with himself—Gen Twiggs was also here, a few days before my return. I have not seen him, nor do I know where he is, but I suppose he will this fall resume command of the Western Division and have his Head Quarters at New Orleans.—Bliss has gone to Baltimore in charge of Gen Taylor's family which is now living in the Eutaw house in Baltimore—Mrs Dr Wood, is there, the Doctors station. Mrs Bliss is now quite unwell from the grief & distress consequent upon the General's death—Gen T. had sold his former plantation, but had bought another below New Orleans, where his son now is, but Mrs Taylor says she is not acquainted in the neighborhood and does not want to go there—I saw Bliss a few days ago, but he did not know what would be their ultimate destination.—It may be gratifying for you to know that Gen Taylor in his life time in conversation with his Cabinet &

19 Richard B. Mason, who was Sherman's commander at Monterey.
20 John E. Wool.
21 David E. Twiggs, later cashiered for treason in the surrender of the whole of Texas to the Confederacy.
23 Richard Taylor.
others frequently spoke of you in terms of more than his usual commendation & praise. Mr Ewing has told me this.—

A Bill is in Committee of the Senate to confer on Gen¹ Scott, the Title, Rank, &c of Lieut General as reward for his distinguished services &c—this is not to be a distinct grade—to be filled by Promotion, but to be confined to General Scott—if Congress have time to consider the Bill it will pass, as there is displayed on all occasions a disposition to honor the General—²⁴

Mr Burt,²⁵ Chairman of the Committee of Military affairs in the House told me yesterday I might write you that the military committee will press upon the House this Session, and the next too if they cannot be brought to consider it this Session, a Bill *materially* to increase the pay &c of officers serving in California and Oregon—Many plans and suggestions had been made them, and they had not fully agreed upon the Bill to be reported, but he said I could write that he and his associates would do all in their power to relieve the officers on the Pacific Station—I believe Mr. Burt and the Committee to be sincere, and also that if Congress can be brought to act on the Bill, that it will pass, but the “furor loquendi” has siezed all hands, and the probability is that even this Session will terminate without admitting California—or even passing the usual appropriation Bills—the Quarter Masters Dept and several other Depts have no money, and yet here is August, and the usual bills for the year that began last month have not passed.—

Throughout the entire country, peace plenty, and prosperity are manifest and yet from the debates on the floor of the Senate of which I am a constant (lobby) member, the Country stands upon the brink of a precipice, and scarce a day passes in the Senate, without the rights of nullification, secession and dissolution are discussed, and what am¹ of oppression will justify secession—I hope and believe it will all come out straight, but the Georgia Senators²⁶ say that the Governor of their State²⁷ is compelled to cause a Convention to be called, in case California be admitted with her limits as prescribed in her Constitution, at which convention such admission of Cali-

²⁴ This bill was not passed until 1855.
²⁵ Armistead Burt of South Carolina, Member of Congress.
²⁶ J. M. Berrien and William C. Dawson.
²⁷ George W. B. Towns.
fornia is to be construed as an act of the General Gov't sufficiently oppressive to justify secession—The general voice in South Carolina is the same; many of the Southern Senators but not near all, entertain similar views, and in them is no doubt that a bill will pass the Senate by a strong vote, admitting California as she is, the fear of being accused of backing out may induce men to do what, unpledged, they would not think of.—I doubt whether the Southern people, or a tenth part of them would conceive the simple admission of California south of 36° 30' as a breach of the National Compact, justifying a dissolution of the Union—but this is not the immediate danger.—You have read of course of Maj Neighbors mission to Santa Fe, to organize that Country into Counties under the Laws of Texas, the general refusal of the People to submit to such organization, and their call upon Colonel Monroe, Comd, for protection, and asking him furthermore to summon a Convention, to follow the example of California, organize a State Gov't, elect Senators & Representatives, and to demand admission into the Union.

Maj Neighbors hastened back to Texas, and meetings of the people were called, in which the Officers, and the General Gov't were denounced for "taking from Texas" a large and settled portion of this Country, which the State claims as within the limits prescribed by herself when admited, and which she contends were always acknowledged to be hers, and to enforce her claim to which she now alleges we went to war with Mexico.

