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The Civil War in California

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Andrew Jackson Grayson: The Birdman Was a Traitor

By Dr. Robert J. Chandler

Born on a Louisiana plantation, Andrew Jackson Grayson (1819-1869) adopted the politics of his region, but came west to California in 1846, two days before the snow blocked the Donner party. In 1859, the family moved to Mazatlan, where Grayson ran a store, invested in mining and sketched birds for the next ten years. As a former successful merchant in San Francisco and Stockton, his Mazatlan business became a community center. "Pacific" wrote the *Alta California* (May 19) from Mazatlan on April 18, 1860, declaring that Grayson

...keeps a general variety store, has a good stand and his place is the headquarters of most foreign shipmasters, who get their supplies here, and a resort for most Americans living on shore, who are in search of news or goods in his line.

During the War of Northern Aggression, Grayson became an avowed Southern supporter and supplier. First, this "Audubon of the Pacific" forwarded letters between the southern states and San Francisco. Alexander Jones wrote to his brother-in-law attorney Alexander Parker Crittenden from Corpus Christi, Texas, on June 20, 1863, forwarding his letter to Droege, Oetting & Co. in Matamoros. They, in turn, probably sent it to Vera Cruz and then across Mexico to their branch firm, Oetting & Co., in Colima. A short journey brought it to the port of Manzanillo, and then to Grayson in Mazatlan.

For letters to him, Jones told Crittenden to reverse the route. He wrote, "At present, I think you had better get Col. Grayson at

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Gracious Andrew Jackson Grayson, seen here in 1854, remained a Southern gentleman in California and Mexico. When war came, he supported the South with all his heart and ability.

Mazatlan to forward your letters to me through Droege, Oetting & Co., Matamoros," where they would cross into Texas at Brownsville. (Richard C. Frajola, *The Crittenden Correspondence*, Danbury, CT, Auction October 23, 1981, lot #51.)

On September 27, 1863, a California wife in Santa Clara revealed how widespread the knowledge of Grayson's mail service existed

among Southerners. She wrote to her sister in Texas,

A minister was here a few days ago. He told me he sent letters to his friends in different parts of the confederacy and got answers regular. He said if I would write, he could get it through.

The minister added instructions to the Texan, including using double envelopes:

Send letters to J[ose] A. Quintero, Monterey, Mexico, instructing him to forward to Col. A.J. Grayson at Mazatlan who will forward them to Cal., at the same time enclosing 25 cents to pay postage.

