

## JERSEY CITY TO JAPAN: The Odyssey of a 19<sup>th</sup> Century Missionary Cover

By John A. Trosky

*[Last issue Don Chafetz featured a nice Morris Canal post card sent from New Jersey to Japan in 1910. It reminded me that in my own collection I had another cover sent to Japan from Jersey City. Here is its story.]*

Since the dawn of organized religion, proselytizing and spreading the faith has been an integral part of the theological doctrines in many faiths around the world. Missionaries were sent to foreign lands to convert or (some would say) indoctrinate the locals who may have adhered to their own religion which was unlike those of the missionaries. The Europeans, particularly the Portuguese and Spanish, were some of the earliest explorers to export Christianity to the “non-believers” in far flung areas of the world. Converting the locals became a byproduct of colonial expansion. Other faiths were “exported” from their homeland because of intolerance, such as the Puritans, the French Huguenots, and the Jews from many lands.

Christianity first arrived in Japan with Francis Xavier and the Jesuits in 1549<sup>1</sup> but only lasted a few decades, after being outlawed by the Japanese. It wasn’t until almost 260 years later that Christianity was once again preached on the islands of the Japanese archipelago. This brings us to our story of the cover below.



**Fig. 1:** Jersey City to Kumamoto, Japan, cancelled with duplex canceller tying three Scott #220 stamps with October 10<sup>th</sup>, 1891 cancel. Japanese receiver (Kobe) on face of cover, dated November 19, 1891.

The above cover is addressed to one Julia A. Gulick, a missionary serving in Japan, who came from a large family of missionaries originally based in the Hawaiian Islands. The ban on Christianity had only been lifted in Japan in the mid to late 19<sup>th</sup> century and many of the new missionaries venturing to the islands of Japan were now Protestant, instead of Catholic as the early missionaries were. This cover from Jersey City is fairly rare as missionaries at that time had only just begun to establish themselves to any great degree in Japan in the previous couple of decades.



Miss  
JULIA A. E.  
GULICK

Fig. 2: Julia A. E. Gulick, circa 1913<sup>2</sup>

There is no evidence of who the sender may have been as the cover was acquired without contents and there is no return address. We can only speculate. The addressee, Julia A. E. Gulick was the daughter of Peter Johnson Gulick<sup>3</sup> and Fanny Thomas Gulick, both very early Hawaiian missionaries, having arrived in Honolulu on April 30, 1828. The family finally settled on the island of Kauai where Julia Ann Eliza Gulick was born in 1845.

The Alumni Association of Princeton Theological Seminary describes Julia's father below:

"Peter Johnson Gulick, the son of John and Lydia (Combs) Gulick, was born at Freehold, New Jersey on March 12, 1797. His father was a farmer of modest means, and his father's ancestors were Dutch, the Gulicks having left Holland for America in 1653. As a youth, Peter worshiped near Freehold at the Old Tennent [Presbyterian] Church, which he joined upon a profession of faith at the age of twenty. Five years later he entered the College of New Jersey (Princeton), his intent being to study for the ministry. Graduating from Princeton in 1825, Peter went on for two more years of study at Princeton [Presbyterian] Theological Seminary, where he heard the secretary of the ABCFM<sup>4</sup> (which in its early years was both Congregational and Presbyterian) give a talk on foreign missions. Inspired by the talk, Peter enlisted as a missionary with the ABCFM, which urged him to seek out a wife. He did so and was married to Fanny Thomas on September 5, 1827. A month later Peter was ordained, and a month later he and Fanny set sail from Boston aboard the *Parthian*, the third missionary vessel sent by the ABCFM to the Sandwich Islands (Hawaii)."<sup>5</sup>

Peter and Fanny had seven sons and one daughter, Julia. Most of these offspring became Protestant missionaries around the world. Julia arrived in Japan in 1874 with her elderly parents, and became a missionary, remaining there for over 30 years.<sup>6</sup> She is buried along with many of her family members in the Kawaiahao Cemetery in Honolulu. The Kawaiahao Church is considered the mother church for all missionaries who arrived in Hawaii after 1820. It is on the corner of King and Punchbowl Streets in downtown Honolulu.<sup>7</sup>

Fig. 3: Julia A.E. Gulick Gravestone, Honolulu, Hawaii.<sup>8</sup>



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This cover was postmarked in Jersey City, New Jersey on October 10<sup>th</sup> 1891, and then sent to New York for consolidation and transport, most likely by rail to San Francisco to the Foreign Division of the U.S. Post Office.