These complaints have been laid before the General Gov't, with the proclamation of the Governor of Texas (Bell) for the Legislature to assemble August 12, to devise measures to establish their Civil Authority over all the Country east of the Rio Grande. The death of General Taylor has interrupted the operation of the Gen't Gov't but it is now openly acknowledged that the opinion of Gen. Taylor was that Texas had no rightful Claim to the Santa Fe Country, that the United States are in occupation, and that she must retain occupation by force of arms, yea even to the shedding of blood, until Congress devise some settlement of Boundary—

This Boundary question entered largely into the discussion of

28 Robert S. Neighbors. Texas was claiming half of the present state of New Mexico.
29 John Munroe, commander at Fort Marcy, Santa Fé.
30 Peter H. Bell.
what is notorious to us here, and I suppose to you too as the Omnibus Bill,\(^{31}\) and in that discussion the Texas Senators\(^{32}\) would not yield an inch of their claims to all the Country east of the Rio Grande. It was proposed to make a Boundary and give Texas Ten Millions, but that would not pass—it was then proposed to leave the whole subject to the Supreme Court, to this the Texas Senators would not assent, and finally to leave the subject to Commissioners.—But the Texas Senators would not consent to this except with a proviso that the Territorial bill should not go into effect till the Commissioners came to a Conclusion.—Upon this a terrible senatorial fight—such eloquence, such manoeuvring I never before heard or saw, but it resulted in the death of the omnibus bill, and as the papers are full of it I'll refer you to them.—No one doubts that Texas will not surrender her Claims to New Mexico without a large price, and her Senators would not vote for any Compromise except ten millions or an inferential right to extend her jurisdiction over all New Mexico east of the River.\(^{33}\) A little fact transpired of which I will write, though it is not generally known—Texas did establish her authority on the East side of the River opposite El Paso, including the settlement and military post of Doña Ana; this post was Commanded by Enoch Steen, Bvt Maj 1st Drags.—Now it appears that Texas owns all the land within her borders (reserved to pay her public debt) and has passed a law selling to individuals a patent for one league of ground, to be located on unoccupied land; these patents are transferable, and Steen bought one of a Citizen of Texas, and located it right over the houses and fields of the little settlement of Doña Ana. It appears that this place is a settlement of very limited extent of about 4000 souls, who, and whose forefathers have lived there years without number, cultivating little patches of vegetables, vines and corn, to sell to the traders passing to & from, between New Mexico and Chihuahua.—Col Monroe reports the spot of limited extent and the last are fit for a settlement before entering upon the celebrated “Jornado del Muerto”\(^{34}\)—therefore an important military position—

\(^{31}\) When it was realized that one bill, the Omnibus, incorporating all the features of the Compromise of 1850, would fail, five different bills were devised in the hope that all would pass by various separate combinations of votes.

\(^{32}\) Sam Houston and Thomas J. Rusk.

\(^{33}\) Under the Compromise of 1850, Texas' claim was denied and her debts paid in return.

\(^{34}\) The Jornada del Muerto is a desert west of the San Andrés range in New Mexico.
When Steen was called on to explain himself—he acknowledged the fact, but says that Texas alone having jurisdiction in the case, he will defend his title before their courts. I do not know, but suppose the people as usual are poor, and have no written titles to their land, only the prescription rights given by occupation. How far Texas juries and Texas courts would enforce such rights are questionable, but I know this case forms one reason, why Texas should not be allowed even the temporary authority in New Mexico, until Congress can devise some means to settle the cursed question—Steen is relieved from command of his company and ordered to Fort Leavenworth—Though his duty under the Treaty was to protect the lives, property and religion of the inhabitants of the Country, it is decided that the facts did not constitute a Military offence, but yet was sufficient cause to remove him from his command.—The troops in Texas will be reinforced, only by filling the companies to the full standard, and I infer that President Fillmore has reiterated Gen. Taylors previous determined orders—When the Legislature of Texas meets the 12 of August, (even should Congress not have acted on the Boundary question,) and learns that the status quo will be maintained, I feel sure her threats will change their complexion, or even if they resolve by force to extend the State jurisdiction to embrace Santa Fe, that she will not have the credit to raise the men or money.—Even an effort to do so will be exceedingly unfortunate to our Country, and it is the universal clamor for Congress to pass some law, it dont matter what—any law not absolutely disgraceful will be welcomed by all good men—this cry of civil war, secession &c is becoming too common, and the common even may soon become habituated to it, and think it less to be deplored than we have been accustomed to regard it.—Mr Ewing says that every measure embraced in the Compromise can pass, each by good majorities, if taken singly—they have failed joined together, and this coming week must prove or disprove the last assertion.

