

Lewis and Hannah

Gerstle

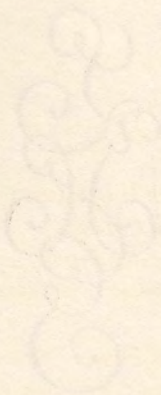


GERSTLE MACK

1953

Law and Liberty

Gerstle Mack



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PERSONAL RECOLLECTIONS

Contributed by: Alice Gerstle Levison, Bella Gerstle Fleishhacker, Edith Mack Branten, Harold Lewis Mack, Adele Mack Gerstley, James Gerstley, Marcus Cauffman Sloss, Samuel Lilienthal, Caroline Greenebaum Koester, Sophie Dinkelspiel Brown, William Gerstle (of Louisville), Lottie Sternau Fleischaker, Bernard E. Fleischaker, Edna Gerstle, Irma Gerstle Gardner, Samuel Frankenheimer, David Albert Wassermann, Max Regensburger, Henry Gerstle, A. W. Wilding, and Volney Richmond Jr.

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Illustrations No. 1 and No. 2 are from photographs taken by Martin Frankenheimer, through whose courtesy they are reproduced in this book. The original miniature of Isak Michael Gerstle (No. 4) is in the possession of James Mack Gerstley, Los Angeles.

The monogram on the title page is copied from the initials engraved on a set of table silver formerly belonging to Lewis and Hannah Gerstle, now owned by Gerstle Mack.

G. M.

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Chapter II

THE GREENEBAUM FAMILY

THE RECORDED HISTORY of the Greenebaum family (originally Grünebaum, the German form of the name) does not extend as far into the past as that of the Gerstles. The first known ancestors were Jacob Grünebaum, born in 1796, and his wife Karoline, *née* Spiessbürger (meaning in German "pikeman" or "spearman"), who were married in 1818 and lived at Münchweiler, a village (with a population in 1949 of 720) on the Alsenz River in the Palatinate, a formerly independent German state west of the Rhine which was politically though not geographically united to Bavaria in 1777.

Nine of the ten children of Jacob and Karoline were born in Münchweiler: Babbet (Babette) on December 24, 1819; Levi in 1821; Abraham and Leon, twins, on June 27, 1823; Herman on November 12, 1826; Jeannette in 1829; Jacob Jr. on May 27, 1831; Moses on December 20, 1833; and Sarah on July 18, 1836. In 1838 the family moved to Kaiserslautern, a much larger industrial town about ten miles southwest of Münchweiler, where the youngest child, Johanna (always known as Hannah) was born on December 23, 1838. Presumably Levi and Jeannette died in childhood, for no records of their lives have been preserved.

Karoline Grünebaum died at Kaiserslautern on February 9, 1841 at the age of forty-two, when Hannah was only two years old. By that time the family had already begun to split apart, at least one of the older children having emigrated to America. Leon crossed the Atlantic in 1838 at the age of fifteen and, after residing for brief periods in various American towns, settled down at Holly Springs in the extreme northern section of Mississippi, near the Tennessee border, and opened a dry goods and clothing store in partnership with Reuben Becker, who afterwards changed his name to Baker. The next brother to emigrate was Herman, who had been apprenticed to a shoemaker in Germany; in 1843, when he was seventeen, he went to Philadelphia, where he was employed by a shoemaker named Benker. In 1845 Abraham crossed the ocean

and joined his twin brother Leon at Holly Springs, and soon afterwards Herman left Philadelphia to live with his brothers in Mississippi.

A year or two later the three Greenebaums (who had anglicized their surname) and Baker moved to Chicago, at that time a small but booming town with a much more promising commercial future than the backwoods of Mississippi. Leon and Baker again went into the dry goods and clothing business, with which Abraham and Herman may also have been associated though apparently they were not partners. The date of Babette's emigration is unknown, but she may have crossed the Atlantic with one of her brothers. By 1847, in any event, she too had arrived in Chicago, where she married Louis Bucki.

On May 12, 1847 Jacob Greenebaum left Kaiserslautern for America with his four youngest children: Jacob Jr., aged sixteen; Moses, thirteen; Sarah, almost eleven; and Hannah, eight. They reached New York on July 1 and proceeded to Philadelphia. Another little girl, the child of a friend, accompanied them from Germany: Rosalia Cauffman, seven years old, two or possibly three of whose uncles, formerly of Kaiserslautern, resided in Philadelphia. One of these was Marcus Cauffman; Rosalia was taken care of by the family of one of Marcus's brothers whose first name cannot now be ascertained.

The Greenebaums remained in Philadelphia until the spring of 1848, when they moved out to Chicago. There, for the first time in ten years, Jacob and his eight surviving children were united. The reunion lasted only two years. Babette, the married sister, cared for Sarah and Hannah as well as she could; but Chicago was still a rough frontier outpost, and it soon became evident that it was an unsuitable place in which to bring up two ladylike little girls. Their father, who appears to have had little taste or aptitude for parental duties, shirked the responsibility of looking after his young daughters. Accordingly he wrote to Marcus Cauffman and his wife Bella and asked them to recommend a good boarding school in Philadelphia. The Cauffmans, childless but exceedingly fond of children, promptly offered to take Sarah and Hannah into their own house. This arrangement suited Jacob Greenebaum perfectly, as it relieved him of all paternal obligations. He brought the two girls to Philadelphia in 1850 and handed them over to the Cauffmans. He himself lived in a boarding house at 454 New Market Street near the Delaware River, and later moved to 311 New Street, where he died on May 15, 1873.

Marcus Cauffman and his wife, *née* Isabelle Wolf, had been in Philadelphia since at least 1839. When the Greenebaum sisters became members of their household they were living at 391 North Sixth Street, and Marcus owned a dry goods store at 62 North Third Street. Sarah and Hannah were never actually

adopted by the hospitable Cauffmans, but they lived in the Cauffman house until they married and moved to California. Marcus and Bella Cauffman were at least moderately wealthy and lived comfortably. They were kind but strict, supervised the children's education (the schooling considered proper for girls was not excessively burdensome in those days), taught them various social graces, and in general gave them the affectionate family background their father was unable or unwilling to provide. Their playmates in Philadelphia were, for the most part, the children of Portuguese Jews. Lessons and games kept Sarah and Hannah busy all day, and they were not permitted to read anything but schoolbooks until evening.

The girls were devoted to their foster parents and never forgot their debt to them. In later years Sarah and Hannah each named a son after Marcus and a daughter after Bella Cauffman. Marcus Cauffman died of cancer on October 5, 1868 at the age of seventy, but his widow survived him by at least fifteen years and was visited at intervals by Sarah, Hannah, and their respective husbands. Lewis Gerstle, on a business trip to the Atlantic seaboard in the spring of 1883, wrote to his wife: "In Philadelphia I found the folks all well. Aunt Bella has not changed in appearance. She looks the same as she did 20 years ago. She lately had a fall in going down a step, which compels her to carry her arm in a sling, as she sprained her wrist, but otherwise seems to be in excellent condition."¹ "I neglected to tell you, my dear Hannah," he added a few days later, "that Aunt Bella gave me a pair of shoes that she made for you."²

By 1850 the gold rush was in full spate, and the eyes of all adventurous young men were turned towards California. The Greenebaum brothers soon joined the thousands of pioneers who headed west in search of this new Eldorado; but when they reached California they prudently decided to carry on the mercantile careers for which they had been trained, instead of venturing into the unfamiliar (and all too frequently unprofitable) field of mining. Early in 1850 Leon and his partner Baker sailed by way of the isthmus of Panama to San Francisco, where they associated themselves with the firm of Taaffe & McCahill, clothing and dry goods merchants. In the spring of the same year Herman started overland from St. Joseph, Missouri, with a group of Chicago friends. After five months of travel by horse and mule over plains, deserts, and mountains he reached San Francisco. He spent a few months there as an employee in his elder brother's store, then moved to San José and set up in business for himself.

