

LETTERS FROM NORTH AMERICA

David Carment

2016



**At Pearl Harbour, Hawaii, United States, in 1980 and Victoria, British Columbia
Canada, in 1994**

Introduction

The letters to my parents included in this collection are of my only two visits to North America. The first, when I lived at Rockhampton, was on an American Express tour of California, Nevada, Arizona and Hawaii in the United States at the end of 1980. The second was to attend an international mining history conference at Colorado in the United States during June 1994. On my way I visited British Columbia in Canada. I returned home to Darwin via California.

The letters include no perceptive insights but the visits they describe helped shape my attitudes towards Canada and the United States. Long before my visits I studied United States history at both school and university and the politics of that country at university. I knew less about Canada. My 1994 stay there was to see Canadian friends and a relation. I have family connections with both countries. I would like to make another trip to the United States to see the east, especially New York.

The letters are presented here very largely as they were written with only minor editorial changes, mainly for consistency. The 1980 letters are much longer than the 1994 ones, when I used postcards and had less time for writing.

All images are my own.

1980

Quality Inn, Anaheim, 12 December 1980

Thanks for looking after me so well [in Sydney] and driving me to the airport. My [Pan American] flight was only slightly delayed and the journey [to Los Angeles] was without incident. I will write more fully from now on.

Quality Inn, Anaheim, 13 December 1980

I slept for 12 hours last night and awoke feeling refreshed. My room is very comfortable and equipped with all mod cons.

I breakfasted at a steakhouse near the hotel, having eggs, sausages, toast and potatoes in a huge reasonably priced helping. I then joined the tour group on a bus to Disneyland.

I do not need to describe Disneyland to you since you have already been there. It is quite a place. I left the others once there and covered many attractions – the jungle cruise, ‘Great Moments with Mr Lincoln’, the Main Street cinema, the Swiss Family Robinson tree house, Tom Sawyer’s island, the Casey Jr. circus train, ‘It’s a Small World’, the Matterhorn bobsleds, the Peter Pan flight, ‘Adventure through Inner Space’, ‘America Sings’, the submarine voyage and the people mover. All were good and some were cleverly conceived. I was impressed by Disneyland’s cleanliness and the friendliness of its staff.

After shopping in Main Street I returned to the hotel at about 6.00 pm.

The people on the tour are generally pleasant. Our escort, Pam Cameron-Clarke, is very efficient.



Swiss Family Robinson tree house at Disneyland

Quality Inn, Anaheim, 14 December 1980

Today was long and hectic but very enjoyable. My bus trip left the hotel at 7.30 am. We had an excellent driver/guide, a Negro [I don't recall 'Black American' being used in 1980] with a great deal of local knowledge and many funny jokes.

We drove into Los Angeles and then Hollywood. Our first stop was the Hollywood Bowl, a huge amphitheatre that would be magnificent for concerts.

From there we went to the Universal studios, where we spent about four hours. We saw the television series 'Battlestar Galactica' being filmed, were driven over a collapsing bridge, visited Robert Wagner's dressing room, were driven through the sets of famous films, saw various special effects explained and looked at animal actors being trained.

We then drove to Mann's Chinese Theatre, where various stars left their handprints in the cement. From there we viewed stars' homes in Beverley Hills. Most were pleasant and some were enormous. We stopped off for an hour at the Farmers' Market, a huge conglomeration of stores and stalls thronged with people buying food, clothes, books etc. We ended the day with a leisurely drive up Willshire Boulevard before getting back to the hotel at about 6.30 pm.



Handprints at Mann's Chinese Theatre

Holiday Inn Goleta, Santa Barbara, 15 December 1980

Today was again most enjoyable. We left Anaheim at about 8.30 am in a very comfortable air-conditioned coach. We drove out of Los Angeles and through attractive agricultural country and small towns. Most of the latter are well laid out with excellent shops and restaurants. The standard of such services, as well as the roads, is far higher than in Australia. We reached Santa Barbara just before midday. It is very attractive, with some beautiful Spanish and Spanish style buildings. Real estate prices, however, are very high. We stopped at the city's old mission, built by the Franciscans in 1786. It is a lovely building with a quaint ornamental garden that includes a Moreton Bay Fig planted in 1820. We lunched in the city centre. I went to an outdoor restaurant to eat a superb crab and avocado salad. I will show you my photo of it.