The first transcontinental Fast Mail to the Pacific Coast only began a few years earlier in 1889. Both the New York Central Railroad and the Pennsylvania Railroad owned many mail contracts and had a terminus in Chicago. This cover would most likely have left New York City bound for Chicago by rail on one of these lines. From there, the cover would have been handed off to three separate railroads in succession for the final link to San Francisco and the eventual trip across the Pacific Ocean to Japan. The western railroads in the chain would be first the Chicago & Council Bluffs RPO (Burlington Railroad), then on to the Omaha and Ogden RPO (Union Pacific Railroad), and finally the Ogden and San Francisco RPO (Central Pacific Railroad). Both Omaha and Council Bluffs were key transit hubs for mail directed to the West Coast.<sup>9</sup>

The current rate to Japan at that time was \$.05 per ½ ounce, so this cover appears to be overpaid by \$.01.<sup>10</sup> From there it was sorted and loaded aboard a Pacific Mail Steamship Company steamer bound for Yokohama, Japan. The New York transit stamp on the reverse is clearly visible and dated October 10<sup>th</sup> (1891). Unfortunately, the San Francisco receiver date is obscured so we do not know the transit time across the U.S. The curious thing with this cover is the two Japanese character receivers. Mail from the United States would normally be received at Yokohama and in this case, be sent to Kobe for further sorting, and then forwarded on to Kumamoto for delivery. We know this cover was received initially at Yokohama due to the faint Yokohama receiver just below the transit stamps from NY and San Francisco. This stamp uses English characters. The Japanese character date stamp on the face side of the cover is dated November 19<sup>th</sup>, Settsu, Kobe, Year 2(4) of the Meiji Era (1891). The similar date stamp on the reverse is Kumamoto dated November 13<sup>th</sup>, Year 2(4) of the Meiji Era (1891). There is also a Kobe English character date stamp on the reverse but the day is not readable. The vertical inscription in ink when the reverse of the cover is turned to a vertical view is a phonetic transliteration of “Kumamoto, Mr. Gyuliku” aka Gulick in English.<sup>11</sup>

What is hard to explain is why the Kobe receiver is dated later than the Kumamoto receiver. Is it possible that the clerk at Kumamoto forgot to change the date in the stamp? The distance from Kobe to Kumamoto is about 300 miles so a date of receipt of, say, November 23<sup>rd</sup> after being received at Kobe on November 19<sup>th</sup> is possible. Did the clerk fail to change the first digit of his canceller? We can only speculate at this point.



*Fig. 4: Kobe receiver, November 19, 1891*



*Fig. 5: Kumamoto receiver, November 13, 1891*

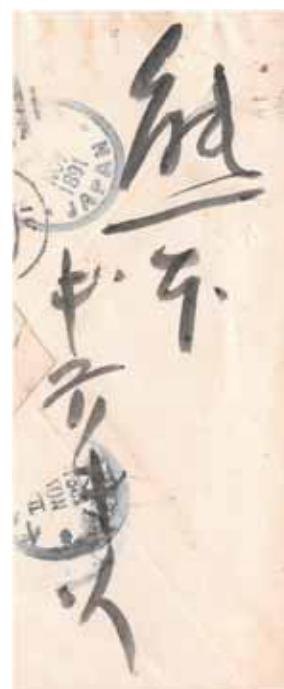


Fig. 6a & 6b.