The firm of Taaffe & McCahill was located on the northwest corner of Sacramento and Montgomery Streets, at that time only a few yards from the

waterfront. The new building, built of cast iron, was supposed to be fireproof, but in fact it afforded no protection whatever when put to the test. During the eighteen months between December 1849 and June 1851 San Francisco, for the most part a conglomeration of tents and wooden shanties, was partially destroyed by no less than six conflagrations. The fifth and greatest of these started shortly after eleven o'clock at night on May 3, 1851 in the paint store of Baker & Meserve on the south side of the Plaza, now Portsmouth Square. A contemporary account gave a vivid if somewhat melodramatic description of the progress of the blaze and its destructive effect:

"The wind blowing strongly from the north-west, the conflagration proceeded in the direction of Kearny street, and soon swept before it all of the houses on some entire blocks. Then the breeze suddenly shifted . . . carrying the fire backwards to the north and east. . . . On all sides in the doomed city there was heard the fierce roar, as of many storms, that drowned the shouts of men and the shrieks of women. The firemen plied their engines vigorously. . . . Houses were blown up, but the fire leaped lightly across the gaps, and pursued its terrible course. It ran along the planked streets . . . almost as if they were but a train of gunpowder. The short space of ten hours . . . saw from fifteen hundred to two thousand houses completely ruined. In the end, the absolute want of further fuel to consume was the chief cause of the conflagration ceasing. . . . The damage was moderately estimated at from ten to twelve millions of dollars." ³

An hour or two after the fire started Leon Greenebaum and Reuben Baker, with Max Nussbaum, Jacob Rosenthal, a ship's captain named James Welsh, and nineteen-year-old Edward McCahill (whose brother Thomas was a partner in the clothing firm) proceeded to the Taaffe & McCahill store, hoping to save the merchandise. As the structure was considered fireproof they believed themselves in no danger; but the interior soon became unbearably hot, and when they attempted to leave they found that the metal doors and shutters had expanded and buckled in the intense heat, cutting off every means of escape. In this sealed iron oven the six men were literally roasted to death. Two days later, when the building had cooled sufficiently to permit search parties to enter, nothing was found but a heap of charred bones, so mixed that it was almost impossible to separate the components of one corpse from those of another.

After the fire Herman Greenebaum hurried to San Francisco to attend to the burial of his brother, Baker, Nussbaum, and Rosenthal. The remains of the four young men, all between twenty-four and thirty-one years old, were interred in a single grave in the old Jewish cemetery near Gough and Vallejo Streets.

Many years later the bones were removed to the Home of Peace cemetery in San Mateo County, where they now repose under one monument inscribed with the four names.

Herman then wound up his own business in San José and moved to Sacramento, where he was joined by his younger brother Jacob who had traveled west from Chicago via Panama in the summer of 1851. That autumn Herman and Jacob opened a store in Sacramento and enjoyed a brief period of prosperity until, on November 2, 1852, a fire destroyed about two-thirds of the town, including the Greenebaum emporium. Part of the stock had been carted away from the burning building in wagons, but during the night all that had been salvaged was stolen, and when morning came the young partners found themselves completely destitute. Luckily their credit was unimpaired and they were able to reopen their business on a small scale. A few weeks later disaster struck again. On December 19 and again on January 1, 1853 the Sacramento River overflowed and covered most of what was left of the stricken city, and the Greenebaum brothers moved their little stock of goods to a dry spot on the banks of the American River about five miles above Sacramento, where they carried on a flourishing business in a tent. By the time the flood receded in the spring of 1853 and they were able to return to Sacramento the brothers had recovered a large part of their losses. Listed in the directory as "importers and dealers in domestic clothing,"⁴ they opened a new store at 128 J Street.

In 1853 Moses Greenebaum, the youngest brother, came to Sacramento and went into the clothing business founded by Herman and Jacob. Abraham, twin brother of the deceased Leon, also arrived in Sacramento about the same time and established himself as a tobacconist at 130 J Street, adjoining his brothers' store. On March 4, 1855 Abraham married Jeannette Moos, born in 1839 at Cappel in Württemberg. In 1874 the couple—the only members of the Greenebaum clan to return permanently to their native land—left California and settled in Kaiserslautern, where Jeannette died on February 7, 1885 and Abraham on November 19, 1889. They had ten children: William, born in Sacramento in 1856, who died in 1874; six other sons, all of whom died in infancy; and three daughters: Caroline, born in San Francisco in 1865, married to Hermann Koester; Fannie (Mrs. Jacob Kiefer), born in 1871; and Bella (Mrs. Karl Metzger), born in 1876.

Between 1855 and 1860 Jacob, Herman, and Moses Greenebaum visited Philadelphia, separately; all three married there and returned to Sacramento with their wives. In 1856 Jacob married Elizabeth Mayer, always called Eliza; on July 1, 1857 Herman married Rosalia Cauffman, the niece of Marcus Cauffman in whose household Herman's sisters had been brought up; and in 1857

or 1858 Moses married Emma Arnold, another Philadelphia friend of the younger Greenebaum sisters.

Eliza had one memorable habit that amused (and at the same time slightly annoyed) her friends and family. At the end of a visit she would say "good-by" to everyone, walk a few steps, think of something she had forgotten, return to say it, say "good-by" all round a second time, and retreat once more, only to come back with yet another scrap of conversation; and this process would be repeated again and again so that sometimes as much as an hour might elapse between the good lady's first farewell and her final departure. To this day, among the older members of the family who remember the protracted boredom of these leave-takings, anyone who is inclined to linger too long over his or her farewells can be jolted into instant flight by the mere hint of a muttered: "Aunt Eliza!"

For a few years all of the Greenebaum brothers and sisters were united in Sacramento. Sarah arrived in 1855 as the bride of Louis Sloss, and Hannah followed in 1858 after her marriage to Lewis Gerstle. In 1853 or 1854 Babette and her husband Louis Bucki moved from Chicago to Sacramento, where in 1855 Louis became the proprietor of "Bucki's Saloon" on Fifth Street between J and K. In 1856 Louis Bucki and his brother-in-law Moses Greenebaum were partners in a crockery store, Greenebaum & Bucki, at 113 J Street. The next year this store was moved to 146 J Street; but by 1859 Bucki had disappeared from the Sacramento directory and Moses had resumed his partnership in the clothing firm of Greenebaum & Brothers. The Buckis had no children; but after Babette's death Louis married again, and this second alliance produced one son, Charles.

Shortly after the great floods in Sacramento in the winter of 1861-1862 Herman and Jacob moved to San Francisco and associated themselves with H. Cohn & Company, manufacturers of and wholesale dealers in clothing. Later in 1862 Herman went to New York with his family to supervise the manufacture and shipping of the firm's merchandise. Moses remained in Sacramento until 1863, when he came to San Francisco as a partner of August Helbing and Emanuel Strauss in the firm of Helbing, Greenebaum & Company, importers and jobbers of crockery and glassware. H. Cohn & Company went out of business in 1865 and was succeeded by Greenebaum Brothers, importers and manufacturers of clothing and men's furnishings at 119 Battery Street, San Francisco. Some time before 1868 Moses joined his brothers in this firm, while Herman remained in New York until 1878 as the eastern representative of the business.