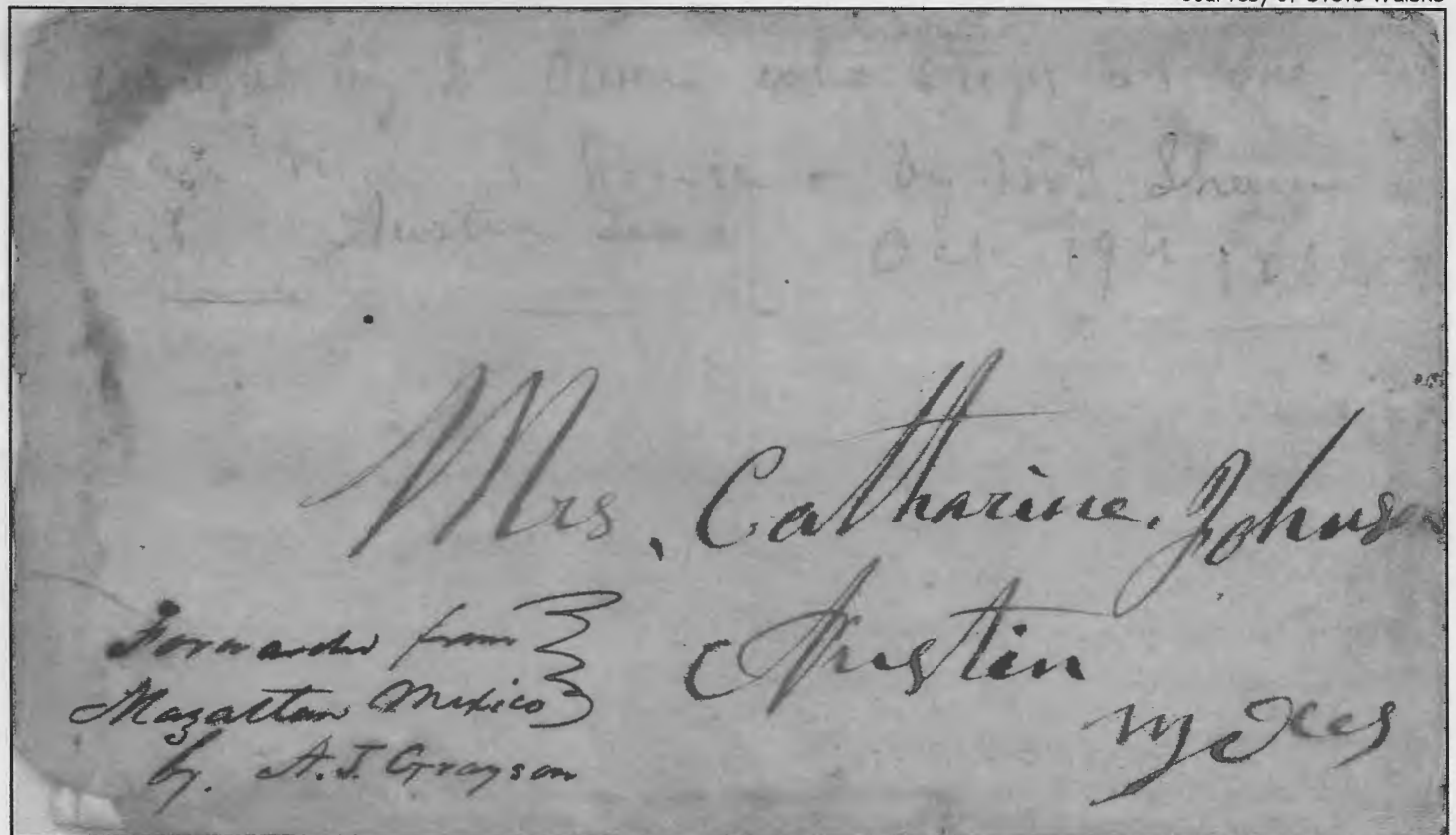
Put your letter into an envelope, seal it, and direct it to your friend in Cal, just as if it were to go by the ordinary

mail; then put that into another, & direct it as above." (PhilaMercury, Cover #5085, Susan Hyde Braly, wife of Cumberland Presbyterian minister John E. Braly, to Mrs. Catherine Hyde Johnson, Austin, TX; Courtesy of Steve Walske).

