



# Barry Lawrence Ruderman Antique Maps Inc.

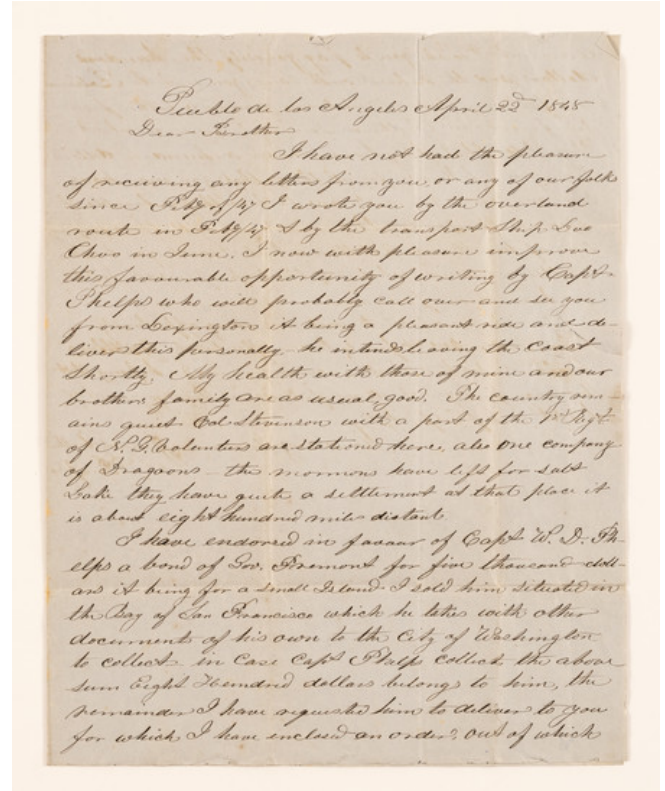
7407 La Jolla Boulevard  
La Jolla, CA 92037

www.raremaps.com

(858) 551-8500  
blr@raremaps.com

**(Los Angeles Pueblo) [Original manuscript letters from Francis Pliny Fisk Temple, to his brother Abraham Temple, describing his sale of Alcatraz Island to John C. Fremont; Los Angeles news, Capt. William Dane Phelps, Henry Mellus]**

**Stock#:** 92942  
**Map Maker:** Temple - Workman Families / Temple  
**Date:** 1848  
**Place:** Los Angeles  
**Color:** Pen & Ink  
**Condition:** VG+  
**Size:** 7.75 x 9.75 inches  
**Price:** SOLD



## Description:

### ***Selling Alcatraz Island to John C. Fremont***

### ***A Pair of 1848 Letters From the Pueblo de Los Angeles***

A fascinating and very early pair of letters written from Los Angeles by a prominent early figure in the region's development. Francis Pliny Fisk Temple writes from Los Angeles to his brother in Massachusetts, Abraham Temple concerning a variety of topics, including interesting Los Angeles news, and, amazingly, a reference to the pending sale of Alcatraz Island by Temple to John C. Fremont, the latter then serving as acting military governor of California.

### **How the Workman-Temple Family Came to Own Alcatraz**



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Among the grants of land made by Pio Pico to William Workman was one for a small island in San Francisco Bay:

*...it has been granted to Don Guillermo Workman, naturalized Mexican citizen of the region of this city [Los Angeles], the little Island called Alcatraz or Bird that he has petitioned for...under the condition that he establishes, as soon as possible, a light that can give protection on dark nights to those ships navigating there - from Spitzzeri, The Workman & Temple Families of Southern California, 1830-1930, page 73.*

Workman, a patriarch of the Temple-Workman families of Los Angeles, clearly understood the strategic importance of Alcatraz at an early date. In July of 1846, after the American navy had invaded California, Workman deeded Alcatraz Island to his son-in-law Francis Pliny Temple. By March 1847, soon after the Battle of Los Angeles ended hostilities in California, acting Governor John C. Fremont executed an agreement with Temple to purchase the property for the U.S. government for \$5000.