About 1876 the firm of Greenebaum Brothers broke up. Jacob entered into partnership with Helbing and Strauss in Greenebaum, Helbing & Company, stockbrokers, in which Herman also became a partner in 1879. After Herman's death on February 1, 1883 the name of the firm was changed to Greenebaum & Strauss. Meanwhile Moses remained in the clothing business as senior partner of Greenebaum, Sachs, & Freeman until 1885, when he joined Leopold Weil, Leopold Michels, and Moritz Weil in Greenebaum, Weil, & Michels, importers and manufacturers of men's furnishing goods and, some years later, of blankets and towels as well.

Herman and Rosalia Greenebaum had seven children: Caroline (Mrs. Isaac N. Walter); Emil (married to Carrie Koshland); Bertha (Mrs. William Haas); Joseph and Alfred, both bachelors; Louis (married to Alice Greene-wald), who changed his name to Greene; and Stella (Mrs. Alfred Simon). Jacob and Eliza were the parents of four daughters: Caroline (Mrs. Emile Dinkelspiel); Millie (Mrs. Herbert Hatch); Alice (Mrs. Jacob Hirschberg); and Florence (Mrs. Adolph Weil). Moses and Emma had three children: William (married to Tillie Brandenstein), who changed his name to Greene; Clara (first wife of Lewis Gerstle's nephew Adolph Bissinger); and Leon, unmarried.

Chapter III

SACRAMENTO

LITTLE IS KNOWN about Lewis Gerstle's life in the United States from his arrival in Louisville in or about 1842 until he set out for California in 1850. According to one account he began his business career in Louisville as a peddler, but it is more likely that he was employed at some time in his brother Abraham's tobacco shop. The one thing that is certain about this period is that he was very poor. In a reminiscent mood more than thirty years later, on his fifty-sixth birthday, he wrote to his wife: "I have no desire of conveying to you the impression that I was born with a silver spoon in my mouth. It has been a hard fought battle, and yet thank God I am none the worse for wear, arrived at an age where most persons subject to hard work and early exposures, as has been my experience, show signs of ailments."¹

He may have moved in 1849 to New Orleans, and it was probably from that city that he sailed, steerage, in the spring of 1850 to San Francisco via the isthmus of Panama. In those days, before the Panama Railroad was built, west-bound passengers disembarked at the miserable little Atlantic port of Chagres, traveled by canoe for three days up the Chagres River to Cruces or Gorgona, and thence made their way over eighteen or twenty miles of rough trail by horse or mule or on foot to the city of Panama on the Pacific. From Panama an assortment of steamers supplemented by a few sailing vessels conveyed the gold-seekers to San Francisco. Young Lewis Gerstle reached the isthmus without mishap, but in Panama he was laid low by an attack of what was then called "Chagres fever"—possibly a mild form of yellow fever but more probably malaria—and was delayed there for several weeks, unable to secure passage in any of the fantastically overcrowded Pacific ships.

When he did finally land in San Francisco he was practically penniless. At first he earned a scanty living by setting up a fruit stand on a street corner and selling apples. Fruit was expensive in California in 1850: "small but good"² apples were priced at fifty cents each and "speckled" ones at twenty-five cents.

But if Lewis's wares included any speckled apples, few of them were exchanged for cash. According to the story that he liked to tell in his later prosperous years, the profits from this enterprise were small because, having a healthy young appetite, he would put aside and eat every apple that was underripe or overripe or speckled or slightly wormy; and if there were not enough of these to satisfy his hunger he would consume some of the sound apples too, so that on certain days he would find that he had eaten up his entire stock.

Nevertheless he somehow managed to save enough money in a few months to buy equipment and travel to the gold mines, where he worked for a short time at or near the hamlet of Georgetown in Eldorado County and possibly also at Mokelumne Hill and Dutch Flat. But the rough life did not appeal to him, especially as he had poor luck as a prospector. By 1851 he had drifted down to Sacramento and become a member of the firm of Louis Sloss & Company, dealing in groceries, hardware, clothing, and household wares. At that time Sacramento was the chief supply center for the mining districts, and as the swarms of gold-seekers streaming up the river valleys and setting up claims in the mountains demanded an ever-lengthening list of luxuries to supplement the bare necessities they had started out with, the business increased rapidly in volume and profits. Before the end of the decade the company was converted into a wholesale firm trading in groceries and provisions, located at 150-152 J Street between Fifth and Sixth.

Lewis Gerstle is said to have been a pony express rider before he settled down in Sacramento in 1851; not for the famous transcontinental pony express which did not commence operations until 1860, but for one of the numerous local companies carrying mail and merchandise between Sacramento and Placerville. Persistent research has failed to bring to light any documentary or other evidence of this alleged activity. If there is any truth at all in the story it is more likely that he served for a short time, not as a rider, but as the Sacramento agent of one of the California express companies; but even this is doubtful.

Louis Sloss was born on July 13, 1823 in the village of Untereisenheim near the Bavarian city of Würzburg. He had emigrated in 1845 to Kentucky, where his older brother Abraham resided; but not finding there the commercial opportunities he was looking for, Louis set out for California across the plains with two Kentucky friends, Dr. Richard Hayes McDonald and C. H. Swift. For the first few weeks they accompanied a wagon train, but after an outbreak of cholera and a series of petty quarrels combined to demoralize the party, the three young men, with a saddle horse and packhorse apiece, left the slow-moving

caravan and struck out by themselves. In July 1849 they reached Sacramento, where they set up shop at the intersection of what are now Sixth and I Streets in a space seven feet wide, covered by a canvas tarpaulin and hemmed in between two tents, one used by a neighbor as living quarters and the other for bottling liquor. In front of this area the tailboard of a wagon, equipped with a pair of scales for weighing gold dust, served as a counter. Back of the "store" in an open field the partners cooked over a campfire, slept on the ground in blankets, and tethered the livestock—horses, mules, oxen, cows—which, in addition to harness and mining supplies, made up their stock in trade. At the beginning these pioneer merchants had a total capital of about \$2500, approximately 90% of which was furnished by Swift. Louis Sloss officiated as auctioneer.

During their first winter in California the livestock in which almost all of their capital was invested was destroyed by the flood waters of the American and Sacramento Rivers. With nothing left to sell, the partnership broke up. In 1850 Louis Sloss met another young emigrant, Simon Greenwald, and together they raised enough money to open a small general store in Sacramento. It was with this enterprise that Lewis Gerstle became associated in 1851.

It is possible, though by no means certain, that Lewis Gerstle and Louis Sloss had already known each other in Louisville before they came to California. The Louisville directory for 1843 listed an Abraham Sloss, cigar maker, on the north side of Market Street between Brook and Floyd Streets. This was almost certainly Louis's older brother, as it would seem exceedingly improbable that two Abraham Slosses lived in Kentucky at that time. In the same directory Abraham Gerstle, Lewis's older brother, was identified as a tobacconist, also on Market Street. It may be surmised that Abraham Sloss and Abraham Gerstle, two Bavarian Jews in a small American city, engaged in similar businesses with shops only three blocks apart, were at least casually acquainted; and it is thus not unlikely that through them their respective younger brothers also met each other.

In a little community like Sacramento, with a population of only a few thousand in the early 1850's, Lewis Gerstle and Louis Sloss must almost certainly have become acquainted with the four Greenebaum brothers. It may therefore be presumed that when Louis Sloss went to Philadelphia on a buying expedition for his store in 1855 he was supplied with letters of introduction from the Greenebaums to their young sisters Sarah and Hannah and to the girls' foster parents, the Cauffmans. In any event Louis did meet the sisters in Philadelphia, fell in love with nineteen-year-old Sarah, proposed and was accepted. On July 25, 1855 they were married at the Cauffman house at 391 North Sixth Street.

