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The Cape Horn Route to California, 1849

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IT IS A HISTORICAL paradox that a hundred years ago Cape Horn was less remote than it is today. Though distant some seven thousand miles to the south of the principal North Atlantic ports, and months away in time, it was intimately known to countless Yankee seamen who had sighted it from the decks and crosstrees of whalers and merchantmen; its name had a familiar ring to Easterners and Westerners alike. In 1849 the Horn was rounded by more Americans than in any previous year—thus becoming still better known.¹ This great increase in traffic is a chapter in the story of the rush for California which followed President Polk's official acknowledgment before Congress, December 5, 1848, that gold had been found on the American River. The reasons are plain why so many chose the Cape Horn route to the gold fields. It could be undertaken at once; the necessary maritime facilities were at hand in the populous coastal cities; an all-sea voyage was a more familiar mode of transportation to most Easterners—New Yorkers and New Englanders, particularly; and a through sea route enabled enterprising emigrants to

¹ Examination of the Matthew F. Maury log-book collection Descriptive List, in the United States Department of Agriculture Archives, Weather Bureau, Marine Division, in the National Archives, shows a small increase for 1849 over 1848 and a great increase over all other previous years, but all types of vessels are included. Doubtless most Argonauts were in too much haste to cooperate in Maury's nautical surveys.

A list of vessel arrivals in San Francisco, from March 31, 1849, to January 1, 1850, including home port and number of passengers, was compiled by the Society of California Pioneers and appeared in the San Francisco *Bulletin*, April 11, 1896, p. 20, under the title: "Ships That Came Here in '49," by Peer Tiffany.

"Boats Arriving in San Francisco Bay from March 26, 1849, to December 30, 1849," Society of California Pioneers *Quarterly*, I (1924), No. 4, pp. 36-45, reprints the records kept by Edward A. King, Acting United States Surveyor and Harbormaster; this tabulation includes name and class of ship, home port, and nationality of passengers.

See also the *California State Register, 1857*, for an aggregate tonnage figure; Theodore H. Hittell, *History of California* (4 vols., San Francisco, 1885-1897), II, 698, 700, summarizes 1849 traffic; Rockwell D. Hunt and William S. Ament, *Oxcart to Airplane* (Los Angeles, 1929), 310, 343, gives total figures on ships and passengers.

Pertinent estimates of the number of forty-niners utilizing the Cape Horn route are at the end of this paper.

carry baggage that could be disposed of at high prices in the San Francisco sellers' market.²

It was not possible to use the overland route in the dead of winter, but the sea route south of the equator was always open and at its best in that season. So, they reasoned, why not seize this opportunity to reach the gold country before the Westerners, who were closer to California by many hundreds of miles? Moreover, ships were available in profusion; and was not the ocean the traditional Yankee highway? Besides, the overland trek would be one of great discomfort and unknown hazards, whereas in most coastal cities there were mariners who were well acquainted with the Horn route and who knew precisely how to prepare for a voyage to California. Then there were Argonauts who foresaw the broad needs and demands of a mining center on the Pacific Coast and who brought along goods of all descriptions and sizes, from needles to knocked-down steamboats, on which they hoped to realize good profits.³ Indeed, some had no intention of panning gold or of digging for it in the mines; they would rather sell all they could sail through the Golden Gate—even the ship in which they arrived—or perhaps utilize their supplies and machinery to establish themselves in a business which the new mining community would support. After all, gold was the objective; what did it matter whether the means of attaining it were direct or indirect?

Notwithstanding its advantages, the Cape Horn route was yet a challenge. Lieutenant Matthew F. Maury is authority for the statement that: "The California passage is the longest and most tedious within the domains of Commerce; many are the vicissitudes that attend it. . . . It tries the patience of the navigator and taxes his energies to the very utmost. . . ."⁴ Seventeen thousand miles of ocean, more or less, roll between New England, Cape Horn, and California, and they include almost every variety of climate and weather known to exist: the cold, gusty North Atlantic, the calms of Cancer, the tropical Torrid Zone with its uncertain breezes, the calms of Capricorn, the frigid and violent Antarctic climate off the Horn, and the somewhat similar conditions encountered—in reverse order—on the run from 56 degrees south latitude to San Francisco.

² The reasons are made clear in Octavius T. Howe, *Argonauts of '49* (Cambridge, 1923), 46-47; additional analysis is in John C. Parish, "By Sea to California," 124-131, in James F. Willard and Colin B. Goodykoontz, eds., *The Trans-Mississippi West* (Boulder, 1930).