After lunch we went to Solvang, a small town in the mountains that Danes established about 70 years ago. Most of the buildings are in a Danish style. We shopped and looked around before returning to Santa Barbara, enjoying spectacular views of the sea as we descended.

Our hotel is very good indeed. My room is luxuriously furnished and close to a large heated pool.



Pam Cameron-Clarke having lunch at Santa Barbara

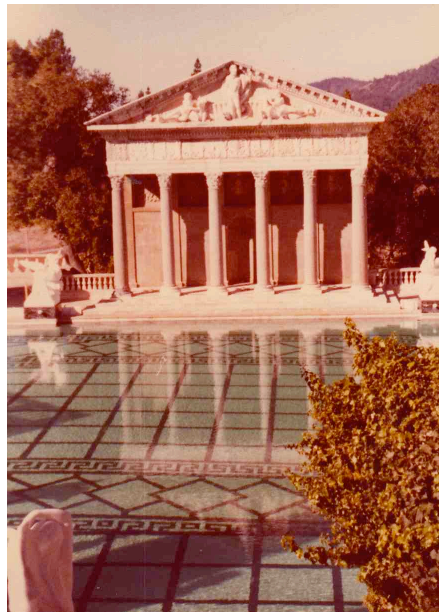
Hotel San Carlos, Monterey, 16 December 1980

We were up again early this morning for an 8.00 am start. We travelled about 300 miles on our drive to Monterey. It was a fascinating trip. For most of the way the highway wound along the spectacular mountainous coast.

We passed through places such as San Luis Obispo and Morro Bay before reaching San Simeon. There we spent a couple of hours inspecting the famous Hearst Castle. It was hideous but interesting. Built by the newspaper magnate W.R. Hearst, this huge structure incorporates a bewildering range of architectural styles and houses works of art and artefacts. The castle is on a mountain with superb coastal views.

We lunched at San Simeon and then followed the road through more beautiful country. It rather reminded me of the Scottish Highlands. The light blue sea was on one side and the high mountains on the other. In the Big Sur area, greatly favoured by artists and writers, we saw otters and grey whales. We stopped for a short time at Carmel, an attractive town that is a favourite setting for artists and photographers. Tourists are not encouraged. The town is a haunt for rich eccentrics.

Finally we reached Monterey. Our hotel is old, built in 1927, but has a lot of style. My room overlooks the sea with a large fishing fleet anchored at a long jetty. Tonight I had a lovely fish dinner before going on a long walk.



Part of Hearst Castle

Yosemite Lodge, Yosemite 17 December 1980

We left Monterey at 8.30 am. We drove through areas of the town made famous by John Steinbeck, particularly Cannery Row. We then took the spectacular Seventeen Mile Drive that goes along a rocky coastline and through forests. The homes we passed are usually worth at least a million dollars each. People such as Clint Eastwood and Bruce Devlin own them.

We then headed inland, passing through towns such as Salinas, Los Banos and Merced and some of California's richest agricultural country. We stopped for a while at the huge San Luis Dam, seeing a couple of short films on its functions.

As we neared our destination at Yosemite the country became more mountainous. There were huge cliffs on both sides of the road. Finally we got to the Yosemite Valley. I have not had time to explore but even from my window there are fabulous views.



Seventeen Mile Drive

Yosemite Lodge, Yosemite, 18 December 1980

I am writing this letter late in the afternoon on the little balcony in front of my room at Yosemite Lodge. Immediately before me are huge trees and behind them high snow topped mountains. It is one of the most beautiful places I have ever visited.

This morning I went on a two-hour bus tour around the Yosemite Valley. We stopped at various spots to take advantage of the superb views. We saw towering waterfalls, streams, forests, meadows and, of course, the mountains. Yosemite was the United States' first national park. Over the years it has inspired many writers, artists and photographers. I took many photos myself.

