



**Barry Lawrence Ruderman
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**(California Gold Rush - First Overland Train From Fort Smith) [Letter to Thomas Gray
from his Nephew Concerning Methods of Getting to California]**

Stock#: 90760

Map Maker: Byrne

Date: 1848

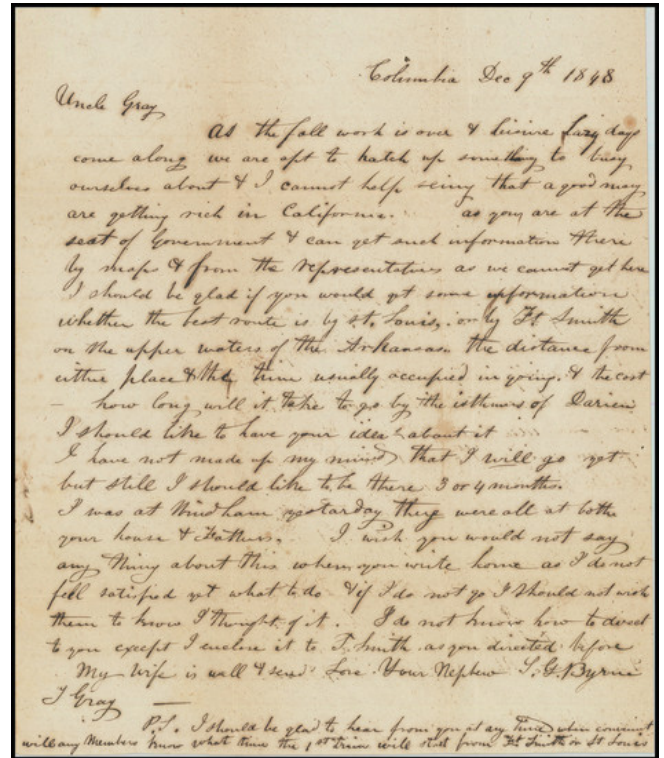
Place: Columbia, (Connecticut?)

Color: Pen & Ink

Condition: VG

Size: 8 x 9 inches

Price: \$ 1,200.00



Description:

**"I should be glad to hear from you at any time convenient will any members know what time the
1st train will start from Ft. Smith on St. Louis"**

Insightful 1848 letter from the earliest Gold Rush period written by a nephew to his powerful uncle in Washington, D.C., looking for information on how best to get to California.

The letter requests that the uncle use his connections to access maps and other information related to the best overland route to get to California. The writer refers to both the traditional St. Louis route, as well as the more unusual Fort Smith route.

While most travelers took the northern route to get to the gold fields, upon which the first wagon train had embarked in 1844, Arkansas and other southern states advertised themselves as astride the shortest route to the gold fields. The first wagon trains going the southwestern route would depart in 1849 (shortly after this letter was written), although most of them started from port cities in Texas.



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The letter writer seems to suggest that Thomas Gray holds some sort of position of power in Washington, D.C., where he would have access to useful documents. Further, he refers to "representatives" and "members," possibly suggesting a congressional connection. Indeed, we do find a Thomas Gray listed as a clerk in the House of Representatives in 1849 as part of the 30th Congress.

It would appear that the letter is written from Columbia, Connecticut. The author mentions visiting "Windham", which is nearby Columbia crossroads in Connecticut. Alternatively, it could be Columbia, South Carolina.

Contents

Transcription of letter:

Columbia Dec 9th 1848

Uncle Gray,

As the fall work is over + leisure lazy days come along we are apt to hatch up something to busy ourselves about + I cannot help seeing [sic] a good many are getting rich in California. As you are at the seat of government + can get such information there by maps + from the representatives as we cannot get here I should be glad if you would get some information whether the best route is by St. Louis, or by Ft. Smith on the upper waters of the Arkansas. The distance from either place + the time usually occupied in going + the cost - how long will it take to go by the isthmus of Darien. I should like to have your idea about it.

I have not made up my mind that I will go yet but still I should like to be there 3 or 4 months.

I was at Windham yesterday they were all at both your house + Father's, I wish you would not say anything about this when you write home as I do not feel satisfied yet what to do + if I do not go I should not wish them to know I thought of it. I do not know how to direct to you except I enclose it to T Smith as you directed before.

My with is well + sends love. Your Nephew S. G. Byrne.

J Gray.

P.S. I should be glad to hear from you at any time when convenient will any members know what



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time the 1st train will start from Ft. Smith on St. Louis.

Detailed Condition:

Pen and ink manuscript on mid-18th century wove paper. With remnants of seal on verso.