³ An unusually full journal, which illustrates this practical approach to the gold rush is Daniel H. Smith, *Journal of a Voyage from Newburyport, Massachusetts, to San Francisco, California, in the Brig Ark*, Charles Marsh, Master, October 31, 1849-May 25, 1850, pp. 22 ff. It is on deposit in the Library of Congress.

⁴ Matthew F. Maury, *Explanations and Sailing Directions* (7th ed., Philadelphia, 1855), 321; Plate XVIII; see also Ernest Seyd, *California and Its Resources* (London, 1858), map facing p. 168.

The nature of the passage and the length of the average voyage in miles and time—often more than six months—meant unusual supply difficulties. Large amounts of fresh water were required for the trip, and, as it sometimes went foul in its inadequate containers, or, if the time of the voyage was lengthened by adverse weather conditions, it was common practice to stop en route in order to take on a new or an additional supply. Rio de Janeiro, Santa Catharina Island, Juan Fernández Island, Talcahuano, Valparaiso, and Callao were among the favorite watering ports. One or another of them was used (and occasionally abused) by all the emigrant ships and the less numerous paddle-wheel steamers.⁵ The steamers burned an excessive amount of fuel and so were compelled to stop frequently for coal as well as for water. The *California*, for example, made ten calls between New York and San Francisco, and some more inefficient steamers had to burn their interior woodwork to make port.⁶ The vexing problem of inadequate coal depots was solved in part through the planning of the newly established Pacific Mail Steamship Company, some provision being made for the advance delivery of fuel at the several way ports.⁷

More serious were the conventional difficulties of navigation. The run down to the southern tip of South America often was made with a minimum of trouble, but it usually required heroic effort to pass into the Pacific. Argonauts who elected to utilize the Strait of Magellan experienced a passage of from three to six weeks' duration in surroundings so forbidding and monotonous that at times passengers joined crew—or vice versa—in drinking bouts, some ships nearly being wrecked in consequence.⁸ In the narrow channels of the straits the unpredictable currents, tides, and winds were constant hazards, especially to sailing vessels,

⁵ Descriptive accounts of these relays are found in the more than a dozen manuscript forty-niner journals in the Henry E. Huntington Library, San Marino; among the more informative are William H. DeCosta, *Journal of the Passage of Ship Duxbury to San Francisco*; John Hovey, *Journal of a Voyage from Newburyport, Massachusetts, to San Francisco, California, in the Brig Charlotte*; George F. Kent, *Journal of a Gold-hunting Expedition to Upper California, Commenced in the Month of February A.D. 1849, Brig Rodolph*; Charles G. C. Plummer, *Table of Daily Observations Taken on a Trip from Massachusetts to California, around Cape Horn, with Covering Letter, June 30–July 6, Ship Leenore*. The published and unpublished journals in the notes which follow contain similar—though usually less extensive—accounts.

⁶ Victor M. Berthold, *The Pioneer Steamer "California," 1848–1849* (Boston, 1932), 1; Jerry MacMullen, *Paddle-Wheel Days in California* (Stanford University, 1944), chap. 2; anonymous, *The Adventures of a Captain's Wife* (New York, 1877), 9–12; W. C., "A Trip to California in 1849," *Overland*, XIII, 408.

⁷ John H. Kemble, *The Panama Route, 1848–1869* (Berkeley, 1943), discusses thoroughly the problems of steam navigation in the Pacific during these years.

⁸ For example, see Edward E. Chever, "Through the Straits of Magellan in 1849," *Society of California Pioneers Quarterly*, IV (1927), 138–150.

which had to battle wind and wave much longer than steamers. Even so, the latter were not immune from the natural eccentricities of Tierra del Fuego. One side-wheeler anchored in seventy feet of water late one evening, only to find herself high and dry next morning. But, in plucky Yankee fashion, her captain turned adversity into advantage by dispatching the crew to repair the ship's bottom. The tide returned the same day in the form of a roaring bore, and the voyage was resumed.⁹

The alternative to the Strait of Magellan was Cape Horn itself, reached by the Strait of Lemaire—the passage between Tierra del Fuego and Staten Island—or by a longer route to the east near the Falkland Islands. Steamers shunned both, as the heavy weather prevalent in the region was apt to damage their relatively frail paddles or disable their primitive engines, leaving them to wallow helplessly in the troughs of the great ground swells which usually roll off the cape. Many of the emigrant-carrying brigs and schooners, however, and most of the larger ships took their chances with the Horn and beat their way around it. Some vessels spent more than a month clawing their way west before they were able to bear north to their destination.¹⁰ A few, dismayed or otherwise disabled by persistent storms, were abandoned, their crews and passengers taking to the ships' boats, or if more fortunate, transferring to other vessels hard by.

