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90¢ Washington stamp of 1860, flanked by 5¢ Jefferson and 10¢ Washington stamps, on a cover posted at New York in November 1860 and sent via French mail to Barcelona, Spain (five times 21¢ per ¼ ounce rate = \$1.05). This is one of six certified covers bearing the 90¢ 1860 stamp. From the concluding installment of Richard E. Winter's three-part article, in our Foreign Mails section, on pre-UPU mails between the United States and Spain.

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THE KEIM-OWEN CORRESPONDENCE: 1869 COVERS FROM THE FAR EAST

SCOTT R. TREPTEL

In September 1870 a 29-year-old former Civil War reporter named DeBenneville Randolph Keim embarked on a journey to conduct an official investigation of the condition of United States consulates in Japan, China, Malaya, Egypt, India and South America. This historic mission, in which Keim uncovered corruption in the consulates and learned of the Manchu cover-up of the horrific rape and massacre of Catholic nuns and their Chinese followers in Tientsin, has now produced a heretofore unknown and significant philatelic legacy.

A group of postmarked envelopes that carried Keim's letters from Japan and China to his future wife in Connecticut was recently sold at auction (Robert A. Siegel Auction Galleries, sale 1016, November 15-17, 2011, lots 1047-1055). Seven of the nine covers have 10¢ 1869 Pictorial stamps on them, but none was recorded by Michael Laurence, the census-taker of all covers bearing the 10¢ Eagle-and-Shield stamp. This article documents these newly-discovered 1869 Pictorial covers, which include examples of rare postal markings applied to mail from the Far East.

DeBenneville Randolph Keim

DeBenneville Randolph Keim (pronounced KIME—his portrait is shown in Figure 1) was born on January 1, 1841, in Reading, Pennsylvania. As a young reporter for the *New York Herald*, Keim earned a solid reputation during the Civil War, reporting on a total of 26 battles. His uncle, Brigadier General William Keim, introduced him to General Ulysses S. Grant, and Keim accompanied Grant during the Vicksburg campaign. After that he became an “embedded” reporter in General Sherman's camp during the famous march to the sea.

After the Civil War, Keim accompanied Generals Sheridan and Custer during the campaign to subdue and relocate American Indians on the Great Plains. His experiences on the frontier were the subject of Keim's 1885 book, *Sheridan's Troopers on the Borders: A Winter Campaign on the Plains*.

Following the 1868 election, Keim was the only reporter allowed a weekly interview with newly-elected President Grant. In July 1870 Grant asked Keim to go on a special mission as “Agent of the United States for the Examination of Consular Affairs in China, &c.” The result of this fact-finding mission was an extraordinary two-volume report to the Secretary of the Treasury with a catchy title: *Reports of De B. Randolph Keim, Agent*



Figure 1. DeBenneville Randolph Keim (1841-1914), journalist, author and world traveller, who wrote and mailed the recently discovered transpacific covers discussed in this article.

of the United States, Etc., to the Secretary of the Treasury, Relating to the Condition of the Consulates of the United States in Japan, China, Cochin China, Malay Peninsula, Java, British India, Egypt, and on the East and West Coasts of South America (GPO, Washington D.C., 1871). This publication can be downloaded at Google Books.

In 1871 Keim obtained a smuggled copy of a Chinese government secret decree concealing the June 1870 Tientsin Massacre. He leaked the story to the *Herald*. The rape and murder of French Catholic nuns, their followers and the French Consul, and its cover-up by the Manchu court, led to public outrage throughout the world and contributed to the weakening of the Manchu Dynasty.

Keim's 1870 trip to Japan and China

Keim left San Francisco for Japan on the Pacific Mail Steam Ship Co. (PMSS) *China*, which was advertised to depart on September 1, 1870, and steamed out of port on that day or possibly a day later. Keim's report confirms his intended departure:

SIR: In my dispatch No.1, dated at San Francisco, California, August 26, 1870, I had the honor to inform you of my proposed departure on my tour of consular inspection, on the Pacific mail steamship *China*, from San Francisco for Yokohama, Japan, advertised for September 1, 1870.

Keim's report also lists the places and dates of his official communications, which present a useful timeline of his travels. These entries are relevant to this article:

"Kanagawa, (Yokohama) Japan, September 30, 1870, proposed route of travel, and condition of the consulate of the United States at that port.

Nagasaki, Japan, October 15, 1870, respecting the consulates at Hiogo, Osaka, and Nagasaki, and conclusions upon the consular service in Japan.

Tien-tsin, China, November 17, 1870, condition of the consulate at that port, and consular affairs in North China.