The wedding was a gala affair complete with all the traditional trimmings: a white satin gown for the bride, attendants, flowers, music, and a reception following the ceremony. The festivities were marred by only one slight mishap, deplorable at the time but amusing in retrospect: during the night after the marriage, while the bride and groom were still in the house, the towering wedding cake, inadequately buttressed, collapsed in a sugary heap.

A fortnight after the wedding Louis Sloss returned to California with his young wife via Nicaragua: by steamer from New York to San Juan del Norte, up the San Juan River and across Lake Nicaragua in smaller steamboats, over the divide in a mule-drawn stagecoach to San Juan del Sur on the Pacific, and thence by steamer to San Francisco.

In Sacramento Louis and Sarah Sloss occupied a brick house at the corner of Fourth and M Streets, and it was in this residence that their three oldest children were born: Hannah Isabelle, always called Bella, on September 7, 1856; Leon on June 26, 1858; and Louis Jr. on August 6, 1860. For two or three years Lewis Gerstle, still a bachelor, lived and boarded in the Sloss household. His particular pet was the baby Bella. Shortly after her birth he presented her with ten dollars in gold "to buy her a wedding dress,"³ as he solemnly told the baby's parents; and each year thereafter he added ten dollars to this fund until, twenty years later, Bella married Ernest Reuben Lilienthal. Whether Bella actually bought her wedding gown with this money or used it for some other purpose is unknown. All his life Lewis loved Bella as much, or very nearly as much, as he loved any of his own daughters.

Lewis Gerstle also profoundly and affectionately admired his partner's wife Sarah Sloss, who provided him with the first real home he had known since he left Germany. Sarah spoke to him so often of her younger sister Hannah that Lewis determined to go to Philadelphia, and told Sarah that "if your little sister is anything like you I am going to marry her."⁴ In the spring of 1858 he journeyed east, met Hannah, and decided at once that Sarah's glowing description was, if anything, an understatement. Hannah was then nineteen years old, Lewis thirty-three. During their engagement they went one night to hear Donizetti's opera *Don Pasquale* at the American Academy of Music, an event that made a deep and lasting impression on them both. A few weeks before their silver wedding anniversary Hannah Gerstle wrote to her husband, who had gone to New York on a business trip: "Twenty-five years ago, you and I went to hear *Don Pasquale*; a lifetime, and still when I look back everything is so fresh in my memory, that it only seems like a few short years."⁵ "I fully appreciate your very affectionate remarks, my dear Hannah," Lewis replied, "whilst reminding me of that famous opera, *Don Pasquale*. We have indeed

much to be thankful for, and can look back to that happy moment with great personal satisfaction." ⁶ Although Lewis was quite unable to carry a tune he always remembered one of the arias from *Don Pasquale*, which in later years he frequently hummed or sang, slightly off key, to his younger children.

The wedding took place in Philadelphia on May 26, 1858, probably at 623 North Sixth Street, the house into which the Cauffmans had moved a year or two before. The occasion was marked by almost none of the glamour that had made Sarah's marriage three years earlier a brilliant social event. The bridegroom, liking simplicity in all things and detesting anything that savored even remotely of "fuss and feathers," persuaded Hannah to invite only a few guests and to wear a traveling dress instead of the traditional satin gown and bridal veil. Although she acceded gracefully enough to Lewis's wishes, Hannah ever afterwards envied Sarah her sumptuous wedding and regretted that she herself had not been married in the proper costume, with all the festive trappings she might have had.

The young couple journeyed to California via Panama, a much safer and more agreeable route than it had been when Lewis first crossed the isthmus in 1850; for the Panama Railroad, completed in January 1855, had eliminated the tedious canoe trip up the Chagres and the mule ride over the bumpy trail. With fair weather and a close connection at Panama the entire journey from New York to San Francisco could be made in about a month. On both the Atlantic and Pacific sides the paddle-wheel steamers were, by mid-nineteenth-century standards, roomy and comfortable; the *John L. Stephens* even boasted the luxury of a bathroom.

In Sacramento Lewis and Hannah Gerstle either rented or bought a house on M Street between Third and Fourth, very near the Sloss residence. In this house their two oldest children were born: Sophie on May 9, 1859 and Clara on June 7, 1861.

Business was good, Sacramento was a rich and rapidly growing community, and the partners in Louis Sloss & Company expected to live there prosperously and comfortably for a long period, perhaps for the rest of their lives. But they reckoned without the temperamental rampageousness of the Sacramento and American Rivers. Several times during its earliest years the town had been visited by disasters of one kind or another: a squatters' riot in which numerous citizens were killed and wounded in August 1850; an epidemic of cholera in October of the same year; a great fire in November 1852; and destructive floods in January 1850, March and December 1852, and January 1853. "What with floods and fires, insurrection and the plague," lamented one historian, "the very

stars seemed to fight against Sacramento in her infancy, and the foundation of her latter prosperity was laid upon the ashes of her pioneers." ⁷

Nevertheless no major catastrophe had occurred since 1853; levees had been constructed, and the citizens considered themselves safe from further inundation. They were soon undeceived. The winter of 1861-1862 was exceptionally rainy, and the rivers rose to such unprecedented heights that they overflowed Sacramento five separate times in less than three months. The first flood of this series began on December 9, 1861 and lasted several days, covering most of the inhabited area to a considerable depth. Before the streets and buildings were completely dry a second overflow drenched the southern part of the town on December 23. This was followed on January 9, 1862 by a third and even more devastating flood caused by a combination of incessant rain and the sudden melting of Sierra snows, which clogged the already swollen American River. The last two floods of that disastrous season, less damaging than their predecessors, broke through the inadequate levees on January 22 and February 24.

So serious was the situation in the state capital that the legislature moved to San Francisco, temporarily, on January 23. Fortunately the people of Sacramento received enough warning to enable most of them to take refuge on higher ground or in the upper storeys of flooded buildings. Although the damage to property was enormous the loss of life was small, and the soggy but sturdy inhabitants made light of their misfortunes. One account of the flood of January 9 emphasized the holiday atmosphere: "Hundreds of boats were afloat upon the streets. . . . Many of them contained parties of ladies and gentlemen, evidently bound on pleasure excursions. All seemed to enjoy the novel experience of a boating expedition through the principal streets of a great city [population about 9000]. Every balcony was crowded with spectators, and mirth and hilarity prevailed." ⁸

In spite of the mirth and hilarity many citizens departed from Sacramento permanently, leaving the stricken city to dry itself out and scrape off the layers of malodorous mud. Among those who failed to find the floods amusing were Hannah and Lewis Gerstle. Marooned on the second floor of their house during the great overflow of January 9, 1862, they were rescued by rowboat and, with little Sophie and seven-months-old Clara, made their way by river steamer to San Francisco. The Slosses and Greenewalds as well as Jacob and Herman Greenebaum and their families left for San Francisco at or about the same time, never to return.

Chapter IV

THE ALASKA COMMERCIAL COMPANY: I

CHANGE OF SCENE had no effect on the close relationship between Louis Sloss, Simon Greenwald, and Lewis Gerstle. In San Francisco the three men remained business associates and devoted personal friends all their lives, and their families, together with many members of the Greenebaum clan, were subsequently drawn into an even more intimate alliance by a series of intermarriages.