Once the Horn had been rounded, the hardest part of the voyage lay astern, and the gold seekers pressed on with renewed hope and determination. Fear of the Cape Horn transit, so evident in many journals, evaporated by the time they reached 50 degrees south latitude.¹¹ Except for stops to take on water and fresh produce or coal, the Pacific voyage often was uneventful for both sailing vessel and steamship until they approached the equator. In its vicinity, as at Callao, steamers began to embark appreciable numbers of passengers along with their coal and to prepare for the call at Panama, where there were always more waiting for passage than could be easily accommodated. Somehow, most of these

⁹ *The Adventures of a Captain's Wife*, 12.

¹⁰ Albert W. Bee, *Voyage from New York to California on the Ship South Carolina*, Sailing from New York January 24, 1849, Arriving in San Francisco June 30, 1849, pp. 18–20; this journal, on deposit in the library of the California Historical Society, recounts a 35-day fight against the elements off the Horn.

¹¹ Illustrations of this state of mind are in Bee, *ibid.*, 18–20; Thomas Sherman, *Log Book of Ship Euphrasia*, Voyage from Newburyport to California, November 7, 1849–May 26, 1850, on deposit in the Essex Institute, Salem; L. J. Hall, *Around the Horn in '49* (Wethersfield, Conn., 1898), 116 ff.; Frank Lecouvreur, *From East Prussia to the Golden Gate* (New York, 1906), 121–144; Edwin F. Morse, "The Story of a Gold Miner," *California Historical Society Quarterly*, VI (1927), 212.

excited people were taken aboard, and, after several additional stops for fuel, the steamers splashed northward to make San Francisco.

When wind-driven ships reached the Torrid Zone, they found themselves in an area of baffling and contrary breezes which forced them far out into the Pacific—sometimes as distant as 140 degrees west longitude—before they encountered favorable winds or a well-directed storm to blow them to the California coast.¹² Coming as close as they did to the Hawaiian Islands, some Argonauts were tempted to put in at Honolulu for refreshment, but most drove doggedly on; one latecomer was forced to work four degrees north of San Francisco before catching a favorable onshore wind.¹³

The last hazards to California-bound vessels were the approach and entrance to San Francisco Bay. The Farallones were the graveyard of several, and the narrow, fog-shrouded opening into the bay was always a danger. The Golden Gate was not easily attained. Once inside, vessels were reported and identified to the people of San Francisco by the watchman on Telegraph Hill. Upon receiving the proper signal from his lookout, he hoisted up the telegraph mast one semaphore arm for a schooner, two for a brig, and three for a ship.¹⁴

Immediately upon Polk's verification of the rumored discovery of gold, the rush to California began—and from both shores of the Atlantic. The first vessel subsequently to clear an American port for the gold fields by way of Cape Horn was the bark *J. W. Coffin*, Captain Martin commanding, which stood out of Boston harbor December 7; the *Saltillo* and the *Carib* followed close in her wake.¹⁵ Resolved not to lose another moment, thousands in the eastern states and in Europe feverishly prepared for the voyage. It was reported that in December and the first weeks of 1849, Englishmen invested more than £1,000,000 in emigrant companies alone. Distressed by the effects of the potato crop failure of 1846, Irishmen who still possessed the price of a ticket to California journeyed to Liverpool to board packets bound for the west coast of South America, where they hoped to secure passage to San Francisco.¹⁶ Restless Germans, dissatisfied with the outcome of the revolutions of 1848 and eager for an economic

¹² See C. W. Haskins, *The Argonauts of California* (New York, 1890), 35. Maury's *Sailing Directions* was not widely used by the Argonauts, as it was shortly afterwards by clipper masters; his recommendations could have saved them many weeks of sailing.

¹³ Joseph Lamson, *Round Cape Horn* (Bangor, 1878), 107.

¹⁴ The system is described in Ezekiel I. Barra, *A Tale of Two Oceans* (San Francisco, 1893), 190.

¹⁵ Howe, *op. cit.*, 47.