Hankow, China, December 5, 1870, consular affairs on the Yangtse Kiang, and at Hankow in particular.

Chin-Kiang, China, December 8, 1870, respecting that consulate.

Shanghai, China, December 22, 1870, respecting the consulate general at that port.

Shanghai, China, December 23, 1870, respecting the consul general.

Foo-chow, China, December 29, 1870, respecting that consulate.

Amoy, China, January 11, 1871, respecting that consulate.

Swatow, China, January 14, 1871, respecting that consulate.

Canton, China, January 23, 1871, respecting that consulate.

Hong-Kong, China, January 25, 1871, on the general condition of the service in China and Japan, with suggestions on the subject; also, respecting the judicial powers of consuls.

Hong-Kong, China, January 31, 1871, respecting that consulate."

Letters to Jane Amelia Owen (the future Mrs. Keim)

All nine covers are addressed to a young woman in Hartford, Connecticut. Keim writes her name as "Jennie," but her given name was Jane Amelia Owen. According to her *Daughters of the American Revolution* biography, Jane was born in Hartford, Connecticut, and educated in Hartford's public schools. She was graduated in 1862 and, after two years of continuing education at a seminary on Narragansett Bay, returned to Hartford to engage in teaching and charitable work.

When Keim left the United States for far-flung places in September 1870, his future bride stayed behind. On June 25, 1872, after his return, he and Jane were married. The new-



Figure 2. The earliest cover in the Keim correspondence, addressed to Keim’s future wife (as are all the covers in the find), was marked by her “A1” to indicate it was the first letter she had received since Keim’s departure. Keim’s directive at upper left reads “Per Pacific Mail Steamer *America*, at Sea, Pacific Ocean.” Originally franked with three 10¢ 1869 stamps (one of which was torn on opening), this cover was exchanged at sea. The San Francisco circular datestamp reads “SEP 13” [1870]; San Francisco also applied the magenta “China and Japan Steam Service” marking.

lyweds spent six months traveling abroad and visiting places in Europe from which their well-pedigreed ancestors originated.

Based on Jane’s careful correspondence notes, which she wrote on the fronts and backs of the envelopes, we can piece together the journey each letter took. In this article the term “letter” will be used interchangeably with cover or envelope, depending on the context, but the original letters no longer accompany the envelopes.

The first letter Jane received from Keim (Figure 2) was noted as “A1” and “1 since sailing from SF.” Jane received it about one week after the San Francisco postmark date and answered it on October 8. When Keim addressed this envelope, he wrote a ship-name directive in the upper left corner: “Per Pacific Mail Steamer *America*, at Sea, Pacific Ocean.” Just above the words “*America*, at” is a short bit of writing, apparently crossed out, which appears to read “c/o.” Using “care of” would be unusual in a ship-name directive, but it makes sense under the circumstances of this mailing, which will be explained later in this article.

Keim franked his first letter with three 10¢ 1869 stamps, prepaying the triple rate for inbound steamship mail. Unfortunately, one of the stamps has been partly torn off the cover, which greatly diminishes its desirability.

In addition to the San Francisco datestamp and cork cancels, there is a blurry strike of the CHINA AND JAPAN/STEAM SERVICE (CJSS) oval in magenta, which during this era was applied by the San Francisco post office to letters, received from PMSS steamers, on which the transpacific origins were not otherwise evident.

Where was Keim when he wrote this letter, and which PMSS ship carried it to San Francisco? These questions are best answered after examining the other covers in the Keim-Owen correspondence.

The November 25 group

On Friday, November 25, 1870, five letters from Keim were received by Jane at Hartford. She made notations on all five envelopes, documenting them as letter numbers 2, 3, 5, 6 and 7 from Keim. On the one marked “6th” she also wrote “Rec’d with 4 others Fri. Nov 25th 1870.” It is assumed that the “4 others” are her numbers 2, 3, 5 and 7. The covers sold at auction did not include letter #4 in the sequence. It was not part of the group found by the consignor, and its whereabouts is currently unknown. Therefore, the November 25 group, referring to the letters received by Jane on that date, comprise the five covers described in Table 1 and discussed below as Figures 3, 4, 5, 6 and 8.

