Benjamin F. Austin Gold Rush correspondence

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Descriptive Summary

Title: Benjamin F. Austin Gold Rush correspondence
Dates: 1850-1854
Collection Number: SFH 443
Creator/Collector: Austin, Benjamin F., 1821-1855
Extent: 1 folder
Repository: San Francisco Public Library. San Francisco History Center
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Language of Material: English
Access
The collection is open for research.

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Acquisition Information
Napa County Historical Society, 2016

Biography/Administrative History
Benjamin F. Austin was born in New London, Connecticut and left that city in late October 1849 as second mate on the Alexander. Settling in San Francisco, he bought an interest in the schooner Sarah Lavinia, and was later captain of the schooner Odd Fellow. His death occurred at sea, February 19, 1855 when the main boom of the Odd Fellow knocked him overboard.

Scope and Content of Collection
Eight letters written by Austin, San Francisco, to his sister, Miss Mary E. Austin of New London, Connecticut. He writes of working the Sacramento River in 1850 on the schooner Sarah Lavinia, alongside Captain Israel Sweet. Austin and Sweet spend the better part of 1851 fishing in the Sandwich Islands. Returning to San Francisco, he buys a quarter interest in the schooner Odd Fellow, with Richard Smith buying a quarter and Sweet buying half. He describes the 1850 explosion on the steamer Sagamore in San Francisco and loss of life, and his aid to victims; Austin mentions the grounding of the steamer Tennessee, and the 1853 wreck of the steamer Independence and Captain Jeffrey, who came to its aid. Austin notes New Londoners who have come to California, including ship masters and their vessels. To Austin, San Francisco is “worse than Sodom and Gomorrah.” He reports that sailing and whaling are more lucrative ventures than mining. Austin receives few letters, and humorously bemoans his bachelor state, often referring to Sarah King in New London, and their bargain. John, who has gone to the mines, is often mentioned; this may be John Lewis, with whom he boarded in New London.

Indexing Terms
Seafaring life
Shipowners
Schooners
Bachelors--California--San Francisco
Wages--California--San Francisco
Gold mines and mining--California
Sweet, Israel, d. 1896
Austin family
Odd Fellow (schooner)
Sarah Lavinia (schooner)
Sagamore (steamer)
San Francisco (Calif.)--History--19th century
San Francisco (Calif.)--Social life and customs--19th century