¹⁶ See Thomas Kerr, "An Irishman in the Gold Rush," *California Historical Society Quarterly*, VII (1928), 205; Howe, *op. cit.*, 10, summarizes the interest in England.

opportunity, became infected with the gold fever, secured space aboard Pacific-bound ships at Hamburg and Bremerhaven, and headed for Cape Horn.¹⁷ Frenchmen, too, became Argonauts; Alexandre Dumas (*père*) met one of them and recorded his California experiences in a "best seller" of the 'fifties.¹⁸

But the great majority of those who came out round the Horn were from the United States. As those from inland flocked to the harbor towns, their numbers added weight to the groups of local citizens already preparing for the voyage. Shipowners and the more venturesome businessmen acted promptly to meet the high-pitched demand for immediate transportation and the calculated demand for goods in the gold region. Accordingly, the better ships were retained by their owners, overhauled, and refitted to accommodate both passengers and freight; the poorer ones—many seemingly beyond repair—were sold at auction to the highest bidders "to carry gold seekers & flour barrels around the Horn."¹⁹ Some of this battered fleet put in to Valparaiso, Rio de Janeiro, even Charleston, in distress, the stranded passengers experiencing the greatest transportation difficulties before reaching the gold fields. Passengers not organized into companies paid for passage to California amounts which varied according to the demand for space and the type of vessel and accommodation. Edwin Franklin Morse, a passenger in late 1849, was one of 113 gold seekers aboard the *Cheshire*, all of whom paid approximately \$150 each for a ticket to San Francisco.²⁰ Since such vessels carried freight also—and at rates up to \$60 a ton—it is clear that ocean shipping during the rush realized very liberal returns.

The greater part of the emigration from New England took the rather unusual form of joint stock companies in which each member participated equally in the fortunes of the organization.²¹ These societies contemplated commercial activities as well as mining and usually purchased their own vessels to carry the party to San Francisco. Some 124 emigrant companies were formed in Massachusetts alone; their shares cost from \$50 to \$1,000; they ranged in number from 6 to 150 members; and they sailed in, or both owned and sailed in, ships of from small yacht size to

¹⁷ Fritz Boehmer, "Early Days in California," *Society of California Pioneers Quarterly*, IV (1927), 88; Lecouvreur, *op. cit.*, 73.

¹⁸ Translated into English by Marguerite E. Wilbur and published as *A Gil Blas in California* (Los Angeles, 1933).

¹⁹ Quoted in Robert G. Albion, *The Rise of New York Port, 1815-1860* (New York, 1935), 356. A number of the more inferior craft were old whalers and coastal vessels.

²⁰ Morse, *op. cit.*, 206.

²¹ The history of the Massachusetts companies is set forth comprehensively in Howe, *op. cit.*

packets of 700 tons.²² Many another seaboard state was the scene of similar organization, equally spontaneous;²³ and in Paris, according to one observer, "the sole topic of conversation . . . was the gold mines of California. On every street corner companies were being organized for the transportation of travelers."²⁴ One thousand francs, the cost of membership, was somewhat less expensive than full membership in a New England corporation, but the benefits were correspondingly smaller. The French seemed to consider the voyage something of a gamble with the odds against them. The New Englanders, on the other hand, carefully weighed the probabilities of the venture, some companies going so far as to offer life-insurance policies to their members.

Swift as these preparations were, the Pacific Mail Steamship Company was far ahead in the interoceanic race to be first round the Horn and through the Golden Gate. The *California* had cleared New York on October 6, 1848, beginning her long voyage via the Strait of Magellan to Panama, where she was to inaugurate the Isthmus-California-Oregon service.²⁵ She was followed by the line's second and third paddle-wheelers, the *Oregon*, December 8, and the *Panama*, February 17, 1849. In the meantime, as the *California* was working her way through the strait, Polk had delivered his electrifying message, and the news preceded the vessel to Callao, where for the first time her officers and crew encountered the gold fever. Official influence made room for seventy excited passengers; the rest had to wait for the next ship. When the *California* reached Panama, the shore swarmed with Americans clamoring for passage to San Francisco. The *Falcon*, of the United States Mail Steamship Company, had left New York on December 1, 1848, with relatively few passengers, but at New Orleans they came aboard in a stampede, so that she carried some two hundred voyagers to the isthmus. This number was swelled to over a thousand by following steamers of the same line and by numerous sailing vessels which discharged passengers picked up along the Atlantic and Gulf coasts from Maine to Texas. Pacific Mail ticket agents had oversold their quotas for the *California*, aggravating an already ugly situation, for, with time the most important element in the Argonauts' plans, none wished to wait for the next ship or to take passage on the slow packet, *Philadelphia*, which the line had chartered

²² *Ibid.*, 174-177, summarizes finances; pp. 187-213, lists and epitomizes the records of all these societies.

²³ Bee, *Voyage*, 1-2, describes the organization of an emigrant company of 163 members.

²⁴ Dumas, *op. cit.*, 1.