Fig. 6: Reverse of envelope with clearly visible New York duplex transit stamp dated October 10, 1891. Faintly visible on top of this cancel is a San Francisco F.D. (Foreign Division) stamp, date obscured.

Three Japanese receivers are also on the back of the cover. Yokohama is below the NY and SF cancels, with only the Y visible. The one to the left is Kobe. Note that this English character Kobe receiver is a double impression, clearly November but the actual date cannot be confidently determined. The third is in Japanese characters, from Kumamoto, dated November 13. A Japanese inscription in ink on the back, meant to be read vertically (see at right), indicates the address as Kumamoto, & Gulick transliterated into Japanese (“Gyuliku”).



International mail from and to Japan prior to 1860 is very rare, and mail prior to 1880 is also scarce but not as rare as the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century period. In the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, Japan had a system that was largely run on foot by postal carriers. Mail was relayed from place to place in a manner similar to the American Pony Express system. Carriers travelled in pairs to ensure that mail was never delayed due to injury or illness of the carrier.<sup>12</sup>

Foreigners had a presence in Japan for many decades; however, with the arrival in 1854 of the Commodore Perry Squadron, those numbers began to increase. The presence of Perry in Japan is recognized as the first American postal system to operate in Japanese territory. Covers to and from this expedition during this period are very rare.<sup>13</sup>

With an increasing number of foreigners in the country, the British, French and Americans saw a need to establish their own postal system to send and receive mail that would parallel the Japanese postal system. The British, French, and Americans opened post offices in Yokohama, Hyogo (Kobe), and Nagasaki; the Americans also opened an office in Hakodate. The American offices were closed in 1873 after the U.S. and Japan signed a convention to establish postal services between the two countries.<sup>14</sup> Most of the other foreign offices were finally closed by 1879.

Japan began its own foreign mail services on January 1, 1875. This was less than four short years after domestic postal service was established in Japan by the Meiji Government. Prior to 1871, all mail was handled by private courier. Japan began issuing postage stamps on April 20, 1871 and with the help of the United States Consular Office, the new postal system established a Foreign Mail Department. Domestically, by the end of 1874, there were over 3000 local post offices in Japan. Japan's foreign mail sections were opened in Yokohama, Hyogo (Kobe) and Nagasaki in 1874. From 1874 through April 19, 1934, all of Japan's foreign receivers contained the word "JAPAN." From that date on until 1949 all foreign mail cancels used "NIPPON." After 1949 the cancels reverted back to "JAPAN." So looking at establishment dates, the above cover was processed by Japan only seventeen short years after the actual establishment of an official government mail system to send and receive foreign mails.<sup>15</sup>

Fig. 7: A depiction of Japanese domestic mail service from 1891.<sup>16</sup>



**PACIFIC MAIL STEAMSHIP COMPANY.**  
**THE COMPANY'S STEAMSHIPS WILL**  
TELL  
**FOR NEW YORK VIA PANAMA.**  
 Steamship ACAPULCO, Friday, July 3, 1891, at 12 noon, taking passengers and freight direct for Mazatlan, Acapulco, Ocos, Charaperico, San Jose de Guatemala, Acajutia, La Libertad, Corinto, Punta Arenas and Panama.  
**FOR HONG-KONG VIA YOKOHAMA.**  
 CHINA.....Saturday, July 18, 1891, at 3 PM  
 CITY OF PEKING (via Honolulu).....  
 .....Tuesday, August 11, 1891, at 3 PM  
 CITY OF RIO DE JANEIRO.....  
 .....Thursday, September 3, 1891, at 3 PM