To be brief is a Military virtue but you must remember for six months have I been loafering about among Citizens, a great portion of the time in this city among politicians when words words are all the go but this is the last sheet of paper in my wifes portfolio, and you must thank her for the conclusion of my letter.

The question of making Benicia a Port of Entry is now prominent
in the view of the Senators Committee on Commerce and they are favorably disposed towards it—I pointed out to the Adjutant General the paragraphs in your letters, description of the superior mercantile & naval advantages of the site over that of San Francisco.—Com
Jones reports confirm yours—so do Maj Allen's—but it appears that Folsom in the most exaggerated terms ridiculed Benicia, and eulogised San Francisco, which views are confirmed by Gwin and Gilbert, and by the fact that San Francisco has become so great a City, whilst Benicia has remained apparently obscure.—Your last report confirming your previous ones are now before the Committee and I think make them report favorably, but the Committee are somehow impressed that speculation, and office seeking is at the bottom of it, that they do not act promptly—a Gentleman named Stewart—father of Stewart who was Commodore Jones Secretary in the Ohio, brought me a few days since, a slip cut out of a Philadelphia paper, speaking of Benicia, and openly accusing you and Commodore Jones with lending your official positions to aid the growth of Benicia, and thereby advance your personal interests—it further called upon Congress to call upon the War & Navy Depts to know what monies had been expended and for what purposes &c all condemnatory: Mr. Stewart told me he was then before the Committee and I requested him to say to the Members of said Committee that the Report was false in every respect as applied to you, and that if they wanted to know your reasons for selecting Benicia, they could find out by a call for your correspondence—it was called for—I further addressed a letter to the Chairman giving the lie to the newspaper article, and offering to testify to the circumstances that occurred to my knowledge in your Selection of the present Depot. It was not deemed necessary.—I merely mention this to show how easy it is for slander to be started, and I fear some people in San Francisco are at the bottom of it to prevent Benicia interfering with the interests of San Francisco.—I read with great interest your report of your tour from San Diego to Benicia, and really should have liked

35 Thomas Ap Catesby Jones, commander of the Pacific Squadron.
36 Robert Allen.
37 Joseph L. Folsom, Collector of the Port of San Francisco, 1846–1848.
38 William M. Gwin, first Senator from California.
39 Edward Gilbert, one of the first members of Congress from California.
to be along, but so long as things remain as now I should not like to
serve in Califor* especially as a Line Officer—desertion of men,
smallness of pay in proportion to expenses, and the arrangement of
the seasons combine to make military service there undesirable.—I
should like very much to hear from Gibbs* or Col Hooker, but can
not ask them to write, as they doubtless have their usual corres-
pondents, and do not feel disposed to increase the List. Give them
my best wishes for their comfort and prosperity.—Say to Lt. David-
son* or Stoneman* if still at Sonoma, that Capt Smith* will be
ordered to Carlisle Barracks* in September, but no move is yet made
to his ultimate destination.

Accept the assurances of my high respect & esteem, and believe
me ever ready to serve you.

Most truly &c

W. T. Sherman

General Smith
California

* Alfred Gibbs.
* John W. Davidson.
* George Stoneman, Jr.
* Andrew J. Smith, commander at Sonoma.
* Carlisle, Pa.