²⁵ Berthold, *op. cit.*, 12-63, carefully reports the Pacific voyage of this vessel; the following paragraphs are drawn from his account.

to accommodate the overflow. Amid confusion and angry disappointment a compromise was arranged whereby approximately 250 Americans were taken aboard the steamer, and the Peruvians who had embarked at Callao were deprived of their cabins but were permitted to travel on deck.

At long last the steamer put to sea. After quelling a mutiny off Acapulco, her Captain Marshall pointed up the Mexican coast to San Blas and Mazatlan, then rounded the tip of Lower California for the gold country. When fuel ran low, calls for wood were made at San Diego and Monterey; finally she stood in through the Golden Gate on the last day of February, 1849. As she paddled past the five warships of Commodore Thomas ap Catesby Jones's Pacific Squadron, she was saluted with their broadsides, and, as she let go her anchor off Clark's Point, she was roundly cheered from shore. Her return voyage was delayed four and a half months, since all her crew but the third engineer deserted for the mines. When her sister ship, the *Oregon*, put in a month later, her captain ran her under the guns of Commodore Jones's flagship, *Ohio*, and had the crew arrested and put in irons so as to avoid a similar mishap.

The *California* was but the first of a fleet of steamers built in the East for the Pacific coastal service.²⁶ Her successors also arrived via the Horn route, but their maiden voyages were neither as heroic nor as historically significant as hers. The number of passages made by steamers in 1849 is less than might be expected. The explanation is, of course, that most seagoing Pacific steamers were employed in the Panama-California run and thus had occasion to use the Strait of Magellan but once. With their hungry and clumsy engines they were ever in need of fuel and constantly in danger from fire. Pernambuco was frequently their first port of call, more for coal than for passengers, and Rio de Janeiro their second, for the same reason; eight stops for refueling was the average. Need for coal was always the first concern of their crews; this is apparent from the frequent underlining and emphasizing of references to fuel in the journals kept aboard them.²⁷ Wood was more than occasionally utilized to assure arrival at the next port. Seaman and passenger alike were ever on the alert for evidences of fire. This precaution plus the usual depleted state of the coal bunkers and the ready accessibility of the more inflammable areas near the high, walking-beam engines probably account for the comparatively small number of serious conflagrations.

At the height of the gold rush the pressing need for steam navigation

²⁶ Kemble, *op. cit.*, Appendix I, lists all the Pacific Mail steamers.

²⁷ See, for example, *The Adventures of a Captain's Wife*, 11; also W. C., *op. cit.*, 408.

on the California rivers and the high profits to be taken impelled certain shipowners to send steamers to the West Coast by the Strait of Magellan.²⁸ Many navigated under their own power, but some were too fragile for the hard voyage and were brought round the Horn knocked-down and in the hold of a large sailing packet. Such was the experience of the *Lady Washington*, which was reassembled at Sutter's Embarcadero on August 9, 1849, and subsequently carried miners and freight on the San Joaquin and Sacramento rivers. Daniel H. Smith, an enterprising citizen of Newburyport, Massachusetts, was responsible for the presence of the first steamboat on the Napa River. Smith disassembled the small steamer *Lawrence*, shipped the machinery, hull sections, and himself to California, then reassembled the vessel and put it back into commission again.²⁹

A somewhat different and ingenious procedure was followed with the 120-foot stern-wheel steamer *S. B. Wheeler*. She was too frail to make the ocean voyage herself, yet too large to be knocked down, shipped, and reassembled. Her owners were equal to the challenge, however; as she neared completion, they launched and sank a deckless bark before the ways on which she lay, launched and placed the *S. B. Wheeler* directly over the bark, raised that with the steamer inside of her, decked and rigged her, and sent her round the Horn to Benicia. After her arrival, her masts and decks were torn out, she was sunk again, and the *S. B. Wheeler* floated free. As a river steamer she later ran between San Francisco and Stockton.³⁰ These and the other paddle-wheelers which utilized the Cape Horn highway became the familiar river boats of the 'fifties and 'sixties.

Soon after the first gold seekers arrived—either from the Hawaiian Islands, Oregon, and other areas relatively close to the gold fields, or by the first steamers to come through the Golden Gate—schooners, brigs, barks, and ships began to work in from around the Horn. Before long, the trickle became a flood. Some of the first adventurers to make their appearance were the members of the Boston and California Joint Stock Mining and Trading Company, the New England Mining and Trading Company, the Plymouth and California Mining Association, the Old Harvard Company, and the other societies whose vessels had cleared early

²⁸ MacMullen, *op. cit.*, 10. This volume recounts the voyages to California, as well as those within the state.

²⁹ Biographical note on page 2 of Smith, Journal.