We returned to the lodge for lunch. Afterwards I went for a long walk along the road to the small Yosemite Village. While there I visited a museum on the history of Indians [now usually called Native Americans] in the area. Like many Indians elsewhere, they were virtually exterminated by the whites. Few of their descendants remain.

Locals tell me that the weather here is unusually warm for this time of year. But I still find it cold enough. We have been very lucky with the weather for the whole trip so far. Every day has been fine and sunny.



Yosemite

Quality Inn, San Francisco, 19 December 1980

It was very cold indeed this morning at Yosemite with a heavy frost. I managed to get out of bed and have breakfast before getting on the bus. We had a spectacular journey through the mountains. In places there was snow on both sides of the road. It seemed quite odd when we finally reached the flat country. We had lunch at a small town near San Francisco.

We got into San Francisco at about 2.00 pm. The city looked impressive as we approached it on the freeway.

I spent several hours wandering around the area near our hotel. We are quite close to the Golden Gate Bridge. Places I visited included Ghirardelli Square where warehouses are converted in specialty shops, Fisherman's Wharf where I had dinner (crab with sourdough bread) and the Pier 39 shopping complex that extends into the bay. San Francisco is a fascinating city. The shops stay open until late, there were dozens of street musicians and the streets were thronged with people, many dressed in extraordinary fashions. I did not get back to the hotel until 8.00 pm.



San Francisco street scene

Quality Inn, San Francisco, 20 December 1980

This morning I went on a bus tour around San Francisco, visiting the main sights. Among other places we saw the famous Golden Gate Bridge, Golden Gate Park, the

city centre, Twin Hills and the magnificent new Catholic Cathedral. It is a city of great charm and character. We got back at about midday.

I then took a bus into Union Square, at the heart of the shopping district. It was very crowded. There were street musicians. A very good orchestra was also playing. I visited the main stores such as Macys and many smaller ones. They were packed with Christmas goods. There was, however, little that could not be obtained in Sydney.

I walked back to the hotel via Chinatown, a large area of shops and restaurants where I saw few European faces. It is one of the biggest concentrations of overseas Chinese people.

On my return I went to drinks at the apartment of the sister of my Rockhampton friend Bob Firth. She was there with her boyfriend. We had a very pleasant time for a few hours. The apartment had superb views.

I had dinner at Fisherman's Wharf before walking back to the hotel and resting my feet.



Golden Gate Bridge

Quality Inn, San Francisco, 21 December 1980

It was very wet today, which rather restricted my activities. Still, I should not complain, as up until now the weather has been superb. San Francisco has not had decent rain for some time. The locals feared a serious drought.

This morning I walked around the waterfront. I intended to take a ferry across the bay but poor visibility made me decide not to. Instead I took a bus into Union Square where I shopped, buying some jeans.

I then went to a concert at the new and impressive Davies Symphony Hall. The San Francisco Symphony Orchestra with a large choir and soloists performed Benjamin Britten's 'War Requiem'. It was very well done and more than made up for the bad weather outside.

After the performance ended I walked back to the hotel, where I had dinner.



Typical old San Francisco houses

Timbercove Lodge, Lake Tahoe, 22 December 1980

I got up this morning to find that San Francisco was covered in quite thick fog so it was just as well we left today. Our coach trip to Lake Tahoe was particularly interesting. We drove west over the very long Oakland Bridge and ultimately reached Sacramento, California's capital.

Sacramento is a city largely devoted to government. It reminded me of Canberra in some ways. We looked at the Capitol building, which like most such buildings in the United States is white with a large dome. We then went to the

beautifully restored old section of the city where streets look as they did in the 1880s, right down to the wooden footpaths. From there we travelled to Sutter's Fort, also well restored. This series of buildings enclosed with a wall was a trading post run by the Swiss J.A. Sutter during the 1840s. Gold was discovered nearby. The Americans certainly know how to present historic sites. We could take lessons from them in Australia.

After leaving Sacramento we lunched at an incredible complex called Sam's Place. It is designed like a Western saloon in the cowboy era but is far larger. There were so many sections that I almost got lost. The food was excellent.

