



# History of the earliest letters from New Zealand to Germany (1839-1841)

## The Dieffenbach story



Johann Ernst Carl Dieffenbach (1811-1855)  
Bildnachweis: [www.1848.de](#)  
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Dokumentation

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The exhibit shows an excerpt from a total of 50 letters by political emigrant Ernst Dieffenbach from Giessen, Germany (1811-1855). It illustrates a unique and largely unknown connection between Germany in the years from 1833 to the March 1848 revolution and the beginning of British colonisation of New Zealand.

Since his medical studies in Giessen, Dieffenbach had been a member of the radical revolutionary Germania fraternity. In 1833, he was forced to emigrate, first to France and later to Switzerland and England.

His language learning skills enabled him to take on odd jobs, for instance as prosecutor in a London hospital, or as a translator of scientific material into German - among other things, he translated works by zoologist Richard Owen and pathologist Thomas Hodgkins.

It was most likely through their support that Dieffenbach, a physician and natural scientist, was able to take part in a New Zealand Company-led first expedition that aimed to explore the country and prepare its colonization by Britain.

**The letters sent home (Grand Duchy of Hesse) are thus the earliest known letters from New Zealand to a state in Germany. Five of his eight letters from New Zealand are shown (two others are in archives, one in Puke Ariki museum, New Zealand). In addition, both his letters from New South Wales are shown.**

In 1843, Dieffenbach returned to Germany, but it was only after the 1848 revolution that he secured permanent residency status in Hesse. In 1850, he became a professor of geognosis and geology in Giessen. A year later, he married and had two daughters. He died as early as 1855 of a typhoid ailment.

His books have never been translated into German. Although he mingled with the geniuses of his time such as Darwin (he translated Darwin's "Naturwissenschaftliche Reisen"), Liebig and Humboldt, he's largely an unknown quantity in Germany nowadays.

**Section 1 and 2** show Dieffenbach's escape to France and his ensuing exiles in Switzerland and Britain, **featuring the earliest proof of his exile in private hands.**

**Section 3** describes his sea journey to **New Zealand (with the earliest document sent from there to Germany in private hands)**, his stay in New Zealand and his trip to New South Wales.

**Section 4 and 5** show his return to England and later on to Germany.

All documents exhibited contain details on delivery routes and taxation. It's worth noting, though, **that during his stay in New Zealand (1839/41) no postal delivery was possible as no postal service existed.** To be precise, the service was not established until 1840 and was not yet functioning fully. Letters could only be handed over to private shipowners (sailing ships only).

### Literature (excerpt):

Official Prussian postal gazettes 1817-1875 ("Circularre" and "Amts-Blatt der Postverwaltung", used in the exhibit "PA-Blatt")

Tabcart, C. "Australia New Zealand UK Mails Vol. 1 to 1880", 2011

McNaught, K.J. "The Postage Stamps of New Zealand, Vol. 7, New Zealand Postal History 1820 to 1874", 1988

Münzberg, Werner "Thurn und Taxis Rayon Post-Stempel", 1971

Schäfer, R. "Auslandspostverkehr Schweiz Transit 1798-1850", 2011

"Georg Büchner Jahrbuch 8 und 9" (1990-99)

"The New Zealand Journal" 1839-1841

[www.paperspast.natlib.govt.nz](http://www.paperspast.natlib.govt.nz)

### New Zealand (history):

Around 1350: Settlement by Maori from the South Seas

1642: Discovered by Tasman (without setting foot on the land)

1769: James Cook starts first explorations

1792: First seal and whale hunters on the coastline

1814: First missionaries

1839: First expedition by the New Zealand Company

1840: 22 January: British flag is hoisted

1840: 06 February: Colony founded as part of NSW

1841: 01 July: British colony of its own

### New Zealand (postal service):

Up to 1840: Letters were handed over to sailing ships exclusively, without postal procedures, letters were shipped from New South Wales on private sailing ships (the letters in question were often kept in Sydney for 4-5 months until a suitable ship was found)

1840-1842: Official postal service in New Zealand managed by New South Wales Fees New Zealand-Sydney: 3d from 21 November 1835, up to 1/2 oz, higher, staggered fees as of 25.9.1838

1844, 1 January: First ship of the Toulmine Line as "packet ship" from New Zealand

Following his participation on the charge of the Frankfurt guard house on 3 April 1833, which caused nine casualties, Dieffenbach and many others of the 100 people involved in the charge had to flee Germany, but most of them were arrested and imprisoned. In 1836, Dieffenbach was still confronted with an arrest warrant against him on charges of high treason.



Charge on the Frankfurt guard house

**B e k a n n t m a c h u n g e n .**

677) [Darmstadt.] Steckbrief. Der Candidat der Medicin, **Ernst Dieffenbach** aus Gießen gebürtig, jetzt in Zürich, hat der gerichtlichen Aufforderung, in der gegen ihn hier anhängigen Untersuchung wegen Hochverraths sich persönlich zur Verantwortung zu stellen, keine Folge geleistet.

Unter Beifügung eines, freilich unvollständigen Signalements, ersuche ich daher die Behörden des In- und Auslandes, den Genannten im Betretungsfalle anhalten und ihn mir gefänglich vorführen zu lassen.

Darmstadt, den 5. März 1836.

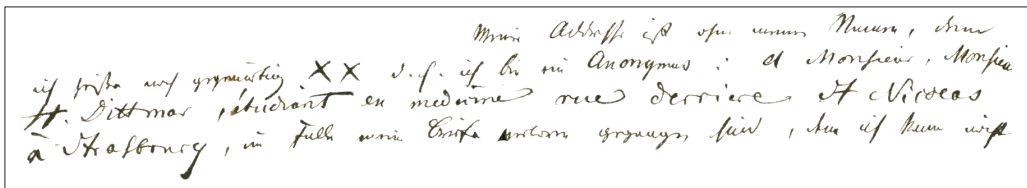
Der von Großh. Hess. Hofgericht der Provinz Oberhessen bestellte Untersuchungsrichter,  
Hofgerichts-Rath **Georgi**.

**S i g n a l e m e n t .**

Alter: 24--26 Jahre,	Mund: gewöhnlich,
Größe: etwa 7 Fuß Gr. Hess. M.,	Rinn: etwas iris.
Haare: dunkelblond,	Bart: im Entstehen.
Stirne: hoch und breit,	Gesichtsform: oval,
Augenbraunen: dunkelblond	Gesichtsfarbe: frisch,
Augen: graublau,	Statur: unterseht,
Nase: gewöhnlich,	Besondere Zeichen: barthörig.

Ernst Dieffenbach wanted poster in the "Großherzoglich Hessischen Zeitung" newspaper No. 71, from 11 March 1836

On 6 August 1833, Dieffenbach hit French soil but had to stay 20 miles away from the border and 40 miles away from Paris in line with a 21 April 1832 refugee law. Since he did not have a passport, he could not go to any authorities on the ground and lived an anonymous life:



My address is without my name, as I'm xx, that is I'm an anonymous person: à Monsieur H. Dittmar, étudiant en médecine rue derriere St. Nicolas à Strasbourg ...