The first letter makes mention of this fascinating transaction with Fremont, specifically that he had endorsed the \$5000 bond from Fremont in favor of Captain William Dane Phelps, who would attempt to collect on the bond in Washington. The bond was apparently never paid due to Fremont's court-martial, which invalidated many of his official actions while governor. In 1850 President Millard Fillmore declared Alcatraz a military possession. Members of the Temple family continued to pursue a claim on Alcatraz well into the 20th century, but no serious foundation for their claim ever developed. Incidentally, Captain Phelps played an interesting role in early California history. Born in Gloucester, Massachusetts in 1802, he followed his ancestors example and opted for a life at sea. He made several early trading voyages to California while it was still part of Mexico, returned to the Pacific coast during the Gold Rush and even published a book about his life at sea which is noted for containing valuable historical information about California in the 1840s: *Fore and Aft, or Leaves from the Life of an Old Sailor* (1871). He captained the Brig Moscow for a succession of Boston owners, sailing her to San Francisco and back in 1849, bringing back loads of gold to much fanfare.

### **Col. Stevenson's Regiment of New York Volunteers in Los Angeles:**

Temple makes mention of Col. Stevenson's Regiment of New York volunteers in Los Angeles, and states that the Mormon brigade had just left for Salt Lake.

In July 1846, Colonel Jonathan D. Stevenson of New York was asked to raise a volunteer regiment of ten companies of 77 men each to go to California with the understanding that they would muster out and stay



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in California. They were designated the 1st Regiment of New York Volunteers and took part in the Pacific Coast Campaign of the Mexican War.

#### **A follow-up letter:**

The second letter, dated May 2, 1848, also by Francis P. F. Temple to Abraham Temple, adds further details on the Fremont bond stemming from the sale of Alcatraz and includes an interesting reference to a Mr. Mellus - almost certainly Henry Mellus, the future mayor of Los Angeles. About the bond Francis communicates that if it is not collected he will send money directly to Abraham to cover the purchase of goods referred to in the first letter:

*...and in case the bond of Gov. Fremont's which I endorsed in favour of Capt. Phelps and made payable to you, is not collected, I will send you the money from here.*

The reference to Mellus, who had family in Boston, would seem to relate to his upcoming journey back east, soon after relinquishing the Bryant & Sturgis agency:

*Mr. Mellus is expecting a vessel from the U.S. in a short time...*

Bryant & Sturgis was an important trading firm which from 1810 to 1850 conducted approximately half of the trade between the Pacific Northwest coast and China, as well as a good part of the California hide trade.

#### **Temple and Workman Families and Early Los Angeles**

The Temple-Workman family played a significant role in the early history of Los Angeles and Southern California, primarily through their involvement in land development and through familial connections with Spanish-speaking pioneers of Alta California.

Jonathan Temple (1796-1866), sometimes referred to by his Californio moniker Don Juan Temple, was a native of Reading, Massachusetts. He lived in San Diego before establishing an American-style store in Los Angeles in 1828. In 1843, he acquired the Rancho Los Cerritos, a 27,000-acre property in the Long Beach area - his 1844 adobe is the centerpiece of the Rancho Los Cerritos historic site. During the 1840s, Temple was active in shipping and commerce along the California and Mexican west coast. Temple was also one of the first real estate developers in L.A., having constructed the original Temple Block and the Market House, which later served as city and county administrative headquarters and the seat of the



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county courthouse.

Francis Pliny Fisk Temple, the writer of the present letter, was a younger half-brother of Jonathan Temple, and a prominent early figure in the development of Southern California in his own right. The younger Temple married the daughter of William William, an English-born pioneer who arrived in Los Angeles from Santa Fe via the Old Spanish Trail route in 1841, as part of the Workman-Rowland Party - considered the first overland party of Americans to settle in Los Angeles. Through hard work and business acumen, Workman became one of the city's most successful entrepreneurs. He co-owned a store, served as a judge, and invested in real estate. As his son-in-law, Francis Pliny Fisk Temple, was able to make use of family connections to carve out a name for himself as a prominent businessman, even branching into banking. He was one of the largest landowners in the Los Angeles area.