In the afternoon the clouds disappeared and we had fine weather. As we climbed the mountains there were magnificent views. On both sides of the road were forests of fir trees. In the distance there were snow-covered peaks. We eventually got to the snow, reaching an altitude of 7500 feet above sea level. We could see Lake Tahoe's shimmering blue in the distance.

We climbed down for a while to reach the lake, which is at an altitude of 4000 feet. Along the shores are many resorts, some in California and others in Nevada. Nearby are some of the United States' best ski slopes. Our hotel is excellent. It is right on the lakeshore with superb views.

Tonight I went for a walk but did not stay out long because of the extreme cold.



Sutter's Fort

Timbercove Lodge, Lake Tahoe, 23 December 1980

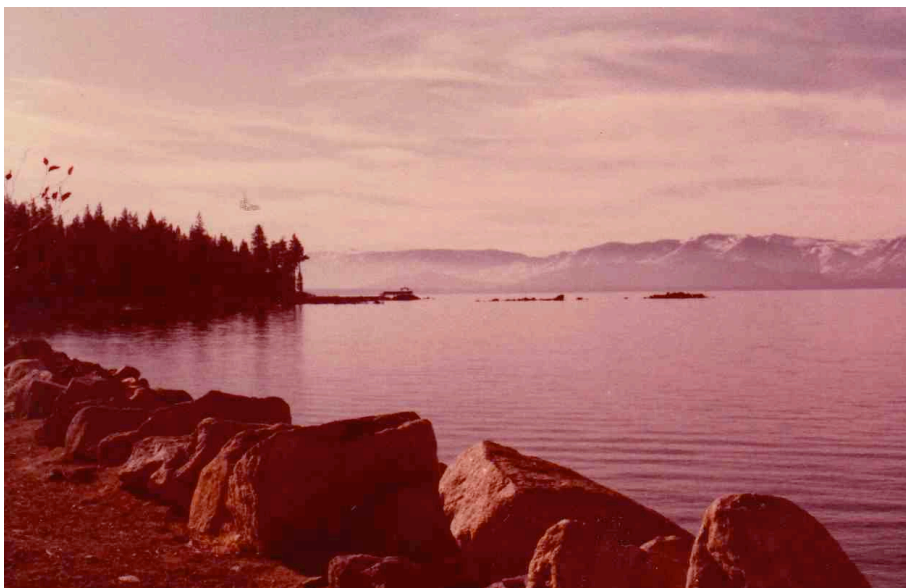
Today was again quite packed. It was a clear night so this morning was very cold indeed. I was glad to be able to lie in bed for a while.

After breakfast we went on a coach tour that took us into Nevada. The border is only about a mile from our hotel. As soon as we crossed the border we noticed an enormous concentration of casinos on the Nevada side. They are illegal in California. The sparsely populated state of Nevada makes most of its money from them. We stopped a couple of times to look at the lake before climbing over the mountains to enter desert country. The scenery was like that of countless cowboy films. There were snow-covered mountains in the background.

Our next stop was Carson City, which despite a population of only 45000 is Nevada's capital. There we visited the state museum, which has some fine exhibits. Many were devoted to the mining that took place at the end of the last century.

From there we went to Virginia City, an old mining town that once had a population of 35000. It is one of many such places that were once prosperous when silver was being found. Many of its buildings have been restored, some as shops and museums. After staying a couple of hours we drove back to our hotel.

On our return I went with Don Solomon from the tour group to a couple of the big casinos. There are huge luxurious places. We ate dinner at one of the hotels before returning to California.



Lake Tahoe

Royal Las Vegas Hotel, Las Vegas, 24 December 1980

Thank you so much for the card. It was thoughtful of you and greatly appreciated. Christmas will indeed seem strange without you with me. I hope that your Christmas celebrations went well.

We left Lake Tahoe this morning by bus. We drove through the Nevada desert for a little over an hour before we reached Reno. There we boarded an Eastern Airlines flight for Las Vegas. The flight took about an hour. Las Vegas appeared from the air as a lump of tall buildings in the middle of a desert surrounded by mountains.