**CF·I·R**  
Correspondence  
Francais du premier  
Rayon.  
Applied in Strasbourg  
under the postal  
convention  
Taxis-France 1818,  
(art. 20).  
It indicates a bulk rate  
of 8 déc. per 30gr.  
(art. 22).

**21** 21x kr.

1/2  
2/3  
1½ ggr.  
3½ ggr.  
Attached by Taxis  
border office  
Frankfurt/M.\*  
\*Frankfurt/Main  
used batzen = ggr.,  
in the border office,  
ggr. was used when  
letters were bound  
for, say, a place  
beyond Giessen.

**France (Strasbourg):** 1833. Dieffenbach's second letter (the first is in the archives of the Darmstadt University Library) from French exile, dated 14 August (written on 13 August), sent unpaid to his sister Emilie Spengel in Giessen, forwarded in a closed mailbag Strasbourg-Frankfurt/M. (Art. 11), transit via Baden. Tariff:

French portion (1st zone): 1½ ggr.  
Thurn & Taxis / Baden portion: 3½ ggr.  
Total: 5 ggr. x4 = 20 kr. + 1 kr. delivery fee = 21 kr. (ggr.= kr. x4)

# 1. Exile in France and Switzerland

1833 - 1836

In Strasbourg, Dieffenbach continued to seek the company of like-minded exiles. In his penultimate letter from France, he shares his view on the second uprising of the Lyon silk workers (Canut revolts):

*Das ist ein Brief an Ihren Vater, den Sie geschrieben haben, und der Sie in Paris geschrieben hat. Aber Sie wissen nicht, dass die Revolution in Lyon gescheitert ist, und dass die Arbeiter in Paris ermordet worden sind, und dass die Revolution in Paris gescheitert ist.*

We don't know yet how the fight in Lyon and Paris ended, because telegraphs are not working temporarily. But what we know is that a lot of blood has flowed in Lyon ... that there have been first murders in Paris and complete turmoil.

(General strike and Lyon uprising from 9 -12 April 1834: over 13,000 soldiers quelled the workers' revolt)

On 25 May 1834, he was expelled to Switzerland according to the Strasbourg register of residents(GBJ 8, p428).



1 1/2 ggr.  
3 1/2 ggr.  
Attached by Taxis  
border office  
Frankfurt/M.

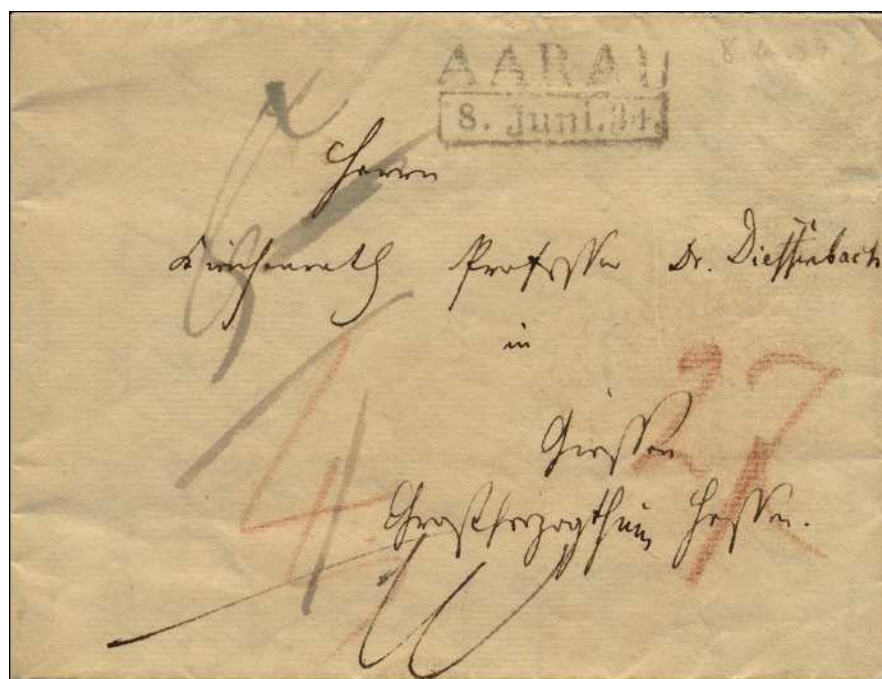
2 1/2  
21x kr.

**France (Strasbourg):** 1834. Unpaid letter sent on 17 April (written on 13 April) to his father in Giessen, shipping and tariff like previous letter.

First letter from Switzerland (admission to radical-liberal physician and philosopher Ignaz Troxler):

*Aarau den 8ten June 1834.*  
*Das ist ein Brief an Ihren Vater, den Sie geschrieben haben, und der Sie in Aarau geschrieben hat.*

Aarau 8 June 1834  
You'll gather from the headline where I am.



6 ggr.  
corrected to  
5 1/2 ggr.  
1 ggr.  
Attached by Taxis  
border office  
Frankfurt/M.

27  
27 kr.

10 kr.  
Attached in  
Schaffhausen  
(Postal convention  
Taxis - Schaffhausen  
1829).

**Switzerland (Aarau):** 1834. Unpaid letter sent from Swiss exile on 8 June to Giessen. Tariff:

Canton of Aargau portion: 4 kr. = 1 ggr.  
Canton of Schaffhausen/Taxis portion\*: 10 kr. = 2 1/2 ggr. + 3 ggr. = 5 1/2 ggr. \*incl. transit Baden  
Total: 6 1/2 ggr. x4 = 26 kr. + 1 kr. delivering fee = 27 kr.

# 1. Exile in France and Switzerland

1833 - 1836

In early August 1834, Dieffenbach left the Canton of Aargau for the Canton of Zurich. Besides working in hospitals and on his doctoral thesis, he continued to be politically engaged in the "Junges Deutschland" secret society. Straight after a meeting of that society on 25 May 1836 the mayor of Zürich ordered Dieffenbach's arrest. On top of that, and because of his assistance in an affaire d'honneur involving a spy by the name of L. Lessing (who was later murdered), Dieffenbach faced investigations. All in all, he remained under arrest for nine weeks and was deported abroad afterwards.

5 ggr.  
1 ggr.  
Attached by Taxis  
border office  
Frankfurt/M.

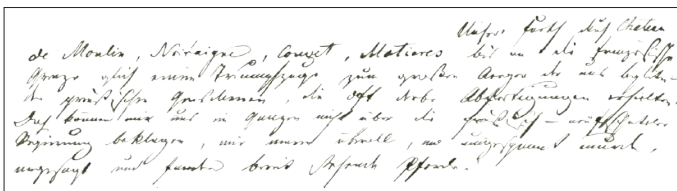


4 kr. fee demanded by  
the Canton of Zurich.  
Used:  
Zurich 1808-1850 (types)

Reverse:  
25  
25 kr.

**Switzerland (Zurich):** 1835. Unpaid letter sent on 19 November to Giessen, forwarded in closed mailbags on the Zurich-Frankfurt route (under 7 June 1822 postal convention Canton of Zurich - Thurn & Taxis, closed transit across Baden). **Tariff:**  
Canton of Zurich portion: 4 kr. = 1 ggr.  
Thurn & Taxis portion\*: 5 ggr. \*incl. Baden transit  
Total: 6 ggr. x4 = 24 kr. + 1 kr. delivering fee = 25 kr.