In sum, the Temple-Workman family were key players in the development of Los Angeles and Southern California in the second half of the 19th century. Their business ventures and land holdings helped shape the city's growth, and their connections through marriage with other early settlers gave them a unique influence on the course of the region's history and culture.

The present pair of fascinating letters sheds light on the family's influential situation, specifically through Francis P. F. Temple's ownership of Alcatraz Island.

**The text of letters:**

*Pueblo de los Angeles, April 22, 1848*

*Dear Brother,*

*I have not had the pleasure of receiving any letters from you, or any of our folks since Feby of /47. I wrote you by the overland route in Feby /47 & by the transport ship Loo Choo in June. I now with pleasure improve this favourable opportunity of writing by Capt. Phelps who will probably call over and see you from Lexington it being a pleasant ride and deliver this personally - he intends leaving the coast shortly. My health with those of mine and our brothers family are as usual, good. The country remains quiet, Col. Stevenson with a part of the 1st Regt. of N.Y. volunteers are stationed here, also one company of Dragoons - the Mormons have left for Salt Lake they have quite a settlement at that place it is about eight hundred miles distant.*

*I have endorsed in favour of Capt. W. D. Phelps a bond of Gov. Fremont for five thousand dollars it*



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*being for a small Island I sold him situated in the Bay of San Francisco which he takes with other documents of his own to the City of Washington to collect in case Capt. Phelps collects the above sum Eight Hundred dollars belong to him, the remainder I have requested him to deliver to you for which I have enclosed an order, out of which amount I wish you to pay yourself the hundred dollars (and the interest on the same) you sent to the Baltimore (my father-in-law (Mr. Workman) received a letter from his friends in Baltimore some weeks since in which they state that they have received a hundred dollars from you, likewise for all things that you may have sent me since you wrote me last, with you trouble & expense on the same - the remainder with the exception of two Hundred dollars which I wish you to give Mother, you can do what you think proper with until you hear more from me.*

*I wish you and all to write me every opportunity. Remember me & family to our affectionate mother, brothers, sisters & all enquiring friends, hoping that this may find you & all our friends in the enjoyment of health and prosperity.*

*Remaining Your ever affectionate brother,*

*P. F. Temple.*

**The second letter:**

*Dear Brother,*

*In haste I improve the present opportunity of writing you a few lines by the overland mail which leaves tomorrow. I wrote you by Capt. Phelps who left this place some days since for the windward, and from thence to the United States, I sent by him the amount you sent to Baltimore last year.*

*Mr. Workman wished me to arrange with you to send his sister Mrs. Agnes Vickers for his son two hundred (I wrote you by Capt. Phelps concerning it) which you will please do me the favour to forward the amount, and in case the bond of Gov. Fremont's which I endorsed in favour of Capt. Phelps and made payable to you, is not collected, I will send you the money from here.*

*Mr. Mellus is expecting a vessel from the U.S. in a short time and I am in the hopes of receiving letters from you, & from our other brothers & sisters, it being now more than a year since I have heard from home.*

*I hope you let no chance of writing me slip unimproved.*



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*Remember myself & family to our affectionate Mother, your family, brothers & sisters, & all enquiring friends.*

*Remaining your ever aff.ate brother,*

*P. F. Temple*

*Angeles - Alta California*

*Tuesday Eve May 2nd 1848*

**Rarity**

Such early letters written from Los Angeles, by prominent figures and dating from the transition period between the Mexican and American eras, are very rare in the market.

**Detailed Condition:**

Two manuscript letters. Folded letter sheets. The first letter with 1 1/2 pages of manuscript text. Addressed on integral address leaf to "Mr. Abraham Temple / Reading, Mass, U.S.A. - By politeness of Capt. W. D. Phelps." The second letter, with 1 page of manuscript text. Both lettersheets with integral address leaf intact. Old fold marks. Remnants of wax seal on both examples. A couple of fox marks. Old fold marks. Overall very clean and nice.