³⁰ MacMullen, *op. cit.*, 15.

and had made the faster passages from the Atlantic Coast.³¹ What had transpired since they left New England?

The first leg of their voyage in the North Atlantic, like that of their colleagues who followed, was most often accompanied by high spirits, tempered with a moderate amount of homesickness and seasickness.³² Monthly meetings to elect officers and pass resolutions were the usual thing and were apt to occur first near the date when the vessel crossed the equator for the first time.³³ "Crossing the Line" was seized upon by veterans to break the monotony of the sea voyage and to amuse the company at the expense of the uninitiated, who were inducted, with elaborate and grotesque ceremony, into the order of the "Free Sons of the Ocean" or some other Neptune-sponsored lodge. For example, the ship *Henry Lee*, carrying the members of the Hartford Union Mining and Trading Company, crossed the line on the evening of March 31, whereupon a reasonable facsimile of Neptune climbed aboard, installed his court, and directed the shaving of the neophytes with tar and odd pieces of hoop-iron.³⁴ Though similar rituals were performed on the decks of most company ships, the tastes of the members were usually such as to restrain excesses and forbid brutality.³⁵

Rio de Janeiro was customarily their first port of call, the pleasant surroundings impelling them to remain for several days. More than eighty California-bound vessels stopped at this port during the first three months of 1849, a good number of them transporting American emigrant companies. The Argonauts were inclined to make the most of their initial landfall and generally celebrated their arrival with enthusiasm; sometimes one went too far and spent a day in a Brazilian calaboose for disturbing the peace.³⁶ But serious offenses were rare enough not to spoil the prevailing holiday atmosphere.

As the vessels pointed south again, many were overtaken in the South Atlantic or the South Pacific by the Fourth of July. To the New Englanders in particular this was no ordinary occasion, and it was observed with a will. Speeches, anthems, toasts, and prayers were a part of the day's program, which was concluded more often than not with a reading of

³¹ The appendixes of Howe, *op. cit.*, list the companies and their elapsed times; they required from 145 to 267 days to make the trip.

³² Examples are in Bee, *Voyage*, 2-4; Kent, *Journal*, February entries; Plummer, *Table*, February entries; DeCosta, *Journals*, March entries.

³³ A typical meeting is reported in Theodore Meserve, "The Log of a '49er," *Overland*, LXIV, 397.

³⁴ Hall, *op. cit.*, 60-61.

³⁵ See Bee, *Voyage*, 9; and Kent, *Journal*, March 21 entry.

³⁶ Hall, *op. cit.*, 83.

the Declaration of Independence.³⁷ Their political orations reflected the expansionist fervor of the 'forties. In the peroration of a speech delivered before the passengers of the brig *Sylph*, for instance, George R. Parburt had this to say concerning the Oregon settlement:

I draw a veil over the dastard act which yielded to Great Britain a *splendid territory, indisputably our own, without a blow*. War! War to the hilt! should be the motto of every American, before one foot of *American* soil should be yielded to a foreign foe—and especially to that insatiate plunderer of all nations, that universal pirate of all seas—Great Britain. But let us forget if we can, at least for a while, the sacrifice of Northern Oregon. Let us glory in the magnificence of our great inheritance; and as one star after another takes its place in our glorious Union, and one ocean after another enlarges the area of freedom, and one banner after another trails in the dust before our stripes and stars, we will shout on—

“Forever float that standard sheet,
Nor breathes the foe but falls before it!”³⁸

The toasts proposed and drunk on this holiday remind one of the more recent Russian technique of celebrating. Aboard the *Rodolph* toasts were drunk in succession to “The President of the United States, The Vice-President, The Cabinet, The Governor of Massachusetts, The Lieutenant Governor, The Council, The Army and Navy, The Memory of Washington, Commerce, Agriculture, Manufacturing, Fair Woman.”³⁹

Their passages from ocean to ocean through the strait or around the Horn were frequently beset with difficulty and delay, but these were anticipated, and not a company ship turned back once it had gone this far. Mild weather was rarely met;⁴⁰ more often, furious williwaws buffeted the vessels in the strait, and violent gales tossed the ships beating round the Horn. A typical entry for two days off the cape reads:

May 3

11 A. M. brings another N. West Gale, & 8 P. M. blows with renewed fury
Sea running Sky High

May 4

A regular Tornado 8 P. M. an awful night, chests break loose, and every loose article is thrown about the Ship.⁴¹

³⁷ A published account of a typical patriotic celebration is in Albert Lyman, *Journal of a Voyage to California and Life in the Gold Diggings* (Hartford, 1852), 85–86.