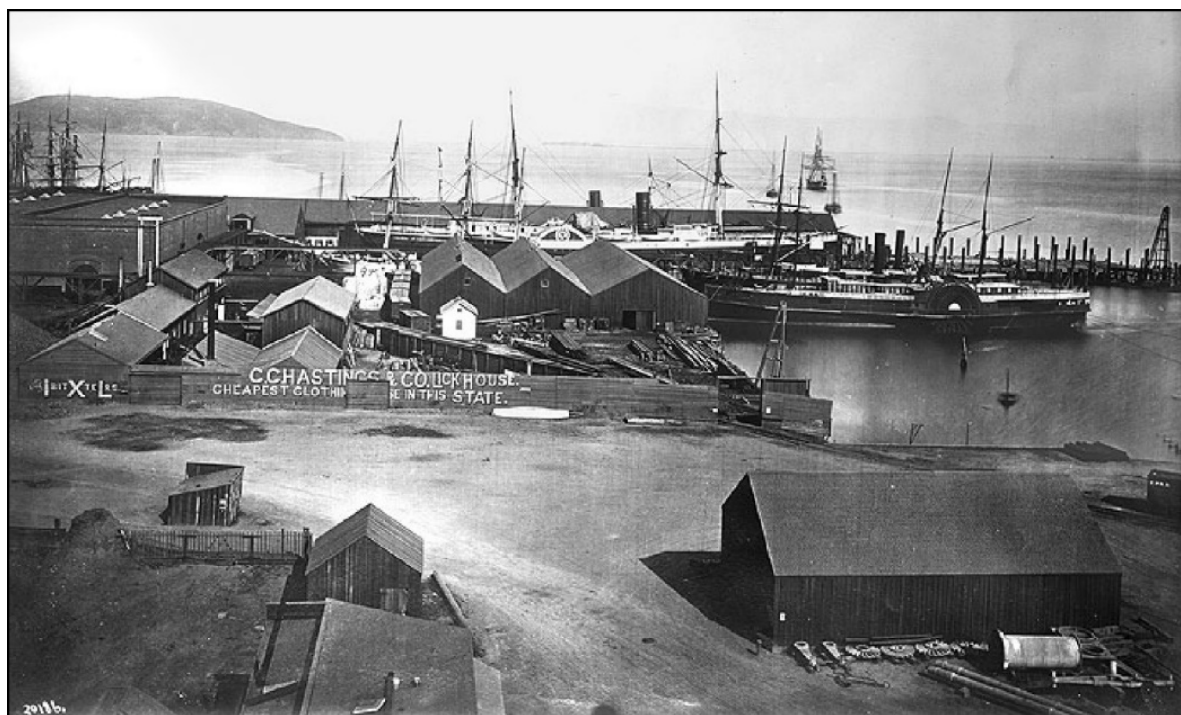
Round trip tickets to Yokohama and return at reduced rates.  
 For freight or passage apply at the office, corner of First and Brannan streets.  
 Branch office—202 Front street.  
 ALEXANDER CENTER, General Agent.  
 7th fl GEORGE H. RICE, Traffic Manager.

Fig. 8: Pacific Mail Steam Ship Company ad from 1891.<sup>17</sup>

The cover to Miss Julia Gulick was received first in Japan at the Yokohama exchange office after being unloaded from a Pacific Mail Steam Ship Company (PMSSC) steamer.<sup>18</sup>

The PMSSC history is closely tied with the development of San Francisco. The company was established in 1848 and prospered with government contracts to move mail, initially along the coast and down to Central America. PMSSC boats brought hundreds of prospectors to San Francisco in 1849 who disembarked for the gold fields in the Sierras. By 1867, again supported heavily by government mail contracts, PMSSC established the world's first regular transpacific steamship service to Asia.

The initial route was San Francisco to Yokohama, with additional stops at Hong Kong and Shanghai. Sailings left approximately every three weeks from San Francisco. The estimated transit time was seventeen days to Yokohama. PMSSC brought mail and goods across the Pacific but were also responsible for bringing many Chinese and Japanese immigrants to California, who helped to build the trans-continental railroad and greatly enriched the culture of the West Coast. PMSSC was acquired by the Dollar Line<sup>19</sup> in 1925, and then in 1938 it became The American President Lines which it remains today.<sup>20</sup>



*Fig. 9: Pacific Mail Steam Ship Company docks in San Francisco circa 1880 with steamers “Colorado” and “Senator” at the dock.<sup>21</sup>*

Another example of American-Japanese mail is the cover shown in *Figure 10*, from a Robert Siegel auction October 19, 2010, which sold for \$12,500.<sup>22</sup> This is a very fine Civil War patriotic cover used from Hawaii in 1863. Very few Civil War patriotic covers are known used from Hawaii.