After the exodus from Sacramento in January 1862 the character of Louis Sloss & Company's business altered: instead of selling groceries and provisions the firm became a brokerage house dealing in mining stocks. Later the company bought and sold California hides, furs, wool, and deerskins, operated a tannery, and acquired various shipping interests. Its first address in San Francisco was 15-16 Government House at the northwest corner of Washington and Sansome Streets. In 1864 it moved to the Donohoe Kelly building on the southeast corner of Montgomery and Sacramento, and in 1868 to 425 Sacramento Street near Battery.

By a treaty dated March 30, 1867 the United States purchased Alaska from Russia for \$7,200,000, and the formal transfer of the territory took place at Sitka on October 18. The purchase, derisively nicknamed "Seward's Folly," had been opposed by many Americans who considered Alaska to be nothing more than some 600,000 square miles of frozen unproductive land; but to the far-sighted partners of Louis Sloss & Company the new acquisition presented a golden opportunity.

The territory ceded to the United States included the Pribilof Islands in Bering Sea, the annual mating and breeding rendezvous of hundreds of thousands of fur seals. The group comprises four islands, the two principal ones lying about thirty miles apart: St. Paul, with an area of approximately thirty-

three square miles, and St. George, about twenty-seven square miles. Fur seals had once abounded in both the Antarctic and Arctic regions, but during the early nineteenth century uncontrolled killing had almost exterminated the Antarctic herds. In the North Pacific the seals were (and still are) found on only a few small islands: the Pribilofs belonging to the United States and, in Russian territory, Bering and Copper Islands of the Komandorski (Commander) group off the coast of Kamchatka, and Robben Island in the Sea of Okhotsk. When on land fur seals require rocky beaches and a cold foggy climate, and in the vast expanse of the North Pacific Ocean only these desolate islands provide favorable conditions during the summer breeding and mating season. From June to October the Pribilof Islands are shrouded in thick fog nine days out of ten.

The Pribilofs were discovered in June 1786 by a Russian navigator named Gehrman (or Gerasim) Pribilof, who was looking for sea otter, not fur seals. The finding of the immense seal rookeries led to the establishment by several rival Russian companies of settlements on the islands, until then uninhabited. These small villages were populated by Aleuts imported from Unalaska and other Aleutian islands. By 1796 indiscriminate slaughter had reduced the seal herds to a fraction of their former size. In 1799 Tsar Paul I granted to a semi-official corporation, the Russian-American Company, a sealing and trade monopoly as well as a large measure of political control throughout Alaska. This company, headed by Alexander Baranof, "a man of iron will, of dauntless courage, shrewd, and wholly devoid of tender feeling,"¹ expelled the competing sealers from the Pribilofs and imposed strict limits on the slaughter of seals, so that in a few years the herds again increased in numbers. The charter of the Russian-American Company, originally granted for twenty years, was eventually extended until December 31, 1861. After the expiration of the charter this company's functions were assumed by the Russian governor of Alaska, Prince Maksoutoff.

In December 1867 Hayward M. Hutchinson, described as a Baltimore merchant, sailed from Victoria, British Columbia, to Sitka "with the full intention of buying the interest of the Russian-American Company. . . . I bought everything they had."² The purchase included buildings, wharves, three steamers, fishing boats, barges, coal, salt, furs, and miscellaneous merchandise, located on the Pribilof Islands and at Sitka, Kodiak, Unalaska, and other trading posts.

1868 was a year of interregnum in Alaska. American administration was not yet firmly established on the mainland, and no government control at all extended to the remote Pribilofs, which were thus left open to unrestricted sealing. After a sojourn of about four months at Sitka Hutchinson landed on St.

Paul early in May 1868 to obtain sealskins, having previously contracted for the services of the entire labor force on the island, consisting of approximately ninety Aleuts who had formerly worked for the Russian-American Company. He found another sealing expedition already there: a group of twenty-four men under the command of Captain Thomas F. Morgan sent from Honolulu by Charles Augustus Williams and Henry P. Haven, whalers and sealers of New London, Connecticut. The two expeditions almost came to blows but eventually agreed to avoid a clash by slaughtering seals from different beaches. Meanwhile two more sealing schooners had anchored off St. George, one chartered by Parrott & Company of San Francisco and the other by two men named Taylor and Bendell. Hutchinson made an amicable arrangement with these sealers to divide the catch on St. George. The total number of skins taken by the four competitors on both islands in 1868 was about 250,000.

The date of Hutchinson's first meeting with William Kohl is uncertain. According to Hutchinson's own statement in April 1876 before the Ways and Means Committee of the House of Representatives, he had not known Kohl when he purchased the Russian property; but in this he may have been mistaken. Kohl was living in Victoria in 1867 and went to Sitka in January 1868 at approximately the same time as Hutchinson. In any event Hutchinson, Kohl & Company was incorporated some time in 1868—perhaps as early as the end of January—to exploit Hutchinson's Alaskan properties. During or shortly after the summer of 1868 Williams, Haven, and Ebenezer Morgan of Connecticut became members of this firm.

William Kohl was born in Bucks County, Pennsylvania, on March 2, 1820, and died in Philadelphia on November 26, 1893. At the age of fifteen he was employed as an engineer by the Norris Locomotive Works and later by the Baldwin Locomotive Works in Philadelphia. In 1842 the Baldwin company sent Kohl to Georgia to superintend the operation of the first locomotives used in that state. He remained there as superintendent of motive power for the Georgia railroad until 1849, when he sailed to San Francisco via Panama. His first venture in California was the successful operation of a sawmill in partnership with James Regan. In February 1852 Kohl and Captain Domingo Marcucci bought a lot of assorted machinery stored in an old ship anchored in San Francisco Bay, unloaded it with their own hands, and sold it the same day at a substantial profit. With this money they purchased a sloop and a canal boat to carry freight between San Francisco and Sacramento. These vessels proved unsuitable for the purpose and were sold, again at a profit. Marcucci, a shipbuilder by profession, and Kohl then built a fast sailing ship for the river cargo service. After the partnership with Marcucci was dissolved in 1854 Kohl purchased a wreck-

ing pump and apparatus which he rented to the owners of vessels in distress. In the winter of 1857-1858 he opened a wholesale butcher business in Victoria to supply meat by contract to miners on the Fraser River. In 1860 he returned to San Francisco to superintend the construction of the first ferryboats operated between San Francisco and Oakland, *Contra Costa* and *Oakland*. He went back to Victoria in 1864 and built or rebuilt three steamers, one running on the Columbia River and two plying between Victoria and Portland, Oregon. From 1868 until the end of his life he resided in San Francisco or San Mateo. Although known generally as Captain Kohl he was in fact a shipbuilder and shipowner, not the master of a vessel.

There is no record of William Kohl's first encounter with Lewis Gerstle and Louis Sloss, but it is not unlikely that their friendship began in 1852 or 1853 when some of the cargoes transported by Kohl and Marcucci from San Francisco to Sacramento may well have included merchandise consigned to Louis Sloss & Company. Nor is anything known of the circumstances in which Lewis Gerstle and Louis Sloss first became interested in Alaska.

The articles of incorporation of the Alaska Commercial Company were filed with the County Clerk of San Francisco on September 18, 1868, and with the Secretary of State of California on October 10, which should be considered the actual date of incorporation. The company's intention was to obtain a sealing concession on the Pribilofs if and when the United States government should decide to grant one. At the first meeting of the directors (then called trustees) held on October 19, 1868 in the offices of Louis Sloss & Company at 425 Sacramento Street, Louis Sloss was elected president, August Wassermann vice president, and E. Neumann secretary. The original trustees were Louis Sloss, Wassermann, Lewis Gerstle, William Kohl, and Leopold Boscowitz. At this same meeting the trustees resolved to buy the assets of Hutchinson, Kohl & Company. Two days later the purchase was completed for the sum of \$1,729,000 payable in 6, 12, 18, 24, and 30 months with interest at 1% per month. Hutchinson, Kohl & Company were to remain in charge of the properties and continue operations as agents and factors of the Alaska Commercial Company until the promissory notes were paid in full. Less than two years after the purchase the debt was liquidated, and on September 28, 1870 the Alaska Commercial Company assumed full control over its Alaskan business.