³⁸ This quotation is from a rare volume in the California Historical Society's library, George R. Parburt, *Oration: Delivered on Board the Ship "Sylph" in the Pacific Ocean, July 4, 1849, . . . together with a Brief Account of Her Voyage from Panama to San Francisco* (Geneva, N.Y., 1850), 20; the italicized words were underlined in the published text.

³⁹ Kent, *Journal*, entry for July 4; these were all Kent could remember.

⁴⁰ An easy transit is described in Benjamin F. Mead, "A Reminiscence of '49," *Society of California Pioneers Quarterly*, IX (1932), 119.

⁴¹ Plummer, *Table*.

Yet they appear to have taken the heavy weather in their stride, even racing with one another through the strait or around the cape; "humbugging off the Horn," they called it.

The long days of beating against head winds from Staten Island to 50 degrees south in the Pacific, or from end to end of the strait usually exhausted water casks and food lockers and necessitated a call at the nearest port. An emigrant at Valparaiso in late November, 1849, reported 70 to 80 vessels at anchor in the roadstead, each awaiting its turn for water, and stated that more than half of them were American ships bound for California.⁴² Talcahuano was almost as popular. Some preferred to make Juan Fernández Island, where they explored and hunted, enjoying a welcome despite from the monotony of the sea voyage.⁴³ They were surprised to find the island virtually under the control of a redheaded Yankee from Maine who was making a business of catering to the needs of the forty-niners. According to one observer, he was prospering mightily.⁴⁴

From these ports to San Francisco the voyage was a contest of speed between the emigrant vessels in that vicinity of the ocean; continuity was broken only by occasional stops in some Central American port for repairs to unseaworthy ships. In Puerto Seguro the crew of the Shawmut and California Company's brig *Rodolph* recaptured and returned to her owners the California-bound schooner *Olympia*, which had been stolen by two of her passengers.⁴⁵ The poor condition of the *Rodolph* and the time lost in this adventure placed her so far back in the procession of ships then approaching San Francisco that she was one of the last to arrive of the group that had left the east coast just after Polk's December message. The final weeks of the voyage were mostly given over to preparation for mining operations, though some emigrants were a bit bored by this time. Aboard the *South Carolina* "a premium was offered . . . to any man who would start a subject for conversation that had not already been discussed."⁴⁶ On the *Duxbury*, William H. DeCosta broke off his journal by calling it humbug and consigning it to the devil.⁴⁷

⁴² Enos Christman, *One Man's Gold: The Letters and Journal of a Forty Niner* (New York, 1930), 49.

⁴³ Good descriptions of the island and the excursions of the Argonauts are in Bee, *Voyage*, 23-26; DeCosta, *Journal*, entry for June 16; and Richard L. Hale, *The Log of a Forty Niner* (Boston, 1923), 48-52, ed. by Carolyn Hale Russ.

⁴⁴ DeCosta, *Journal*, entry for June 16.

⁴⁵ Kent, *Journal*, entry for July 30.

⁴⁶ Bee, *Voyage*, 31.

⁴⁷ DeCosta, *Journal*, entry for June 23.

Within three weeks of their arrival in California, every emigrant company had dissolved, their members preferring to search for gold, or to trade, as individuals. The majority of company ships added their spars to the widening forest of masts in San Francisco Bay, some 250 vessels of assorted tonnages being anchored there by August.

The members of companies which did not purchase their own ships secured passage together and traveled in a group. In most respects their experiences were similar to those of the independent organizations, but they did not possess the same freedom of action while on the voyage itself, nor were they able to carry as much merchandise for sale in California. The organized groups from Europe experienced the greatest trials. In addition to their foreign status they had farther to travel, and their ships were not always equal to the rigorous voyage. A Norwegian company, which was late in starting, floundered as far as Rio de Janeiro, but there their vessel was condemned as unseaworthy and had to be abandoned. Some of the members followed the ancient Viking tradition and settled in Brazil; the others eventually reached California.⁴⁸

Gold seekers who traveled as individual passengers could make the trip faster than emigrant company members, especially if they were fortunate enough to book passage on an early clipper.⁴⁹ But those who made the trip in old packets often experienced real discomfort. Their welfare was subordinated to that of the more valuable cargo, and at times masters made the trip so unpleasant for them that they transferred to other vessels at the earliest opportunity.⁵⁰ When the Pacific Mail began operations, sailing vessels sometimes carried coal to the regular ports of call on the Pacific Coast. These ships—as well as regular colliers—appear to have been particularly trying ones in which to travel.