Toward the end of August 1836, Dieffenbach was escorted to the border with France to be sent on to England. He wrote his first letter from Pontarlier, some 5 miles into France.



Our journey via Chateau Moiraigne, Couvel, Motieres and straight up to the French border resembled a triumphal procession - to the chagrin of the Prussian\* constables accompanying us and who were often verbally attacked. But by and large, there was no reason to complain about the government.

\*The principality of Neuenburg/Neuchâtel was under Prussian rule 1707-1857.

**C·F·3·R**  
Correspondence  
Français 3rd Rayon.  
Applied in Strasbourg  
under the postal  
convention  
Taxis-France 1818,  
(art. 20.)  
It indicates a bulk rate  
of 22 déc. per 30gr.  
(art. 22).

3½ ggr.  
3½ ggr.  
Attached by Taxis  
border office  
Frankfurt/M.



Reverse:  
29  
29 kr.

**France (Pontarlier, some 5 miles into France):** 1836. The only (unpaid) letter sent on 31 August by Dieffenbach while he was headed for England after his deportation from Switzerland. **Tariff:**

French portion (3rd zone): 3½ ggr.  
Thurn & Taxis / Baden portion: 3½ ggr.  
Total: 7 ggr. x4 = 28 kr. + 1 kr. delivering fee = 29 kr.

## 2. Exile in Britain

1836 - 1839

Crossing France in the constant presence of police, Dieffenbach reached his new place of exile, London, via Calais and Dover in mid-September 1836.

At that time the sender of a letter to the German States could only pay postage to the port of entry in Germany.

DANEMARCK  
PAR HAMBOURG

Denmark via  
Hamburg.

Used:  
Thurn & Taxis post  
office Hamburg  
1814-1854

9  
9 sch.C.



Hamburg

6  
27

6 ggr.  
27 kr.

Both applied by  
Taxis post office  
Hamburg

Reverse:

55  
55 kr.

**London:** 1837. Unpaid letter sent on 18 November to Giessen. Apparently, with Dieffenbach always short of money, the letter was handed to an acquaintance and taken privately on board ship to Kiel, enabling Dieffenbach to save the partial fee to the German coastline. On 27 November, the letter was mailed in Kiel (Duchy of Holstein belonging to the Danish Kingdom). The letter finally reached Giessen via Hamburg. Tariff:

Danish portion:	9 sch.C. resp. 6 ggr. resp. 24 kr.
Hamburg - Frankfurt/M.:	27 kr.
Frankfurt/M. - Giessen (incl. 1 kr. delivering fee):	4 kr.
Total:	55 kr.

**A·T·F**

Angleterre Transit  
Français  
(England transit via  
France).

Applied in Strasbourg  
under the postal  
convention  
Taxis-France 1818,  
(art. 20.).

P 1/4

Paid 8d for ship  
letter was crossed  
out, letter was sent  
as packet letter  
with fee corrected  
to 1s/4d

33 kr.

Reverse:

55  
55 kr.

Hendon  
2py P.Paid  
2 penny Post Paid

p(er) Mainz

8¼ ggr.  
5¼ ggr.

All attached by  
Taxis border office  
Frankfurt/M.

fr. France  
fr(anco). France  
It indicates  
prepayment to  
the French coast  
(Calais).



**London (Hendon, Middlesex, incorporated in 1894):** 1838. Partly paid letter weighing over ½ loth and under ½ oz sent on 9 September via France and Baden wrongly in a closed mailbag Paris-Mainz (should have been Paris-Frankfurt, postal convention Taxis-France 1818, art.5), double rate for France, and double rate for Taxis. Tariff:

Prepaid:	2d (Hendon-London)	
	1s/4d (to the French coast, Moubrey, p88)	
Unpaid: French portion:	5½ ggr. x 1,5 = 8¼ ggr. = 33 kr.	(½ loth - ⅔ loth incl.)
Thurn & Taxis / Baden portion:	3½ ggr. x 1,5 = 5¼ ggr. = 21 kr.	(½ loth - 1 loth incl.)
Due:	13½ ggr. = 54 kr. + 1 kr. delivering fee = 55 kr.	

## THREE DAYS PRIOR TO HIS DEPARTURE FOR NEW ZEALAND



The Tory in Port Nicholson (New Zealand), 1839, drawing by Charles Heaphy

In 1839, the London-based New Zealand Company sent an expedition to New Zealand to explore whether the territory could be colonized. Dieffenbach was picked to join the expedition as a physician and natural scientist. The journey was meant to last about two years, with the sailing ship Tory passing the Cape of Good Hope on its way to New Zealand. Apart from crew the Tory took on board only six passengers, including painting artist Charles Heaphy and Nahiti, a Maori who had been found on a French ship bound for Europe. From him Dieffenbach learned the local language during the voyage.

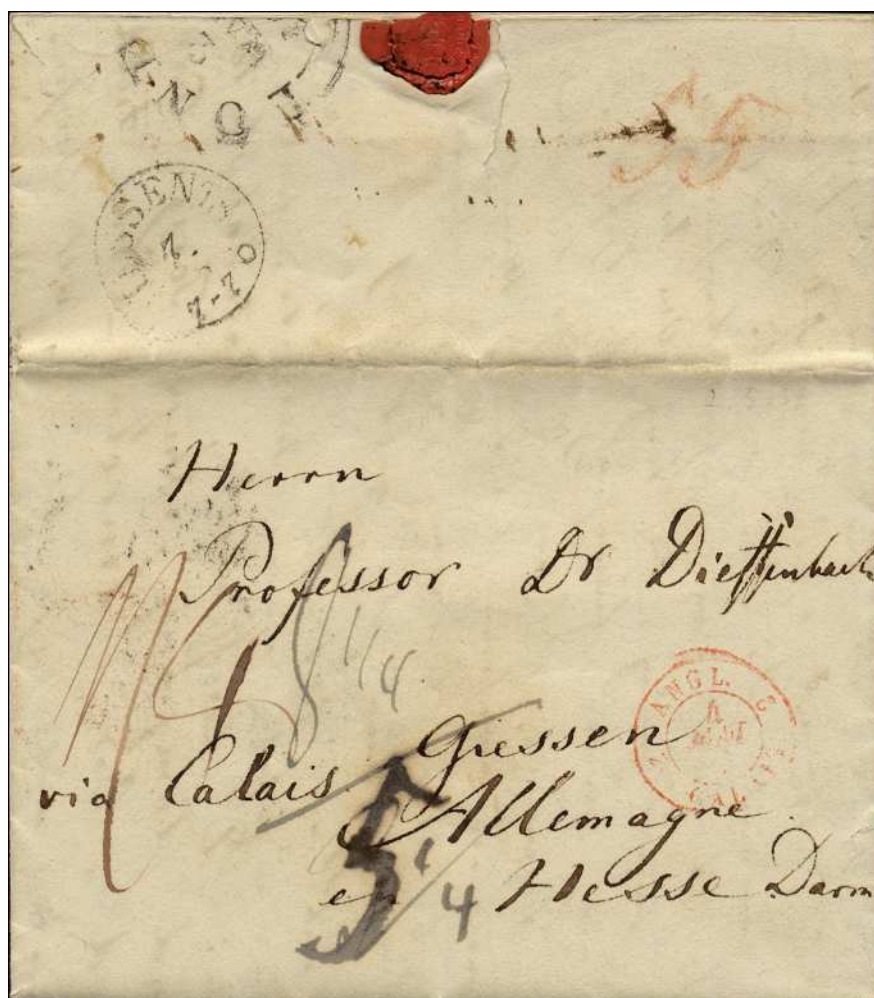
**Dieffenbach was the first naturalist to explore New Zealand** (Darwin's short stay there in 1835 lasted only 10 days). In his letter from 2 May 1839, Dieffenbach first told his parents about him being selected for the journey:

*Im Augenblicke ist von dem Bureau der Geographischen Gesellschaft die Anfrage, ob ich mich zu einer Expedition nach den Südsee, insbesondere nach Neuseeland, mit Aufträgen begeben wolle?*

*Two weeks ago, I received an enquiry from the secretary of the Geographic Society whether I'd be willing to join a marvellous expedition to the South Seas, particularly New Zealand, as a naturalist, an expedition equipped by the New Zealand Company.*

*Wir die Aeltern, haben nun das die zu gutem Befinden, gegen die in die Südsee, in die Meerenge zwischen den beiden nördlichsten Inseln, im Norden dann das ganze Land, besichtigen die Missionen am nördlichen Ende der nördlichen Insel, besichtigen Van Diemen's Land, Australien, besichtigen in der Inselwelt der Südsee, mit besorgen sein*

*... we sail around the Cape of Good Hope, directly into the South Seas in a strait between the two New Zealand islands, we visit the missionaries on the northern tip of the northern-most island, visit Van Diemen's Land, Australia, cross the South Seas isles and return home.*



55  
55 kr.

M4  
1s/4d

8/4  
8¼ ggr.

5/4  
5¼ ggr.

Added by Taxis border office Frankfurt/M.



England (via) Calais Applied in Paris. Used: 1839-1851.

**London:** 1839. Letter written three days before departure to the South Seas and sent partly-paid from London to Giessen via France. Double rate for France and double rate for Taxis, in a closed mailbag Paris-Frankfurt. Tariff:

Prepaid: 1s/4d (to the French coast, Moubrey, p88)

Unpaid: French portion: 5½ ggr. x 1,5 = 8¼ ggr. (½ loth - ⅔ loth incl.)

Thurn & Taxis / Baden portion: 3½ ggr. x 1,5 = 5¼ ggr. (½ loth - 1 loth incl.)

Due: 13½ ggr. x4 = 54 kr. + 1 kr. delivering fee = 55 kr.

## ON THE WAY TO NEW ZEALAND (IN THE ATLANTIC OFF THE COAST OF WEST AFRICA)

The journey started from Plymouth on 12 May. The captain's name was E.M. Chaffers, who had already accompanied Charles Darwin on the Beagle in 1831 and 1836.

In early June 1839, the expedition ship *Tory* had already circumnavigated the Canary Islands and the Cape Verde Islands (and later passed the equator on 7 June and the Cape on 10 July). Three weeks out, it encountered a sailing ship, and letters were handed over to it for London. On spotting the ship, Dieffenbach quickly wrote the following letter to his father, mentioning his current location:



World atlas by Flemming, Glogau 1848  
Position of the ship at the time the letter was written: X

Longitude 6° 1' West  
Longitude 23° 17' West

Latitude 6° 1' North  
Longitude 23° 17' West

*Der Name der Schiff und folgende Lage  
mit der sie sich befindet kommt  
Ja auf die mit uns mit nach London*

Right now, a ship with full sails is coming toward us, and it will likely come near enough for us to hand over some letters.

*Ich muss Schluss machen  
habe mich, falls mich  
per die Expedition  
zu London für den  
1839.*

I have to finish writing as the ship comes closer. Be well, my dear, be well, yours, Ernst  
2 June 1839

Received on 27 Aug. 39



Col. Wakefield also sent a letter that way to the New Zealand Company in London which was published in the first edition of the NZG (21 August 1839 - originally published in London, later in New Zealand):

**THE PRELIMINARY EXPEDITION.**—The *Tory*, a fine ship of 400 tons, left the river early in May, and finally sailed from Plymouth on the 12th, with Col. Wakefield, principal officer of the company, on board, bound to New Zealand, to take possession of large tracts of land already purchased, and to treat with the natives for an extension of the company's territory. A letter has been received from the *Tory*, dated June 3rd, in lat. 5 deg. 30 m. north, and long. 23 deg. 17 m. west,—stating all to be well on board. As there can be little doubt the *Tory* has arrived in Cook's Straits by this date, despatches from thence may be expected by the 15th of December next.



1/8  
1s/8d  
5  
5 ggr.  
8 1/2  
8 1/2 ggr.  
20  
20 cents

Reverse:  
L O N D O N  
21  
AUG  
1839

ANGLETTERE PAROSTENDE  
23  
AOUT  
1839

England via Ostende  
Applied in Ostend.  
Used: 1837-1841

35  
35 kr.

**At the equator in the Atlantic:** 1839. Letter written on 2 June on the *Tory* and handed over to staff of a ship sailing in the opposite direction. In London, the letter was delivered to the address of an acquaintance of Dieffenbach\*. Posted in London on **21 August** and forwarded via Belgium and Prussia to Giessen where it arrived on 27 August. Tariff:

Prepaid:	1s/8d (to the French coast, paid by Dieffenbach's patron* in London)
Unpaid: Belgian portion:	20 cents resp. 3 1/4 ggr.
Prussian portion:	1 3/4 ggr.
Sub-total:	5 ggr.
Thurn & Taxis portion:	3 1/2 ggr
Sub-total:	8 1/2 ggr. x4 = 34 kr.
Delivering fee:	1 kr.
Due:	35 kr.

(\*Presumably Thomas Hodgkin, M.D. Bond Street, London, mentioned by Dieffenbach in his letters)

### 3. Expedition to New Zealand

1839 - 1841

#### NEW ZEALAND - KAPITI ISLAND (IN THE COOK STRAIT)

On 10 July 1839, the *Tory* passed the Cape of Good Hope, and without a stop or sighting any other land in between, those on board spotted New Zealand on 16 August, all in a record time of just 96 days. The *Tory* reached Queen Charlotte Sound on 17 August and Port Nicholson (later to become Wellington) on 20 August.

**That marked the start of New Zealand's European colonization.**

On the day of arrival, the crew witnessed a bloody battle among the indigenous people (battle near Waikanae on 16 October 1839 between warring Ngati Raukawa and Te Ati Awa tribes).

The expedition started exploration work without delay. Dieffenbach sent his second letter from New Zealand to his father, from Kapiti Island in the Cook Strait.



World atlas by Flemming, Glogau, 1848  
Kapiti Island (7.5 sq mi): x

*Angewiesen d. 29<sup>ten</sup> Nov. 1840. October 26 1839.*  
Arrived on 29 November 1840      October 26 1839

*Mein Aegidius Vater!*  
*Die neueste Briefe brief, An die Kapiti also Entzug*  
*island in Cooks Strait, Manufaktur Straite, den*  
*Dr Thomas Hodgkin.*

My dear father,  
you receive this letter from me from Kapiti Island in the Cook Strait via Dr. Thomas Hodgkin.