The company issued 20,000 shares of stock at \$100 par value, of which 12,000 were divided equally between Sloss, Gerstle, Wassermann, Kohl, Boscowitz, Hutchinson, and Gustave Niebaum. The remaining 8000 shares were to be sold, but by September 1870 only 700 had been disposed of. Some of the earliest

stockholders in addition to the trustees were Williams, Haven, Ebenezer Morgan, John Franklin Miller, John Parrott and his son Tiburcio, Mark Livingston, Simon Greenwald, Samuel and Daniel Willets (New York Quakers), and Richard H. Chapell of Connecticut. On February 1, 1870 the company adopted fourteen by-laws, the twelfth of which prohibited the sale or transfer of stock to any person not a citizen of the United States. The president's annual salary was fixed in 1870 at \$8000 and increased in December 1872 to \$10,000.

In 1869 a government agent, Dr. H. H. McIntyre (who subsequently entered the employ of the company), was installed on the Pribilof Islands to stop the indiscriminate slaughter of fur seals pending some definitive arrangement for a concession. That year Hutchinson, Kohl & Company, acting for the Alaska Commercial Company and armed with a special authorization from Secretary of the Treasury Hugh McCulloch, killed 69,000 seals. The skins were left on the islands until the following year.

Late in 1868 Louis Sloss went to Washington to apply for a fur seal concession, but Congress was not yet ready to pass the necessary law. Hoping that negotiations might be speeded up if conducted by a company president who had had legal training and who was personally acquainted with members of Grant's administration, the officers and trustees resigned on January 21, 1870. A new president, John Franklin Miller, was elected, and the other new trustees were Louis Sloss, Hutchinson, Haven, and Chapell. Miller, who had practiced law in Indiana, had been brevetted major general in the Federal army under Grant during the Civil War. Later he served as collector of the port in San Francisco, a post he resigned when he joined the Alaska Commercial Company.

On July 1, 1870 President Grant approved an act of Congress entitled "An act to prevent the extermination of fur-bearing animals in Alaska," which instructed the Secretary of the Treasury to award a sealing concession to some responsible party, with due regard for the rights of any group already in the field. Secretary George S. Boutwell promptly advertised for bids. Several were submitted, but only two of the bidders were considered "responsible" parties: the Alaska Commercial Company, and a group of three or four affiliates, including Taylor and Bendell, represented by Louis Goldstone. The two bids were substantially equal except that Goldstone proposed to pay a tax or royalty of \$2.625 per skin, whereas the Alaska Commercial Company offered only \$2. But the Alaska Commercial Company had inserted in its bid an offer to match any rival bid higher than its own, and the law had been framed so as to give the Secretary of the Treasury a good deal of discretion; he was not obliged to accept the highest bid automatically. After consulting the Attorney General, Boutwell decided that the Alaska Commercial Company was entitled to preferential treat-

ment because of its ownership of the physical plant on the Pribilofs and its previous experience in sealing through its subsidiary Hutchinson, Kohl & Company. He therefore permitted the company, after the bids were opened and compared, to increase its offer to \$2.625 per skin. This somewhat unorthodox though perfectly legal procedure was to cause the company a great deal of trouble in later years.

On August 3, 1870 an indenture was signed by William A. Richardson, Acting Secretary of the Treasury, and John F. Miller, president of the Alaska Commercial Company. This gave the company the exclusive right to take fur seals from St. Paul and St. George for twenty years from May 1, 1870. The company undertook to kill not more than 75,000 seals a year on St. Paul and not more than 25,000 on St. George. The company was forbidden to kill any seals except during June, July, September, and October; to use firearms or any weapons which, on account of the noise, might frighten seals away from the islands; to kill female seals of any age or males less than one year old; to kill any seals in the water, or on the beaches onto which they hauled up from the sea to breed and mate. The company was further forbidden to sell, transfer, or assign its lease. It was obliged to furnish annually to the inhabitants of the islands, free of charge, 25,000 dried salmon, sixty cords of firewood (later coal was substituted), and salt and barrels for the preservation of seal meat for food; and to maintain a school on each island for not less than eight months a year. No distilled liquors were to be supplied to the natives except by a physician.

For this concession the company agreed to pay the United States Treasury the sum of \$55,000 annual rental, plus \$2.625 for each fur seal skin taken and shipped, plus 55 cents for each gallon of seal oil sold. This last provision never went into effect; fur seal oil had little commercial value because of its offensive odor, and the company never exported it, though the natives, who used seal oil and blubber for lighting and cooking, were permitted to take as much as they wanted without charge. Because the lease was not signed until most of the summer season of 1870 had already run its course the catch for that year was limited to 37,500 on St. Paul and 12,500 on St. George, and the rental for 1870 was reduced to \$27,500. Actually only 9577 skins were taken in 1870, so the rental for that season was afterwards further decreased to \$5480.75.

On March 25, 1874, by agreement between the Treasury and the company, the lease was amended to provide for the annual killing of 90,000 seals on St. Paul and 10,000 on St. George, and to allow killing in the first half of August as well as during the previously stipulated months.

Meanwhile the firm of Hutchinson, Kohl & Company remained in existence and on February 18, 1871 negotiated a lease from the Russian government of exclusive sealing privileges for twenty years on Bering, Copper, and Robben Islands. By the terms of this lease, which went into effect on January 1, 1872, the number of skins was to be fixed by the local Russian authorities; the skins were to be shipped in vessels flying the Russian flag; the company agreed to pay Russia 5000 rubles (then about \$3900) annual rent plus two rubles for each skin, in addition to 50 kopecks (39 cents) per skin to be paid to the natives; and the company had to have at least one Russian partner whose name would be part of the firm's title.

In compliance with this last provision the firm was reorganized as Hutchinson, Kohl, Maksoutoff & Company. This company intended to turn over its lease to the Alaska Commercial Company, but the Russian government refused to permit the transfer. For some reason Maksoutoff seems to have been an unsatisfactory partner, and Louis Sloss went to Russia to select another Russian to replace him. The choice fell on Alex. E. Philippeus, who was already serving as the company's representative in St. Petersburg. On January 1, 1874 the firm's name was changed to Hutchinson, Kohl, Philippeus & Company. Philippeus contributed little to the enterprise except the use of his name, for which he was paid \$10,000 a year. On his annual trips round the world he visited San Francisco and sometimes attended the company's meetings, more or less as a figurehead. Louis Greene, subsequently vice president of the Alaska Commercial Company, remembered Philippeus as "a very large man, full beard, hearty and jolly" ³ who enjoyed boasting of his ability to eat a whole spring chicken, bones and all, and whose phenomenal memory enabled him to play whist with his cards face down on the table after a single glance at his hand. Philippeus died on August 17, 1889 during a voyage in the steamer *Akashi* between the Siberian ports of Okhotsk and Ayan.