Mrs. D. B. Bates took passage on such a ship, the *Nonantum*; it burned off the Falkland Islands. There she embarked on a similar vessel, the *Humayoon*, which caught fire and sank off the Horn. After being rescued by the *Fanchon*—also destroyed by fire in the Bay of Pechura in Peru—she made her way overland to Payta, where she boarded the *Carbargo* for Panama. Mrs. Bates sailed from the isthmus in the Pacific Mail's *Republic*, which carried her to California without disaster, except for an-

⁴⁸ Theodore C. Blegen, "California-Gull og Brasilbansk Kolonisasjon," *Nordmands-forbundet*, 1930 (special julhefte), 45-48.

⁴⁹ Alexander Laing, *Clipper Ship Men* (New York, 1944), 246. Since only a few 1849 arrivals in San Francisco were clipper-type vessels—the clipper rush not beginning until 1850—no special attention is given to them here.

⁵⁰ Two examples are: George Payson (Ralph Raven, pseud.), *Golden Dreams and Leaden Realities* (New York, 1853), 17; and Barra. *op. cit.*, 134.

other coal fire that was brought under control at Acapulco.⁵¹ Her experiences illustrate the hazards of carrying coal, though doubtless some superstitious seamen aboard the latter several vessels attributed the fires to something else.

In other respects the voyages of company members and independent travelers were much the same. The fate of their ships was also similar; about half of those which entered the Golden Gate never sailed forth again. Their crews deserted them and made for the gold fields with the passengers. Possibly three hundred ships were included in the tangle of masts within San Francisco Bay by late 1849. They had a variety of destinies.⁵² At first some were utilized as homes for the new arrivals, but their situation made them most inconvenient and unpopular. In 1850 enough seamen were found to man a few and to send them out into the channels of commerce again. Some became river boats; others were broken up for building material. A number rotted and sank at their moorings; a few were reprieved by being transformed into stores or prisons and were gradually engulfed by the advancing shore line as the San Francisco water front was filled in.⁵³ Most of those left in 1851 were destroyed by the fire of that year.

There is no precise agreement as to the number of gold seekers who arrived by sea. For the period from April to the end of the year, tabulations run as high as 91,000,⁵⁴ as low as 30,000.⁵⁵ Probably a figure between 35,000 and 40,000, including seamen who deserted, is reasonably accurate. Of this number, about 20,000 evidently took the Horn route.⁵⁶ Roughly 70 per cent of these were Americans. For the same period, 233 vessels are recorded as having arrived in San Francisco from American Atlantic ports—a trifle less than half of the total arrivals.⁵⁷ Regardless of the precision of the tabulations, it is clear that the Cape Horn Argonauts made up a large part of the total migration by sea.

Unlike the forty-niners who followed the overland route, the Horn veterans arrived physically ill-prepared for the hard life in the gold country. They were soft from the months of relative idleness, and the

⁵¹ Mrs. D. B. Bates, *Incidents on Land and Water* (Boston, 1857), 22–92 *passim*.

⁵² "Boats Arriving in San Francisco Bay from March 26, 1849 to December 30, 1849," 32–34, discusses their disposal.

⁵³ Some of these were the *Niantic*, *Euphemia*, *General Harrison*, and *Apollo*.

⁵⁴ *California State Register*, 1857. This figure is an aggregate one and is much too large.

⁵⁵ *San Francisco Bulletin*, April 11, 1896; see footnote 1, above.

⁵⁶ "Boats Arriving in San Francisco Bay from March 26, 1849, to December 30, 1849," 36–45; see footnote 1, above.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*; Hittell, *op. cit.*, II, 698.

sudden change to strenuous manual labor took an inordinately heavy toll of their numbers. Many did not bother to go up to the mines, however, but stayed in San Francisco to resume their regular trades and businesses or to sell their prized freight. Some had this intention from the beginning; some changed their plans when rugged reality confronted them. Others soon took passage home. There can be no doubt that a greater proportion of them than of overlanders returned whence they came.⁵⁸ Yet many of those who remained quickly assumed positions of leadership in the new communities, and they came to exercise an influence upon California out of all proportion to their numbers. In short, the Horn voyagers were less significant in mining than they were in almost everything else.

The rush round the Horn had profound effect upon the course and tempo of American maritime development. The merchant marine had been cleared of much of its old and worn tonnage; few vessels ever came back from California. Accordingly, there existed a shortage of merchant ships—and at a time when the demands of the new California market had sent freight rates skyrocketing. This combination of circumstances had much to do with the quick appearance and the spectacular progress of the clippers during the next decade—the golden age of the American merchant marine.

⁵⁸ Parish, *op. cit.*, *passim*, analyzes their contributions.