Thomas Hodgkin\* (1798-1866) in 1832 described Lymphogranulomatosis, also known as Hodgkin's lymphoma; in Guy's Hospital as of 1825.

*Am Tage unserer Ankunft hier war ein blutige*  
*Kampf zwischen den Eingeborenen ausgefallen und*  
*es war sehr, die Wunden der Wunden*  
*Spiele zu geben, als ich war.*

On the day of our arrival, there was a bloody fight between indigenous people, and I was glad to provide as much surgical help as possible to those wounded.



1/4d  
1s/4d Post Paid

*Handwritten initials*

5½ ggr.  
3½ ggr.

Applied by  
Taxis border office  
Frankfurt/M.

Via Postum  
Via France  
Written by sender  
Hodgkin.



England (via) Calais  
Applied in Paris.  
Used: 1839-1851.

Reverse:

Bond. S!N

*Handwritten number 37*

37 kr.

Earliest privately-owned letter from New Zealand to Germany.

**Second known letter from New Zealand (precolonial era)** (the first letter dated 10 October 1839, is in the archives of the Darmstadt University Library): 1839. Letter from Kapiti Island (Cook Strait) dated 26 October, to Giessen, transported by ship to Dieffenbach's friend and patron, Thomas Hodgkin, M.D., Bond Street, London (as stated in the letter). **It only reached London after a year and a month**, and was then posted in Bond Street on 24 November 1840, with Hodgkin meaning to send it via France and paying for carriage to the French coast. It finally arrived in Giessen on 29 November (thus later than the ensuing third letter and simultaneously with the fourth letter). Tariff:

Ship letter fee:	2d or 1d	(for the captain of the private ship)
Prepaid Britain:	1s/4d	(to the French coast, paid by Dieffenbach's patron* in London)
Unpaid: French portion:	5½ ggr.	(up to ½ loth)
Thurn & Taxis/Baden portion:	3½ ggr.	(up to ½ loth)
Sub-total:	9 ggr.	x4 = 36 kr.
Delivery fee:		1 kr.
Due:		37 kr.

# 3. Expedition to New Zealand

1839 - 1841

## NEW ZEALAND - QUEEN CHARLOTTE SOUND (IN THE COOK STRAIT)



World atlas by Flemming, Glogau, 1848  
Queen Charlotte Sound: x

November 10<sup>th</sup> 1839. Eastbay in Queen Charlotte Sound  
Cook's Straits, New Zealand.

November 10th 1839. Eastbay in Queen Charlotte Sound  
Cooks Straits, New Zealand.

Dieffenbach's letters were exclusively transported as ship letters as there was no regular postal service at the time between Australia and England (packet letter). Such a service was even less important for New Zealand, given the low number of missionaries there. Only a couple of months after Dieffenbach's arrival, colonization began through the first immigrants from England who arrived in January 1840 on board the Aurora. Linking specific letters to specific ships is therefore hardly ever possible.

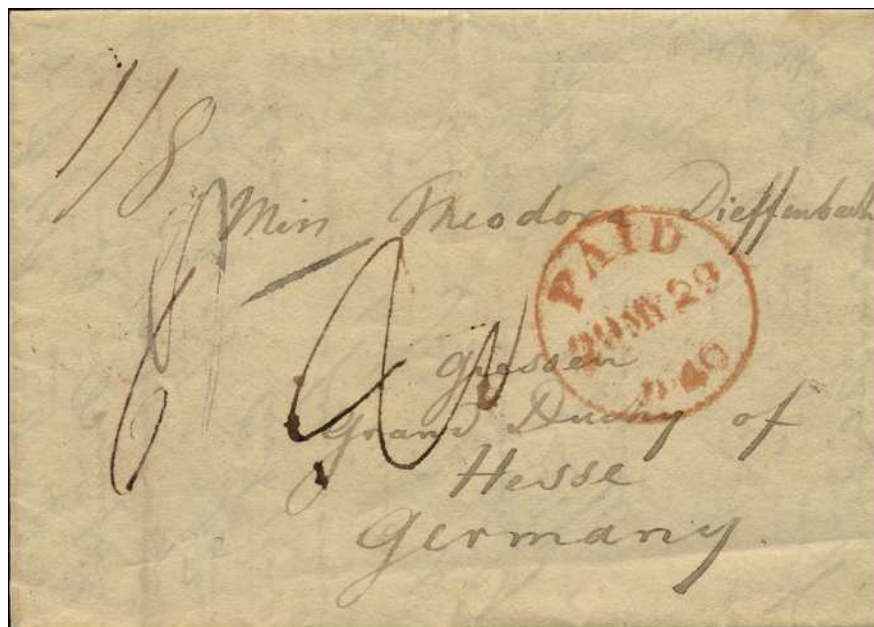
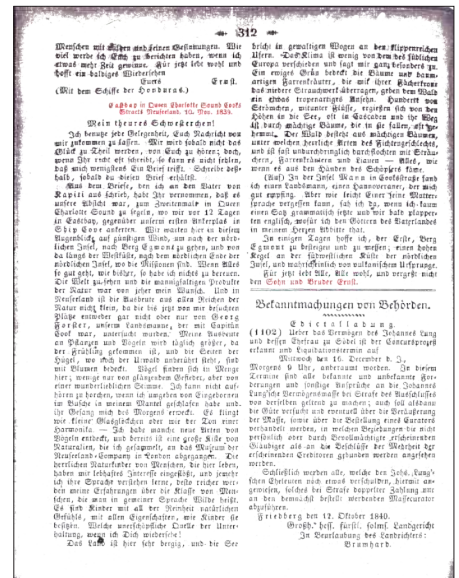
That's why Dieffenbach had his letters addressed to the Colonial Museum in Sydney:

*Adresse To Dr. Dieffenbach in Sydney,  
Care of George Bennet, Esq. Colonial Na-  
turalist, Colonial Museum, Sydney;  
To be retained untill the "Tory" arri-  
ves.*

Adresse to Dr. Dieffenbach in Sydney,  
Care of George Bennet, Esq. Colonial Na-  
turalist, Colonial Museum, Sydney;  
To be retained untill the "Tory" arri-  
ves.

News from the German natural scientist considered spectacular at the time made its way into the upper-Hessian press as a copy of the whole letter:

Page from "Intelligenzblatt für die Provinz Oberhessen" No.45, from 7 November 1840, "Letters from a young German from the other side of the Earth", letter content dated 10 November 1839, published by Dieffenbach's uncle. Since Dieffenbach was on the "wanted" list, no name was mentioned (no mention either of the address found in the letter).



1/8  
1s/8d

9 1/2 ggr.  
Applied by  
Taxi border office  
Frankfurt/M.

6  
6 ggr.

20 cents

Revers:  
39x  
39x kr.

Engeland  
over Rotterdam  
Applied in Rotterdam.  
Used:  
1823-1852.