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It is addressed to the same Julia A. E. Gulick, then in New York City, the youngest of the eight Gulick children. A young girl at the time, Julia would have been 17. It was sent in care of an attorney in New York City, addressed to Bible House, Astor Place, New York City, which was the home of the American Bible Society. There is some evidence that Julia may have attended the Union Theological Seminary in the Chelsea neighborhood of Manhattan. It would be several years yet before she would set foot in Japan. She would later assist her brother the Reverend Orramel Gulick when he and his wife visited Kyushu in 1885, and decided that Kumamoto was the ideal spot for the center of their operations for teaching English and for evangelization. They preached throughout Kyushu and on one trip “travelled 475 miles, 200 by jinrikisha [more commonly known today as a rickshaw], 150 by steamer, 75 on pack horses and 50 in an open boat.” Eventually her brother would return to Hawaii to care for the Japanese there, while Julia remained in Japan until 1907, then returning herself to Hawaii where she continued to serve the ABCFM as a missionary.<sup>23</sup>



*Fig. 10: 12¢ Black (69). Tied by cogwheel cancel, “San Francisco Cal. Feb. 12, 1863” double-circle date stamp on red, blue and gold “The Union, it must and shall be preserved” Eagle and Shield Patriotic cover to Miss Julia A. E. Gulick in New York City, originating in Hawaii with red “Honolulu U.S. Postage Paid Jan. 24” circular date stamp, slightly reduced at right.<sup>24</sup>*

My 1891 cover led me on a voyage of discovery – the postal system to and from Japan, and the extraordinary life of Miss Julia A.E. Gulick.

### ENDNOTES:

- <sup>1</sup> Wikipedia, History of Christianity in Japan at [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/History\\_of\\_the\\_Catholic\\_Church\\_in\\_Japan](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/History_of_the_Catholic_Church_in_Japan).
- <sup>2</sup> Annual Report, Volume 61, Hawaiian Mission Children’s Society, p. 60, at <https://books.google.com/books?id=SAFNAAAAMAAJ&q=gulick#v=snippet&q=gulick&f=false>.
- <sup>3</sup> Alumni Association of Princeton Theological Seminary, “Necrological Report” (Philadelphia:Grant, Faires & Rodgers, 1878), pp. 14-15; and Peter Gulick, “Autobiography” (pp. 1-10), 1990, Transcription, Hawaiian Mission Children’s Society Library. See also [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Peter\\_Johnson\\_Gulick](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Peter_Johnson_Gulick).