After landing we drove through the city to our hotel. There is one casino after another. There were even slot machines at the airport.

After unpacking I walked around and had dinner.



My Las Vegas hotel

Royal Las Vegas Hotel, Las Vegas, 25 December 1980

Today started early when we all assembled for our trip to Grand Canyon. We were driven to Las Vegas's airport, where we boarded a series of small aeroplanes. Each held about 10 people.

For just over the next hour we witnessed really impressive views. We flew over the Nevada desert and the Hoover Dam before reaching Arizona and the Grand Canyon.

The canyon is even bigger than I expected. The aeroplane I was in flew into it, so at close range we witnessed the red cliffs and rock formations that have made the canyon famous as well as the Colorado River that flows along its floor. We landed at Grand Canyon Village, from where a bus took us to beauty spots on the South Rim. They were well worth seeing. Finally we had an excellent buffet lunch at a hotel before flying back to Las Vegas. We reached our hotel at about 3.00 pm.

I then had a long walk along the Las Vegas Strip. All the casinos were thronged with people. Among them were many Mexicans, no doubt spending some of their oil riches. I visited the famous Caesar's Palace, which has thousands of slot machines and many gaming tables among Roman statues and fountains. I then had dinner and watched television in my hotel.



Members of my tour group at Grand Canyon

Outrigger West Hotel, Honolulu, 26 December 1980

This will be my last letter, as I should be seeing you soon. Thanks so much for the letter that awaited me in Honolulu when I arrived this afternoon.

Most of today was spent in flying. We left Las Vegas at 11.00 am and arrived here via Los Angeles at 3.00 pm. We flew with Western Airlines. Flights were on time and the service was excellent, far better than on Pan Am.

Our hotel, the Outrigger West, is very good. I have a large room with a verandah. I walked tonight, shopped (buying a colourful Hawaiian shirt) and had a Hawaiian meal. Honolulu is much warmer than the other places I have recently been to.

I will see more tomorrow when I go on a tour.

I stayed in Honolulu until the end of the month, returning to Sydney on 2 January 1981. While there I toured the main Hawaiian island of Oahu, went to museums, saw the film 'Nine to Five', visited Pearl Harbour and did an all day air tour of other Hawaiian islands during which I enjoyed some remarkable views. We also landed at a few of them.



Waikiki beach at Honolulu



USS *Arizona* memorial at Pearl Harbour



The island of Hawaii from the air



My tour group's farewell party at Honolulu

1994

Hotel Georgia, Vancouver, 30 May 1994

I got here this morning after an excellent flight. We went from Singapore via Seoul and had good views of Korea. I found I could sleep much better in Business Class than Economy and arrived here well rested. I spent much of the day seeing Vancouver on foot with the aid of a tourist map. I took in many of the main attractions. It is a lovely place. The weather is cool but sunny. I rang [my cousin] Laura [Carment] and shall see her in Victoria.



Vancouver



Stanley Park at Vancouver

4126 Cabot Place, Victoria, 1 June 1980

Much of yesterday was spent walking around Vancouver before I took the very short flight to Victoria in the afternoon. Eric Sager [Professor of History at University of Victoria] met me at the airport and took me to his very comfortable house.

Both yesterday afternoon and for most of today Eric and his archaeologist wife Brenda Clark showed me many of the local sights. The museum, as you said, is terrific. Victoria is a most attractive city.