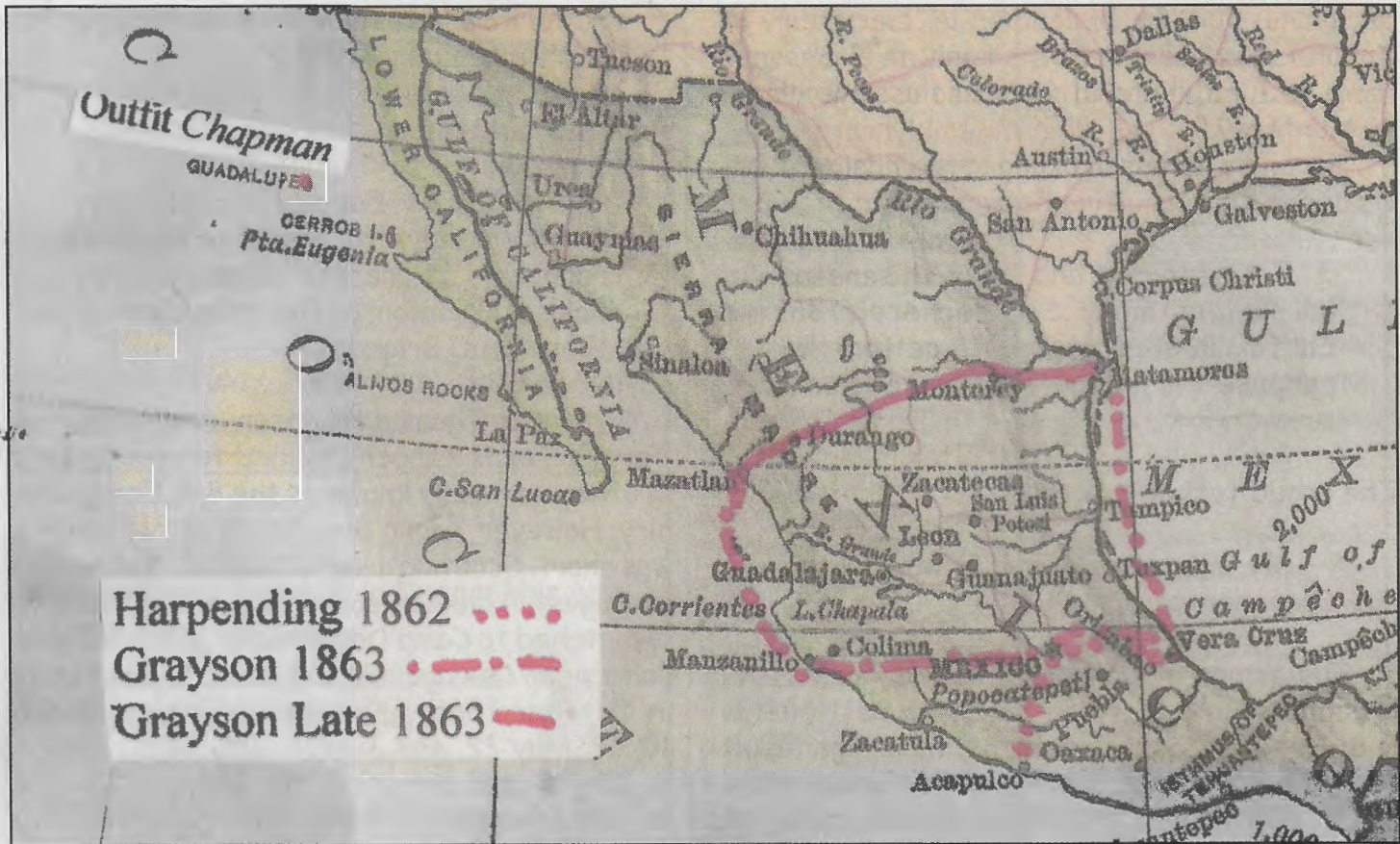
On August 21, 1863, Grayson wrote to President Jefferson Davis, dispatching his letter by private courier from Mazatlan to Richmond. He added that he could receive return letters sent to John Tabor in Brownsville, Texas. Tabor, in turn, forwarded them to Matamoras, Monterey, Torreon, Durango, and finally, Mazatlan. By then, Grayson had refined his forwarding network to a more direct route, eliminating the long, time-consuming southern detour to Colima.

As Union forces captured Brownsville, Texas, on November 6, 1863, and Mexican Liberals then captured Matamoras, John Tabor was out

Courtesy of Steve Walske



On June 25, 1864, sister Rachel wrote Catherine Johnson in Austin, Texas from the Braly homestead in Santa Clara County. A.J. Grayson ably did his job and she received it on October 19, less than four months. (Courtesy of Steve Walske)



He yearned to inflict

retaliation for the many wrongs and outrages she [the South] has received and suffered at the hands of enemies, alike destitute of honor and humanity.