Docket number	Letter date	Letter Origin (per docketing)	Marking(s)	Cover
#3	9/18/1870	Written at sea 3,260 mi. from S.F.	C&JSS oval	Figure 3
#2	9/22/1870	Written at sea 4,222 mi. from S.F.	C&JSS oval	Figure 4
#5	9/29–10/4/70	Hiogo, Yedo, Yokohama	Hiogo DC; Yoko 10/23/70	Figure 5
#6	10/11/1870	Hiogo, “Rec’d with 4 others”	Hiogo DC	Figure 6
#7	10/14/1870	Nagasaki (based on Keim report)	Circle of wedges	Figure 8

Table 1. Details of the five covers sent from the Far East by DeBenneville Randolph Keim and received by Jane Amelia Owen at Hartford, Connecticut, on November 25, 1870. All show San Francisco circular datestamps (two types) dated November 18.

These five covers are fascinating not just for their obvious philatelic attributes, but because they show how letters starting from different geographic and time points in the Far East would eventually meet up to make the monthly transpacific voyage from Yokohama. They also reveal subtle differences in mail handling along the route, and they provide the clues necessary to understanding the “America at sea” cover presented in Figure 2.

The cover shown in Figure 3 is letter #2 in proper chronological order, but Jane incor-



Figure 3. Pair of 10¢ 1869 stamps on a cover that contained letters written on the outbound voyage of the PMSS steamer *China* and carried back to San Francisco on its return trip. The San Francisco circular datestamp reads “NOV 18” [1870]. Note also the “China and Japan Steam Service” oval.



Figure 4. Similar to the cover in Figure 3. In docketing this and the Figure 3 cover, the recipient transposed the order in which they were written.

rectly noted “C. 3d after leaving America.” On the back she wrote “C. Written at sea 3260 miles Sept. 18, Rec’d Nov. 25, 1870. Two days after this he rec’d my 1st dispatch.” The September 18 letter date and location “at sea 3260 miles” from San Francisco are important for reasons to be explained.

Next in correct chronological order is the cover shown in Figure 4. Jane transposed the order of the #2 and #3 covers, noting this one as “B/2 after sailing.” On the back she wrote “4222 m. from S.F., written Sept. 22.” The miles from San Francisco and date obviously put this in sequence after the September 18 cover.

On both covers in Figures 3 and 4 (written in that order) a pair of 10¢ 1869 stamps is tied by the same San Francisco November 18 (1870) small circular datestamp duplexed with a quartered cork cancel. Each cover has a strike of the magenta “CHINA AND JAPAN/STEAM SERVICE” oval.

The cover in Figure 5 is the next in the November 25 group. As noted, #4 in the original correspondence is missing, so the next sequential cover is this one marked in Jane’s handwriting “E/5 after sailing” and (on back) “Hiogo Jeddo Yokohama Sept. 29 to Oct. 4.” Between these dates, Keim apparently wrote letters from three different cities: Hiogo, Tokyo (Jeddo and Yedo are English names for the port of Edo, which was re-named Tokyo starting around 1868) and Yokohama, and he used one envelope to post all three letters. Keim wrote a route directive “Via Yokohama” in the upper left corner.

The Figure 5 cover, originating in Hiogo, has a strip of three 10¢ 1869 stamps cancelled by three strikes of the “HIOGO/JAPAN” double-circle marking. This multiple-stamp franking and use of the Hiogo double-circle handstamp would be remarkable in any case, but the envelope was additionally postmarked with the “YOKOHAMA/JAPAN/OCT/23” circular datestamp, and the 10¢ stamp at left was cancelled by a segmented circular cork killer.

This is the only recorded cover with postmarks of two different U.S. post offices in Japan. The Yokohama marking was lightly struck, but someone later strengthened some of the letters and the date (the author thinks it was Jane, who seems mildly obsessive about documenting this correspondence).



Figure 5. Vertical strip of three 10¢ 1869 stamps on a cover bearing three strikes of the Hiogo double-circle marking along with a Yokohama circular datestamp. This is the only cover known to show postmarks of two different U.S. post offices in Japan. Like Figures 3 and 4, this cover was received at San Francisco on 18 November 1870, but on this cover the San Francisco marking is a double circle struck on the reverse.