- <sup>4</sup> American Board of Commissioners of Foreign Missions
- <sup>5</sup> “The Legacy of the Gulicks, 1827-1964,” by Clifford Putney in *The International Bulletin of Missionary Research*, January 2001 See <http://www.internationalbulletin.org/issues/2001-01/2001-01-028-putney.pdf>.
- <sup>6</sup> *Annual Report of the Hawaiian Mission Children’s Society, 1913*, p. 68. See <https://books.google.com/books?id=SAFNAAAAMAAJ&q=gulick#v=snippet&q=gulick&f=false>.
- <sup>7</sup> Hawaiian cemetery information at <http://files.usgwarchives.net/hi/honolulu/cemeteries/mission.txt>.
- <sup>8</sup> Find-A Grave web site for Julia A.E. Gulick at <https://www.findagrave.com/memorial/106526441/julia-ann-eliza-gulick>.
- <sup>9</sup> RailsWest Railroad Museum, The Historical Society of Pottawattamie County, and *A Teacher’s Guide to “A Railway Mail Service”* – at [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/RailsWest\\_Railroad\\_Museum](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/RailsWest_Railroad_Museum) , and <https://www.thehistoricalsociety.org/ewExternalFiles/Railway%20Mail%20Service%20unit.pdf>.
- <sup>10</sup> *U.S. International Postage Rates, 1872-1996*, Anthony Wawrukiewicz & Henry W. Beecher, CMA Publishing Company 1996, p.34, 354 Since there were no UPU rates established for a second ½ ounce until October 1, 1907, the sender was required to pay the full 15g/1/2 oz. rate if the letter exceeded the initial ½ oz. So it appears that the letter to Julia Gulick was overpaid by \$.01 in 1891.
- <sup>11</sup> Translation of the Japanese characters and receiver cancels provided by Bobby Liao of the American Philatelic Society, Translation Department.
- <sup>12</sup> *Manners and Customs of the Japanese in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century: From Accounts of Recent Dutch Residents of Japan and From the German Work of Dr. Ph. Fr. Von Seibold*”, 1841, p 230
- <sup>13</sup> *Foreign Postal Systems in Japan in the 1800s*, Copyright George C. Baxley 1999-2020 Baxley Stamps:
- <sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>16</sup> Illustration of Japanese postmen from Fuzohu Gaho, August 1891, on Baxley Stamps web site at [http://www.baxleystamps.com/litho/post\\_fuzoku\\_18-34\\_1-31b-1.jpg](http://www.baxleystamps.com/litho/post_fuzoku_18-34_1-31b-1.jpg)
- <sup>17</sup> California Digital Newspaper Collection at <https://cdnc.ucr.edu/?a=d&d=SFC18910702.2.88.3&e=-----en--20--1--txt-txIN-----1>
- <sup>18</sup> “*A Sketch of The New Route To China And Japan by the Pacific Mail Steamship Company, Part VIII*,” pg. 91-101, 1867 Turnbull, Smith Printers, Stanford University Library, Hopkins Transportation Library. See [https://books.google.com/books?id=fZ8pAQAAIAAJ&printsec=frontcover&source=gbg\\_summary\\_r&cad=0#v=onepage&q&f=false](https://books.google.com/books?id=fZ8pAQAAIAAJ&printsec=frontcover&source=gbg_summary_r&cad=0#v=onepage&q&f=false).
- <sup>19</sup> Dollar Line history at <https://www.gienvick.com/OceanTravel/SteamshipLines/DollarSteamshipLine.html>.
- <sup>20</sup> Pacific Mail Steamship Co. at <https://www.tavbooks.com/pages/books/38814/pacific-mail-panama-transit-steamship-companies/pacific-mail-steamship-co-time-table-australian-route-for-mail-service-between-great-britain-new>.
- <sup>21</sup> Photo from *Pacific Mail Steamship Company, An Historical Essay*” by Steve Potash, at [https://www.foundsf.org/index.php?title=Pacific\\_Mail\\_Steamship\\_Company](https://www.foundsf.org/index.php?title=Pacific_Mail_Steamship_Company).
- <sup>22</sup> Robert Siegel Auction Galleries catalog for the Raymond Vogel Collection, Part 1 Sale October 19-20, 2010, Lot 2065, Sold \$12,500. See <https://siegelauctions.com/2010/995/995.pdf>.
- <sup>23</sup> *Thirty Eventful Years-The Story of the American Board’s Mission In Japan, 1869-1899*, Chapter X, pg. 83, Reverend M.L. Gordon, American Board of Commissioners For Foreign Missions, Boston, Congregational House 1901. See <https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=coo1.ark:/13960/t8mc9gz42&view=1up&seq=7>.
- <sup>24</sup> Description from the Robert Siegel Auction Galleries catalog for the Raymond Vogel Collection, Part 1 Sale October 19-20, 2010, Lot 2065, Sold \$12,500. <https://siegelauctions.com/2010/995/995.pdf>.