Its commander would be English-born George Simpton, 51, once a captain in the Navy of Republic of Texas, a California '49er, and former San Francisco harbor master and pilot, who had retired to Sausalito.

Luckily for the United States, Davis sent the letter to Secretary of State Judah P. Benjamin, who replied four months later on December 14, 1863. Red tape won again. Benjamin told Grayson that before he could receive his letter of marque,

You must first obtain your vessel, and then state her name, tonnage, force, name and residence of each owner, and the intended number of the crew.

This was quite the reverse of the procedure in 1862 by which Asbury Harpending obtained a blank letter of marque. (*Official Records of the Union and Confederate Navies in the War of the Rebellion* (Washington 1921) Series II, Volume 1: 421-423.)

After the war, Mazatlan remained a safe haven for rabid Southerners. In 1865, Ridgley Greathouse and Daniel Showalter opened the Planters Hotel. Much had changed since Greathouse worked with his brothers' Greathouse & Slicer's Express from 1855 to 1857. In 1863, he financed a plot to sail a Confederate privateer out of San Francisco. In this he was more successful than Grayson in that he had an armed ship, the *J.M. Chapman*, and a crew, but Federal officers stopped the fast schooner before she left the harbor. Conviction for treason should have kept him behind bars for ten years, but in early 1864 a federal judge released him under President Abraham Lincoln's amnesty policy. Following a second arrest and imprisonment at Fort Lafayette in New York harbor, he escaped in July 1864, sailed to Europe, and then went to the Em-

peror Maximilian's Mexico the next summer.

Greathouse's hotel partner, Daniel Showalter, was a hot-headed Mariposa assemblyman, who on May 25, 1861 killed Assemblyman Charles W. Piercy of San Bernardino in the final political duel in California. Showalter left for the Confederate army, but the U.S. Army interrupted his journey on November 29, 1861, sending him to Fort Yuma. Of course, in mid-April 1862 he took the oath of allegiance to get out, immediately joined the Texas forces, and became a lieutenant colonel in the Fourth Texas Cavalry. August 18, 1865, found Showalter in Mazatlan, where he died on March 4, 1866, shot by his bartender as he drunkenly smashed furniture. As San Franciscans well knew, these sorts were Grayson's associates.

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Grayson's Southern politics and toadying to the Mexican Emperor Maximilian therefore became another impediment to publication of his *Birds of the Pacific Slope*. The book did not appear until 1986 when Andrew Hoyem's Arion Press produced a magnificent atlas folio edition including 156 color prints and a 430-page biography. (Yours for \$4,500).

There is a certain irony, therefore, after writing about all of the turmoil in Mexico up to 1869, Grayson's wife Frances said,

The U.S. Consul [Isaac Sisson] boards with us and has his office in our house, so you see we are under the protection of the Stars and Stripes.

Bibliography

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Stone, Lois Chambers. "Andrew Jackson Grayson: Artist-Naturalist of the Pacific Slope." *American West* 2 (Summer 1965): 19-31.

-----, *Andrew Jackson Grayson: Birds of the Pacific Slope: A Biography of the Artist & Naturalist, 1818-1869*. (San Francisco: The Arion Press, 1986). Stone concentrated on Grayson's birding.

[Walske] Robert A. Siegel Auction, 988: "The Steven C. Walske Collection of Civil War Special Routes," May 27, 2010, Lot 369, is a second letter from "Mrs. Bralys Cala. June 25/64" and received by Mrs. Catherine Johnson in Austin, TX, on October 19. It carries the notation, "Forwarded from Mazatlan, Mexico, by A.J. Grayson."

In 1859, A.J. Grayson supplied a half dozen bird drawings for the Women's monthly *Hesperian*. The Altamira Oriole ranges from Central America into Texas, becoming the largest such bird in the United States, while its long basket nest may reach over two feet. Louis Nagel redrew the bird, Charles Kuchel and Emil Dressel lithographed it, and a woman colored it for the August issue.