**Third known letter from New Zealand (precolonial era):** 1839. Letter from 10 November from Eastbay in Queen Charlotte Sound (Cook Strait) to Giessen, carried as ship letter to Dieffenbach's confidant in London, posted there by the latter on 29 May 1840 and paid to cover carriage to the French coast; transit via the Netherlands and Prussia, arrived on 4 June 1840 (and hence almost half a year earlier than the second letter). Tariff:

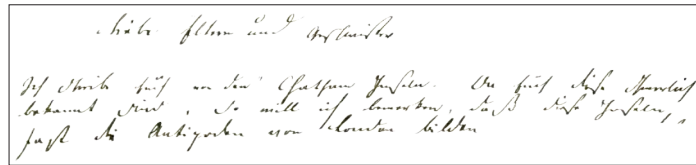
Ship letter fee:	2d or 1d	(for the captain of the private ship)
Prepaid Britain:	1s/8d sh	(to the French coast, paid by Dieffenbach's patron in London)
Unpaid: Dutch portion:	20 cents	resp. 2 3/4 ggr.
Prussian portion:		3 1/4 ggr.
Sub-total:		6 ggr.
Thurn & Taxis portion:		3 1/2 ggr.
Sub-total:		9 1/2 ggr. x4 = 38 kr.
Delivery fee:		1 kr.
Due:		39 kr.

## NEW ZEALAND - CHATHAM ISLANDS (650 KM - 400 MILES - EAST OF NEW ZEALAND)



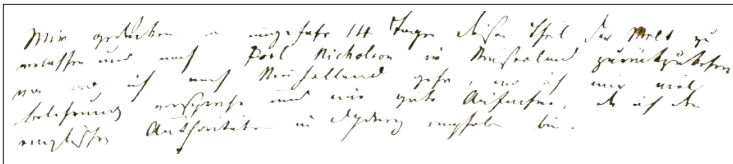
World atlas by Flemming, Glogau, 1848  
Chatham Islands x  
Port Nicholson (Wellington) x

In early May 1939, Dieffenbach was the first scientist ever to explore the Chatham Islands some 650 km (400 miles) southeast of New Zealand. The two-month expedition was carried out on the barque Cuba under captain Newcombe.



Dear parents, brothers and sisters,  
I'm writing to you from the **Chatham Islands**. As you will most likely not know them, let me tell you that they almost form London's antipodes.

Following his expedition to the Chatham Islands, Dieffenbach shared his further plans in a letter:

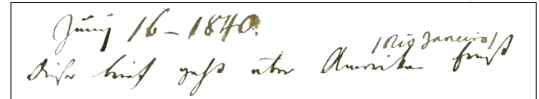


We aim to leave this part of the world in a fortnight and return to Port Nicholson in New Zealand; from there I'll go to New Holland (Australia) where the authorities in Sydney have been told about my arrival.

On 13 July, the expedition returns to Port Nicholson.

Announcement of the return in the New Zealand Gazette from 18 July 1840:

SHIPPING INTELLIGENCE.  
**ARRIVED.**  
July 13, barque "Cuba," 270, Newcombe, Chatham Islands.



June 16, 1840  
This letter is sent via America / Rio de Janeiro



8 1/4 ggr.  
Applied by  
Taxis border  
office  
Frankfurt/M.

6 ggr. 5  
5 ggr.

188  
1s/8d  
20 cents

Reverse:  
34  
34 kr.

Engeland  
over Rotterdam  
Applied in Rotterdam.  
Used:  
1823-1852.

Earliest letter from the Chatham Islands.

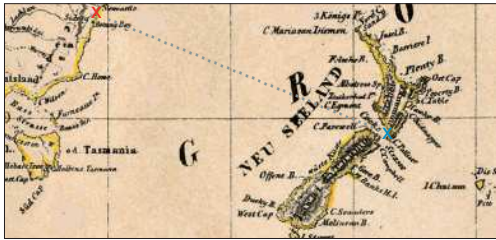
**Fifth known letter from New Zealand (colony of New South Wales)** (fourth letter dated 2 January 1840, from Port Nicholson was missing until 2021, now in Puke Ariki museum, New Zealand): 1840. Letter dated 16 June from the **Chatham Islands** to Giessen, transported by ship via Rio (according to the content) and sent to Dieffenbach's confidant in London who posted it to Giessen on **24 November 1840**, paying the fee to the Dutch coast. It then transited via Holland and Prussia and, although not stamped on arrival, a note in the letter confirms that it was **received on 29 November**, the same day as the second letter from Kapiti dated 26 October 1839 arrived). Tariff:

Ship letter fee:	2d or 1d (for the captain of the private ship)
Prepaid Great Britain:	1s/8d to mainland
Unpaid: Dutch portion:	20 cents resp. 2 3/4 ggr.
Prussian portion:	3 1/4 ggr.
Sub-total:	6 ggr., changed to 5 ggr.
Thurn & Taxis portion:	3 1/2 ggr., charged 3 1/4 ggr
Sub-total:	8 1/4 ggr. x4 = 33 kr.
Delivery fee:	1 kr.
Due:	34 kr

# 3. Expedition to New Zealand

1839 - 1841

## AUSTRALIA - PORT JACKSON (SYDNEY)



World atlas by Flemming, Glogau, 1848  
 Port Jackson (Sydney) x  
 Port Nicholson (Wellington) x

For the first time, he writes about what became New Zealand's best-known bird, the kiwi:



Kiwi illustration from Dieffenbach's "Travels in New Zealand", London, 1843

Departure on the barque Cuba was from Port Nicholson on 4 September 1840.

Announcement of the departure in the New Zealand Gazette No.22 from 5 September 1840:

**SAILED.**  
 September 4, barque "Cuba," Newcombe, Sydney.

On 20 September 1840, Dieffenbach went ashore in Sydney after a 6-month journey and reported home:

*Was soll ich jetzt von dieser Stadt erzählen? Grundsätzlich am besten sind Menschen und Banknotenfabriken, seit sie sich in 60 Jahren zu einem Ort erhoben.*

What shall I tell you about this city? Founded by thieves, murderers and banknote forgers, it has in 60 years .....

*Wenn ich Wahrheit mit Mittheilung, fast die Wahrheit, von den Fliegeln, Vogel, spind, die man die Apollonische frühl, und die die Dodo oder die Dodo ginge?*

My collections will be sent off to London in the next couple of days ... among them a lot of rare and strange things. Have you heard about the wingless bird and the bird resembling the Dodo\*?

\*Endemic in Mauritius, persecuted to extinction by c.1690

3d

*Verschot f. 1.40*

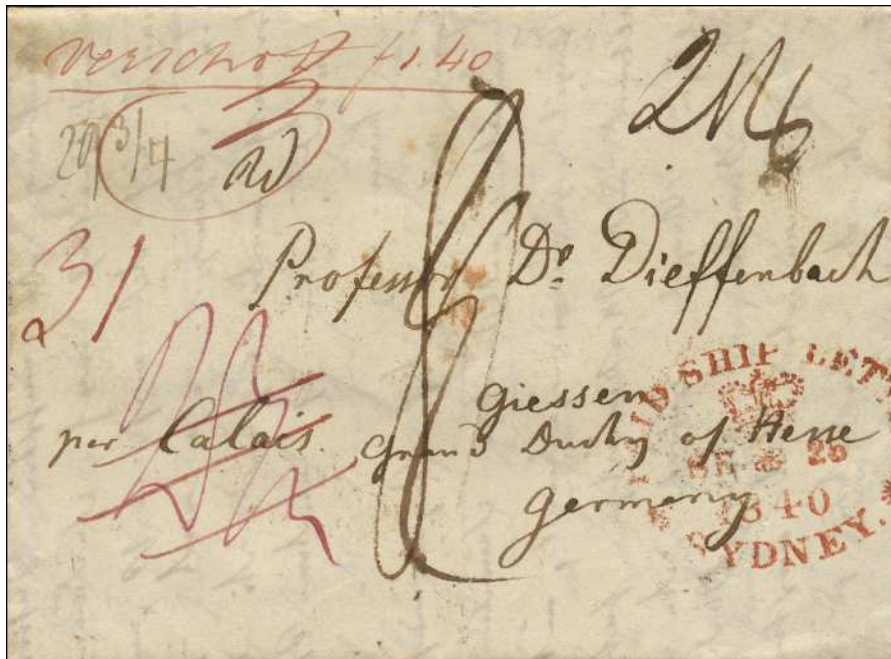
Verschot f 1.40  
 Debit

1 guilder 40 cents  
 (debit Britain).