Although Hutchinson, Kohl, Philippeus & Company could not legally assign its lease to the Alaska Commercial Company, the transfer was made in effect if not in name by the appointment of the Alaska Commercial Company as "the sole and exclusive agent of said firm, in the conduct of the business, under said lease, under power of attorney irrevocable, and entitled to receive the profits of said business, the same to be carried on under the name of said firm, so long as it may be desirable to do so." ⁴

The fur seal bulls begin to "haul up" on the rocky Pribilof beaches early in May; the cows, heavy with young, during the first week in June. Within a few days after the arrival of the cows the pups are born, seldom or never more than

one to each female. The adult bull, which attains maturity in its seventh year, weighs 400 to 500 pounds; the cow averages only 80 pounds. Within a week or two after the birth of the pups the mating season commences, the period of gestation being almost a year. Seals are polygamous, and each of the older bulls, called *sikatchi* or, in anglicized form, sea catch, attempts to accumulate a harem, averaging about thirty females, which he guards jealously, often engaging in savage battles with rival bulls for the possession of his cows. From time to time the cows return to the sea to gorge themselves on fish, leaving their young on the beaches, but the bulls remain on land, fasting, all summer. Only about one-third of the males are mating bulls; the younger bachelors or holluschickie (a corrupt form of the Russian word *holostiaki*), chased away from the rookeries by the *sikatchi*, haul up on separate beaches and keep strictly to themselves.

This automatic segregation greatly facilitated the work of the killing gangs, for skins were taken only from the bachelors two to five years old, those aged three or four years having the finest fur. Females, bulls old enough to mate, and pups were never killed for their fur, but the Aleuts, whose chief article of diet was seal meat (of which they consumed approximately 600 pounds annually per person), were allowed to slaughter about 5000 pups every year for food. In accordance with the terms of the lease the killing never took place on the beaches, where the sight and smell of thousands of rotting unburied carcasses would certainly have discouraged future migrations of seals.

Every morning during the season the killing gangs, each led by a foreman or chief chosen by the natives themselves, rounded up groups or "pods" of bachelor seals—each pod consisting of 100 to 150 seals—and drove them to the killing grounds half a mile or a mile inland. The drives started about two in the morning, already daylight in those latitudes. On land the seals progressed very slowly and clumsily, and as they had no sweat glands they became easily overheated. Heating caused the fur to become "stagy" and fall out in patches, so the drives proceeded at a pace not exceeding half a mile an hour on damp cold days and even more slowly in relatively mild weather, with frequent pauses to permit the seals to cool off. When they reached the killing grounds the seals were allowed to cool again, and the slaughter began at six or seven o'clock, after the foreman had culled out and driven back to the sea all animals that were too young, too old, or so badly bitten in combat that their fur was worthless. Each man in the gang was equipped with a hickory or oaken club five or six feet long and three inches in diameter at the head, a stabbing knife, a skinning knife, and a whetstone. At the foreman's signal: "Strike!" the clubs fell, crushing the thin skull bones and stunning the seals, which were then quickly stabbed to the heart and allowed to bleed. As the carcasses tended to heat rap-

idly after death and become stogy, it was necessary to skin them immediately on mild days, but in very raw cold weather several pods might be slaughtered before the skinning commenced. The skinning process was hard work demanding great strength and skill, and the knives had to be whetted frequently during the operation, which was completed in an average time of less than four minutes per seal. The skins were then carried to the nearby salting sheds, counted, sprinkled with salt, and stacked in wooden bins or "kenches" until they could be baled and shipped.

During the Russian era the Aleut settlers on the Pribilof Islands were neglected and frequently ill treated. They lived in dilapidated huts or in sod-walled, dirt-roofed burrows called *barrabkies*, built partly underground, which were damp, dark, cold, and filthy, thickly coated with greasy black stinking soot from the seal blubber used for light and fuel. They had no medical attendance, and whether they survived or died was a matter of indifference to their Russian masters.

These conditions improved rapidly and radically under the administration of the Alaska Commercial Company, which went far beyond the stipulations in its lease in its efforts to provide for the welfare and comfort of the natives. Between 1875 and 1880 the company built about eighty frame cottages on St. Paul and twenty on St. George, lined with tar paper, painted, sanitary, and furnished with stoves and little outhouses, at a cost of over \$50,000. Only one family occupied each house, for which the company charged no rent. About 1880 the company erected a number of similar dwellings on Bering and Copper Islands in Russian territory. It constructed and maintained schools on St. Paul and St. George, paying the teachers' salaries and supplying free textbooks. A physician and a dispensary on each island furnished medical services free of charge. The natives were given free passes in the company's ships to and from any Aleutian or Alaskan port at which these vessels touched. A large church on St. Paul and a smaller one on St. George were built and supported partly by the company, partly by contributions from the natives, devout believers in the Russian Orthodox faith. During the long dark months of idleness between the brief killing seasons the frequent festivals and ritual ceremonies of the Russian church furnished the only diversions (except gambling) in the monotonous lives of the Aleuts. The company neither made nor permitted any attempt to convert the natives to any other religion.

Provisions and merchandise were supplied by company stores at prevailing San Francisco retail prices. No native was compelled to work. One of the company's rules read: "It is strictly enjoined upon all agents and employees of the

company to at all times treat the inhabitants of the islands with the utmost kindness, and endeavor to preserve amicable relations with them. Force is never to be used against them, except in defense of life, or to prevent the wanton destruction of valuable property. The agents and employees of the company are expected to instruct the native people in household economy, and by precept and example illustrate to them the principles and benefits of a higher civilization." ⁵

Actually the Aleuts, well fed and contented, were so amiable and law-abiding that between 1870 and 1880—and probably during the next decade as well—they committed no misdemeanors requiring police or judicial action. In 1880 the population of St. Paul numbered 14 whites and 184 Aleuts; that of St. George, 4 whites and 88 Aleuts. The whites were agents of the United States Treasury and employees of the Alaska Commercial Company, including doctors and teachers. No other white people were allowed to live or even land on the islands.

The killing gangs were paid 40 cents per skin. At the end of each season the company handed over the entire sum to the chiefs, who divided it into first, second, third, and fourth class shares, the classification being based on the relative skills, ages, and working hours of the men rather than on the specific number of seals killed by each. It was always customary for the chiefs to subdivide the total into more shares than there were individuals to claim them, the surplus shares being devoted to the support of the church, the priest, and the widows, orphans, and disabled of the community. Thus in 1872 on St. Paul 56 men killed and skinned 75,000 seals, for which (and for some additional labor) they were paid \$30,637.37. This was divided into 74 shares, varying from \$451 per first class share to \$315 in the fourth class. The company encouraged the natives to save their money by accepting deposits on which it paid 4% interest. In the first decade the amount so deposited by the Aleuts totaled about \$64,000.

To some extent this solicitude for the welfare of the natives was inspired by humanitarian motives, but it was also very good commercial policy. During the Russian régime when the Aleuts were wretchedly housed, inadequately nourished, and physically debilitated, the killing and skinning of the season's catch required the labor of the entire adult male population for four months. Under the enlightened administration of the Alaska Commercial Company the men were able to work much more rapidly and efficiently, and the operational period was drastically shortened. Thus in 1872 fifty days of labor by 71 men produced 75,000 skins; in 1873 the same number of men accumulated the same number

of skins in only forty days; and in 1874 thirty-nine days sufficed for the acquisition of 90,000 skins by 84 men. By 1880 almost the entire quota of 100,000 skins was being taken and salted down in about thirty working days. This time element was of vast importance, for the fur was in prime condition only between the middle of June and the beginning of August, after which it deteriorated rapidly. By reducing the killing season to five or six weeks the company secured nothing but perfect skins for which it obtained high prices.

The sealskins, preserved in salt, were shipped from the Pribilof Islands in the company's steamers to San Francisco, where they were packed on the dock in large specially constructed barrels. These were transported by rail to New York and thence by steamer to London. About 3000 barrels were required to hold an average year's catch. One year the company's officers decided that the transcontinental freight rate was excessive, and when the Southern Pacific Railroad refused to reduce the charges the company forwarded its skins in one of its own steamers, the *St. Paul*, to Panama, across the isthmus by railroad, and on to England in another vessel. The next year the Southern Pacific substantially lowered its rates.