Fort Rodd Historic Park

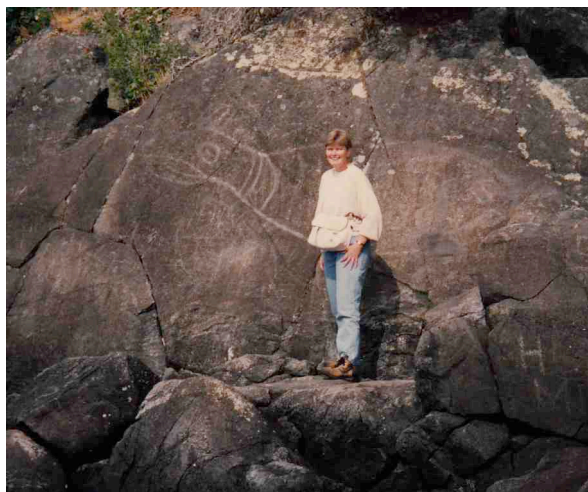


Royal British Columbia Museum

4126 Cabot Place, Victoria, 3 June 1980

Yesterday Eric, Brenda and I went in the morning to the East Sooke National Park, where we walked for a few hours. The weather was perfect and there was superb scenery – forests, snow covered mountains and secluded beaches. During the afternoon we went to Hatfield Castle and the Commonwealth Games pool. I dined last night with Don Vandenberg [Professor of Astronomy at University of Victoria] and his family.

I spent today with Laura Carment. She is very pleasant. We exchanged family history information.



Brenda Clark with pictograph at East Sooke National Park



Laura Carment outside Empress Hotel at Victoria

Jamison Inn, Golden, 6 June 1980

On Saturday Eric took me to Duncan on Vancouver Island. There we visited the Native Heritage Centre and the Forest History Museum. The scenery was attractive. That night he had some of his historian colleagues to dinner so they could meet me.

Yesterday I flew to Denver via Vancouver and Seattle. I am staying at a quaint inn on the Colorado School of Mines campus at Golden, the location of my conference. From my windows I see the Rocky Mountains. The conference has so far gone well.



Eric Sager at the Forest History Museum



Jamison Inn at Golden

Jamison Inn, Golden, 8 June 1994

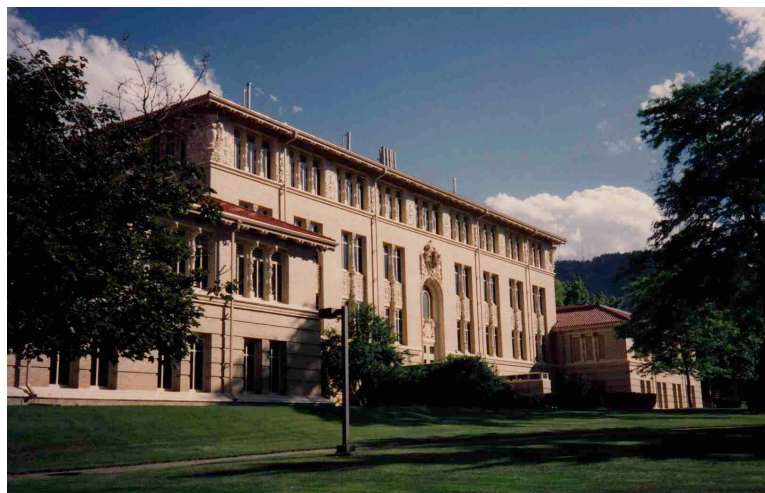
The conference has remained interesting with speakers from many different countries presenting papers. Today I attended sessions on the preservation of historic mining sites. [I also presented a paper.]

Yesterday afternoon we went on an excursion to Georgetown, an hour's drive from here. It is an old mining town in the Rockies. While there we did a steam train trip. It was a terrific experience.

Our good weather continues.



Georgetown train trip



Colorado School of Mines

Jamison Inn, Golden, 10 June 1994

I went on a one-day conference excursion to Leadville yesterday. It is very scenically situated high in the Rocky Mountains and is surrounded by snow-covered peaks. The town includes many interesting old buildings and the National Mining Hall of Fame.

Today there were more conference sessions that ended at midday. It looks like the next mining history conference will be in Chile. This afternoon I went for a long walk following the pretty Golden Trail.



Leadville



Land yacht on the Golden Trail

Melia at Scotts Hotel, Singapore, 14 June 1994

I left Golden on Saturday morning and went to Denver airport for my flight to Los Angeles. This was on time and uneventful. Once at LA airport I took a shuttle bus to my hotel and later went for a long walk to a nearby beach. The weather was cool and overcast. There was also bad smog. I had an early night.



My Los Angeles hotel



My aeroplane at Los Angeles airport

I returned home via Singapore, where I stayed for a couple of days.