Added by the Dutch border office.

*27 3/4 ad*  
 29 3/4 ggr. 20 cents

*23 1/2 ggr.*



*2 1/4*  
 2s/4d

*8d*

Reverse:

SHIP-LETTER  
 Applied in London.



Applied in Engeland  
 London. over Rotterdam

EMMERICH  
 20. FEBR. V

Applied by Incoming  
 Prussian: border office and outgoing border office.



*2 1/4 =* 2 fl.-  
 (= 120 Kr.)

**New South Wales (Australia):** 1840. Partly paid letter from Port Jackson (port of Sydney), written on 23 September and posted in Sydney on 25 September to Giessen. It was sent as a ship letter on either the brig William Wyse (planned to leave on 30 September, "The Sydney Monitor" of 25 September) which departed on 11 October, or on the barque Eliza Frances which left on the same day to London. It was dealt with by postal staff in London on 14 February 1841 and forwarded via the Netherlands and Emmerich (Prussia) where it arrived on 20 February, and by closed mail from Wetzlar to Giessen, arriving on 24 February 1841. The marked route via Calais was ignored. **This was the first letter to come without a forwarder in London. The partial fee was paid in full by the recipient under the 1839 regulation** (see next page). Tariff:

Prepaid: Ship letter NSW: 3d\* (paid by Ernst Dieffenbach) (\*1/2 oz, tariff since 21 October 1835; Talbot p.16)

Unpaid: Ship letter Sydney-England: 8d

Sub-total British portion: 2s/4d = 1 fl. 40 = 140 cents (28d x 5 = 140 cents, Moubrey, p497)

Dutch portion: 20 cents

Sub-total: 160 cents resp. 23 1/2 ggr.

Prussian portion: 3 1/4 ggr.

Sub-total: 26 3/4 ggr. (the next page but one)

Thurn & Taxis portion: 3 ggr.

Sub-total: 29 3/4 ggr. x4 = 119 kr.

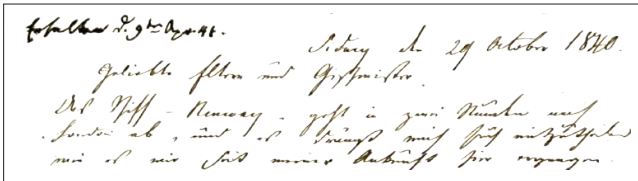
Delivery fee: 1 kr.

Due: 120 kr. = 2 fl.

**AUSTRALIA - PORT JACKSON (SYDNEY)**

The Prussian Head Post Office announced that from 1 December 1839 letters from the British colonies would be sent to the Belgian and Dutch post offices as unpaid letters, thus doing away with the obligatory fee for transport to the Continent and the need for a forwarder in England (initially valid for the provinces of the Rhineland and Westphalia, see excerpt).

The return on the Cuba from Sydney to New Zealand was to be on 1 November 1840, but was delayed until 12 November (Sydney Monitor, 13 November 1840 edition). Before that, Dieffenbach wrote his second letter home from New South Wales:

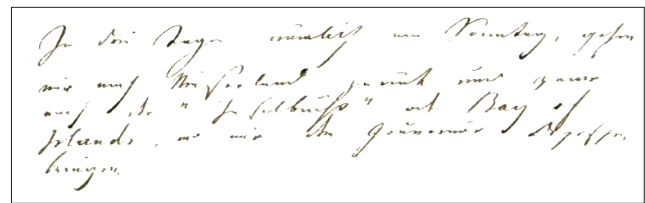


Received 9 Apr. 41  
 Sydney, 29. October 1840. The ship *Nenway* (by which he was probably referring to the barque *John Renwick*, 402 tons, *Sydney Gazette*) is leaving the port for London in two hours, and I'm raring to tell you how I have fared since my arrival here.

**Circulare**  
 an  
**die Post-Anstalten in der Rheinprovinz und in Westphalen.**

Vom 1sten December d. J. ab wird das Großbritanniſche General-Post-Officium alle aus überseeiſchen Ländern in England ankommende, nach der Preußiſchen Rheinprovinz und Westphalen bestimmte Briefe resp. den Niederländiſchen und Belgiſchen Posten aushändigen, und ſich mit dieſen wegen des darauf haftenden Britiſchen Porto berechnen. Den Post-Anstalten werden dieſe Briefe in Zukunft auf demſelben Wege zugehen, wie die aus England ſelbſt kommenden Briefe.

Berlin, den 13. November 1839.  
**Der General-Postmeister**  
 v. Nagler.



In three days, on Sunday, we're going back to New Zealand, to the Bay of Islands where we will hand over dispatches to the governor.



2/4  
 2s/4d

30/4  
 30% ggr.  
 Applied by  
 Taxis border office  
 Frankfurt/M.

Bremen  
 Bremen  
 Applied by Taxis  
 post office Bremen.  
 24 w 24 ggr.

3 3d  
 8 8d  
 24 24 ggr.  
 18x 18x Kr.  
 Applied by  
 Taxis post office  
 Bremen.

PAID SHIP LETTER  
 OC 29 1840 SYDNEY  
 Applied in Sydney.  
 Used: Since 1831.  
 It indicates prepayment of the NSW portion (3d).

Reverse:

SHIP-LETTER Applied in London.  
 F 2 AP 2 1841 Applied in London.  
 BREMEN ETH. u. TAX. O. P. A. 6. Apr. Applied by Thurn & Taxis post office.  
 2/4. 2 fl. 4x (= 124 kr.)

**New South Wales (Australia): 1840.** Partly paid letter from Sydney, written on 29 October, posted in Sydney on **Sydney 29 October** to Giessen, transported as ship letter via **London 2 April** and **Bremen 6 April**, arrived on 9 April 1841. Dieffenbach's preferred route via **Hamburg** was ignored. **All of the unpaid portion was paid by the recipient under the 1839 regulation. Tariff:**

Prepaid: Ship letter NSW:	3d*	(paid by Ernst Dieffenbach)	( <sup>1</sup> / <sub>2</sub> oz, tariff since 21 October 1835; Talbott p.16)
Unpaid: Ship letter Sydney-England:	8d		
Sub-total British portion:	2s/4d	resp. 18 ggr.	(8d + 1s/8d)
?		24 ggr. x4 =	96 kr.
Bremen-?:		4½ ggr. x4 =	18 kr.
Sub-total:		28½ ggr. x4 =	114 kr.
Thurn & Taxis portion:		2¼ ggr. x4 =	9 kr.
Sub-total:		30¾ ggr. x4 =	123 kr.
Delivery fee:			1 kr.
Due:			124 kr. = 2 fl. 4 kr.