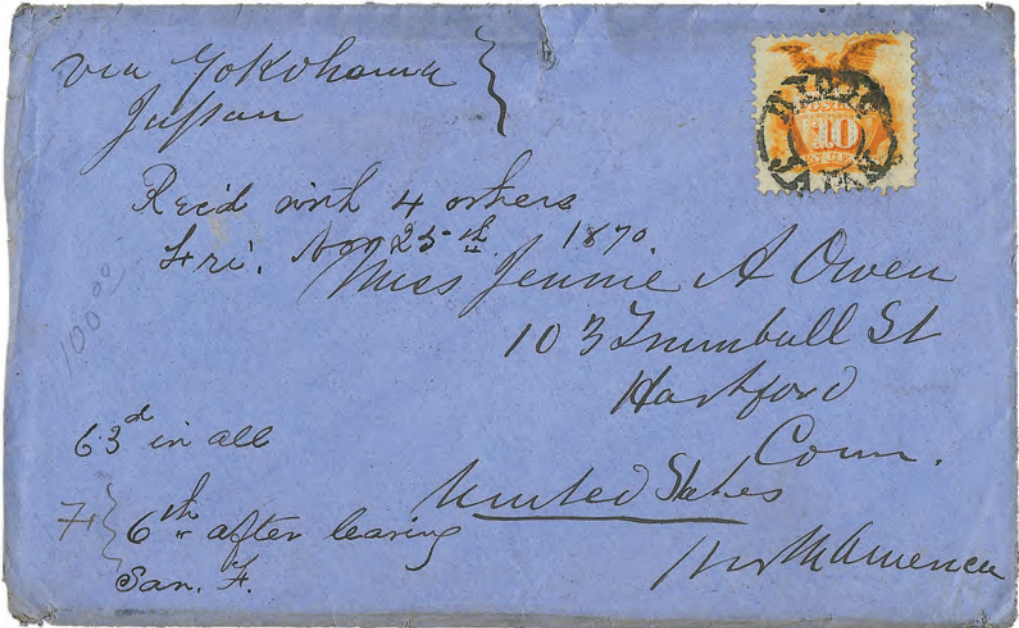


Figure 6. Striking blue cover on which the 10¢ 1869 stamp is just tied by a single strike of the Hiogo double-circle marking. This marking on off-cover 10¢ 1869 stamps is fairly common, but covers showing the Hiogo double-circle are scarce, less than a dozen known. Like the cover in Figure 5, this one is backstamped with a San Francisco double-circle entry marking dated November 18.



Figure 7. Map of Japan, showing the relative positions of the cities at which the United States had consular post offices. The eastbound branch steamer from Shanghai would call first at Nagasaki and then Hiogo, before delivering its mail to the transpacific steamer at Yokohama.

The cover in Figure 6 is a striking blue envelope with a single 10¢ 1869 stamp tied by the “HIOGO/JAPAN” double-circle marking. Once again, Keim wrote “Via Yokohama” in the upper left corner. Jane noted “F/6th after leaving San. F.” and “Rec’d with 4 others Fri. Nov. 25th 1870” on the front. On back she wrote “Hiogo-Oct. 11,” which places Keim in Hiogo on October 11.

Both covers from Hiogo (Figures 5 and 6) were carried on PMSS branch line steamer *Golden Age*, which departed Shanghai on October 13 and arrived in Yokohama on October 21. Branch line steamers routinely picked up mail along the way. The map in Figure 7 shows the locations of Nagasaki, Hiogo and Yokohama along the route. Nagasaki is at the western end of Japan, closest to Shanghai. Yokohama is situated on the eastern coast and Hiogo lies between them.

Each of the two Hiogo-origin covers has a “SAN FRANCISCO/CAL/NOV/18” double-circle datestamp on the back. Unlike the covers in Figures 2, 3 and 4, the San Francisco post office did not cancel the stamps or apply the CJSS oval to these two covers.

The cover in Figure 8 was noted by Jane “G. 7th foreign” on the front and on the reverse as follows: “The last of his writing Oct. 14. I have now rec’d an account of his daily doings every day since he last sailed from S. Fr. In fact since he left me at V.” This cover also shows the “SAN FRANCISCO/CAL/NOV/18” double-circle backstamp, so it must have been among the five covers received by Jane on November 25, although it is not docketed with a receipt date.



Figure 8. The 10¢ 1869 stamp on this cover is tied by a killer that closely resembles the circle of wedges cancels used by the U.S. Consular Postal Agency in Shanghai, but this cancel seems to have been applied in Japan, not China. The letter was written from Nagasaki on October 14 and picked up by the branch-line steamer *Golden Age*, which arrived in Yokohama on October 21. Like the covers in Figures 5 and 6, this is backstamped with a San Francisco double-circle marking dated November 18.

According to his October 15 report, Keim was in Nagasaki on October 14. He wrote “Via Yokohama” in the upper left corner of the cover, which follows the pattern of the covers from Hiogo.