The skins were sent to England because, until about 1910, there were few craftsmen in America skilled in the preparation and dyeing of the fur; moreover wages in England were much lower. The seal has an outer coat of coarse hair which must be removed by carefully scraping the flesh side of the skin so as to cut the roots, after which the hair can be pulled out, leaving the soft fur intact. The skins were consigned to the company's London agents, the firm of C. M. Lampson & Company, founded early in the nineteenth century by the English representative of John Jacob Astor. By the terms of its contract with the London agents the Alaska Commercial Company was to pay 5% interest on money borrowed from Lampson & Company, and the Lampson firm was to pay the same rate on funds left with it on deposit. Only once, during the first year of its existence, did the company borrow from Lampson; thereafter it always maintained a substantial balance on deposit.

Every October Lampson & Company auctioned off the season's consignment of skins. The average price per raw skin on the London market was about 60 shillings or \$15, but this fluctuated considerably from year to year, and the cable announcing the precise figure was awaited in the San Francisco office with eager anticipation. In October 1880 Lewis Gerstle wrote to his wife, who was in New York: "As you may readily imagine that our sale which has taken place in London today kept me somewhat excited until the result could be ascertained. . . . Just at this moment I received the desired telegram, informing me that 80,000 skins have been sold at an average of 93 s[hillings], almost



1. GENERAL VIEW OF ICHENHAUSEN
About 1935



2. MARKTSTRASSE, ICHENHAUSEN
About 1935



3. THE HOUSE IN WHICH LEWIS GERSTLE
WAS BORN, ICHENHAUSEN



4. ISAK MICHAEL GERSTLE
1787-1851

From a Miniature



5. JACOB GREENEBAUM
1796-1873



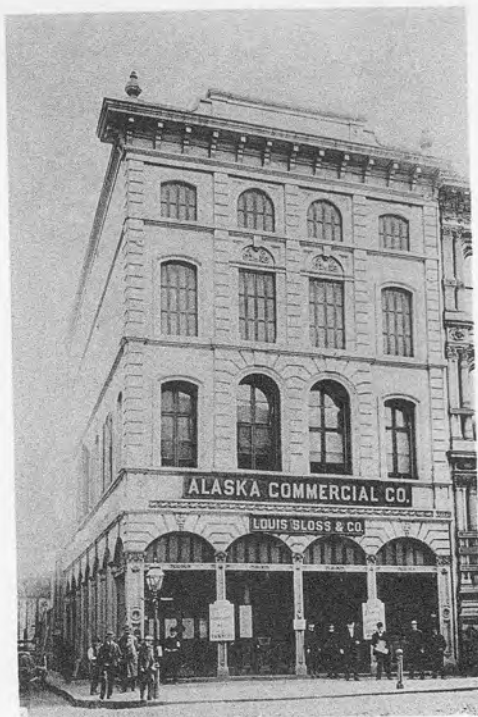
6. HANNAH AND SARAH GREENEBAUM
About 1850

From a Daguerreotype

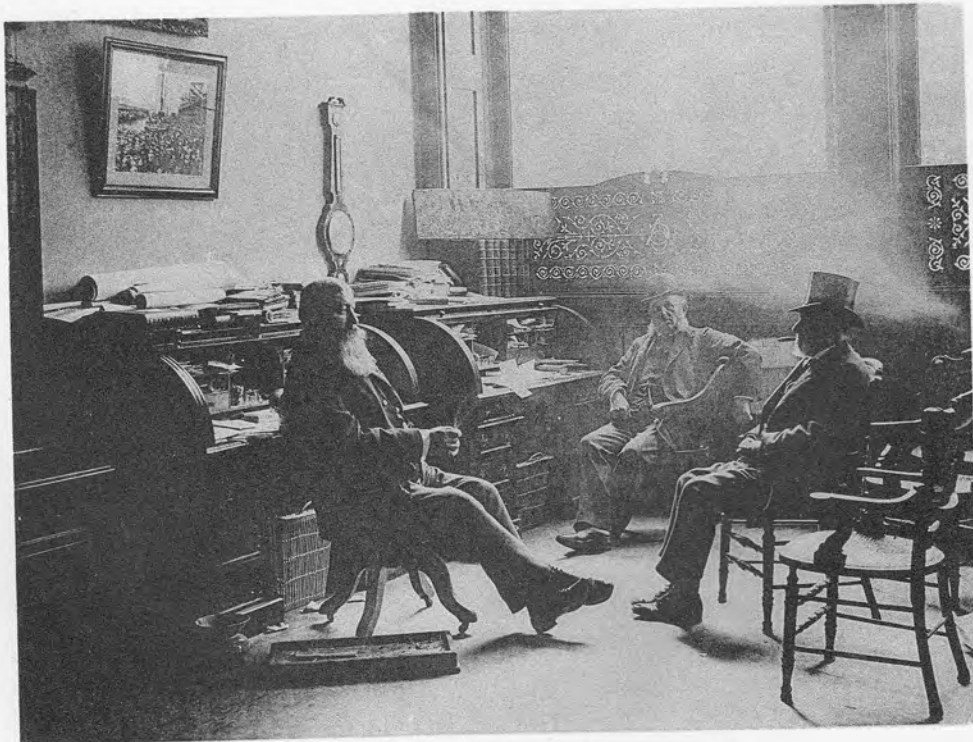


7. LEWIS AND HANNAH GERSTLE
1858

From a Daguerreotype



8. 310 SANSOME STREET, SAN FRANCISCO



9. THE 'FRONT OFFICE AT 310 SANSOME STREET

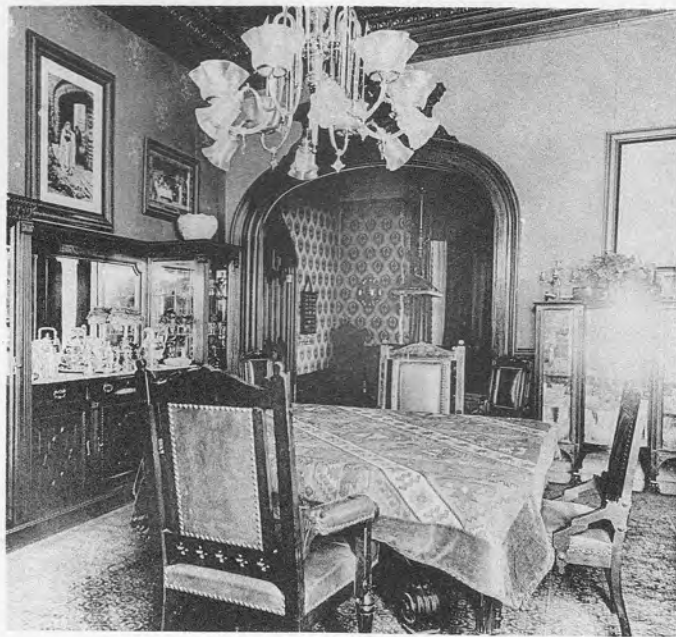
Lewis Gerstle

Gustave Niebaum

Louis Sloss



10. 1517 VAN NESS AVENUE, SAN FRANCISCO



11. THE DINING ROOM AT 1517 VAN NESS AVENUE



12. THE GERSTLE FAMILY IN FRANKFURT IN 1875

Bertha
William

Lewis
Sophie

Alice

Hannah
Bella

Clara
Mark