The 10¢ stamp on the Figure 8 cover was cancelled with a small killer that closely resembles the circle of wedges cancels used by the U.S. Postal Agency in Shanghai, but it is almost certain this cancel was applied in Japan, not China. Since the letter was written from Nagasaki on October 14, it must have been picked up from there during the October 13 sailing of the branch-line steamer *Golden Age* from Shanghai, which arrived in Yokohama on October 21. Possibly the cancel was applied on board the steamer. It is also possible the cancel was applied in Yokohama, since other examples are known with cancels applied after the mail was received from a branch line steamer. (For example, see Ishikawa’s USPO’s in Japan, Sotheby Parke Bernet Stamp Auction Co., Sale 58, July 7, 1981, lot 49). However, there is no possibility that Keim carried it with him to Shanghai and then mailed it there, because in that scenario it could not make the trip back to Yokohama in time for the October 23 departure.

Table 1 (page 62) summarizes the origins of the November 25th group, arranged in chronological order (Jane’s docketing error is corrected).

The sequence of covers arriving in Connecticut on November 25 and Keim’s published reports of his journey confirm that he left for Japan on the PMSS *China*, departing San Francisco on or shortly after September 1 and arriving at the port of Yokohama on or about September 23. The letter Keim wrote on September 18 (Figure 3) was written on board the *China* when it was 3,260 miles from San Francisco, and the letter he wrote on September 22 (Figure 4) was again written on board the *China*, which at this point was 4,222 miles from San Francisco and just one day away from Yokohama. Those distances and dates mesh perfectly with the distance between San Francisco and Yokohama (about

4,500 miles) and the average speed of a Pacific steamer (approximately 9 miles per hour, or 215 miles per day).

When Keim arrived in Yokohama around September 23, he just missed placing the letters he wrote at sea on board the PMSS *Great Republic*, which sailed earlier that day. So the letters were held for the return trip of the *China*, which left Yokohama on October 23 and arrived in San Francisco on November 17.

The letters in the triple-rate cover shown in Figure 5 were written from Yokohama, Yedo (Tokyo) and Hiogo, in that order, between September 29 and October 4. The next (Figure 6) was written from Hiogo on October 11. The last of the group was written on October 14 without any indication of origin, but by then Keim had already spent time in Nagasaki, where he examined the U.S. consulate and reported his findings on October 15. All three covers were carried by the branch line steamer *Golden Age* in time to join the other two for the October 23 departure of the *China*.

Yokohama to San Francisco to Hartford

When the *China* steamed out of Yokohama on October 23, 1870, it carried the five covers from Keim that were received by Jane on November 25. She had already received the “*America at sea*” letter (Figure 2) in September. The two covers with letters written at sea were received as loose steamship letters when they reached San Francisco on November 17. The uncanceled 10¢ 1869 stamps on those covers were dutifully cancelled by the San Francisco office, using the small circle (dated November 18) and quartered cork killer. They were also marked with the CJSS oval, indicating transpacific origin.

The two covers mailed from Hiogo and the October 14 cover from Nagasaki (Figure 8) arrived at San Francisco with cancelled stamps. These were presumably in a separate mailbag prepared at Yokohama. The San Francisco office backstamped each of the three covers with the double-circle datestamp (also dated November 18).

All of the Keim letters taken off the *China* on November 17 were put on the next eastbound Union Pacific Railroad train. The letters continued to travel together, reaching Jane Owen on November 25, the day after Thanksgiving Day in 1870. Perhaps she read her boyfriend’s letters while munching on turkey leftovers.

The mystery of the “*America at sea*” cover

Returning to the “*America at sea*” cover in Figure 2, which was postmarked at San Francisco on September 13, 1870: This letter was obviously written by Keim while he was on the westbound *China* after it sailed from San Francisco on or shortly after September 1. However, unlike his September 18 and 22 letters (Figures 3 and 4), which were also written at sea but carried back to San Francisco on the *China*’s return trip in October, letter #1 was handed over to the purser of the *America* as it sailed eastward to San Francisco.

How and when did this transfer of mail “at sea” occur? At a rate of approximately 215 miles per day, the eastbound *America* and the westbound *China* would pass each other around September 7. The meeting location, measured from the ships’ departure points, would be about 1,100-1,200 miles from San Francisco for the *China* and 3,300-3,400 miles from Yokohama for the *America*. Mail exchanges between ships at sea are well known, but the cover in Figure 2 is one of the few that can be proven to have been transferred between ships traveling in different directions.

When the author described this cover for the auction, he missed this significant point and erred in assuming it was written on the *America*’s westbound journey in July. However, the archival evidence proves Keim did not leave until September. Fortunately, the cover did not sell in the auction, apparently due to its condition problem and presumably because no one else figured out it was exchanged between PMSS steamers at sea. No harm, no foul.