# 3. Expedition to New Zealand

1839 - 1841

## NEW ZEALAND - AUCKLAND

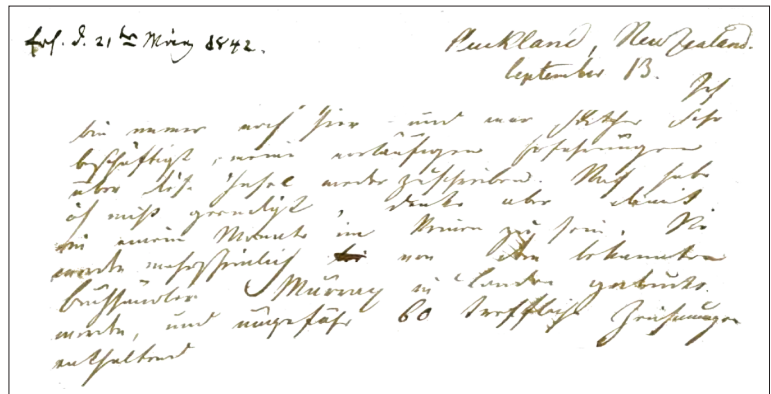


World atlas by Flemming, Glogau, 1848  
Auckland (in the atlas still unknown): X



Cover page of the first volume of his "Travels in New Zealand" and - as written in his letter from Auckland - published by John Murray in 1843

Auckland was founded on 18 September 1840 and officially recognised as the capital on 26 November 1842 in the New Zealand Gazette (until 1862). Dieffenbach worked on the ground for almost a year to put his "Travels in New Zealand" to paper (two volumes).



Received on 21 March, 1842 Auckland, New Zealand, September 13  
I'm still here and have been very busy writing down my impressions of the island. I haven't finished the job yet but hope to get it done within a month. My writing will likely be published by the well-known book publisher Murray in London and include 60 marvellous drawings.

2 fl.  
2 fl.  
*Verschot f 1.40*  
**Debit**  
1 guilder 40 cents  
(debit Britain).  
Attached by the  
Dutch border office.

*Hess*  
**26 2/3 ggr.**  
Debit Prussia.

*2/4*  
2s/4d



*29 1/2*  
*4*  
**29 1/2 ggr.**

*3*  
**3d**

*8*  
**8d**

*160*  
**160 cents**

Reverse:

SHIP-LETTER



Engeland  
over Rotterdam



Applied by  
Prussian  
incoming  
border office.

*2 fl.* 2 fl.-  
(120 kr.)

**New Zealand (then colony of Britain): 1841.** Partly paid letter from Auckland (founded only a year earlier on 18 September 1840), written on 13 September to Giessen, transported as ship letter to London 14 March 1842, via the Netherlands and Prussia, Emmerich 18 March, arrived on 21 March 1842, all of the unpaid portion paid by recipient under the 1839 regulation. Tariff:

Prepaid: Ship letter NSW:	3d*	(paid by Ernst Dieffenbach)
Unpaid: Ship letter Sydney-England:	8d	
Sub-total British portion:	2s/4d = 1 f. 40	= 140 cents (28d x 5 = 140 cents, Moubrey, p497)
Dutch portion:		20 cents
Sub-total:		160 cents resp. 23 1/2 ggr.
Prussian portion:		3 1/4 ggr.
Sub-total:		26 2/3 ggr.
Thurn & Taxis portion:		3 ggr.
Sub-total:		29 2/3 ggr. x4 = 119 kr.
Delivery fee:		1 kr.
Due:		120 kr. = 2 fl. / 2 fl.

(not discernible what 14 1/4 and 34 2/3 is related to)

# 3. Expedition to New Zealand

1839 - 1841

## NEW ZEALAND - AUCKLAND

On 5 October 1841, Dieffenbach wrote yet another and his final letter home while staying in New Zealand. In it, he still ruled out taking up the captain's offer to get on board for the journey back home as he was waiting for news from England.

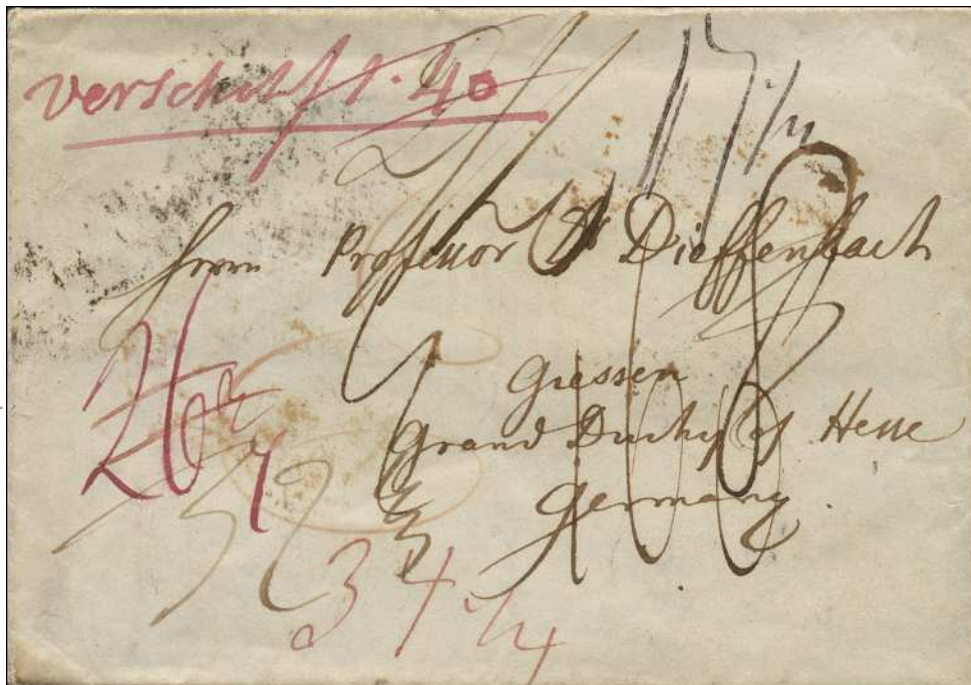
*Die "Planter" am Pfauzug geht morgen direkt nach London. Ich muss mich nicht entscheiden, ob ich nun will oder nicht. Die Reise umfahren sollte, die mir der Captain angeboten wurde, ist mir lieber, und meine anderen Expeditionen abzugeben, bis ich Nachrichten von England empfangen kann.*

The Planter is setting out for London tomorrow. I'd been undecided whether or not to accept a free ride offered by the captain....  
.....to turn the offer down and wait for news from England.

*Im Augenblicke sind die zwei Südpol-Entdeckungsfahrten, die Erebus und Terror, befehligen von Captain Ross; sie gehen in einigen Tagen nach Süden. Ich weiß, daß sie mit solchen Gefahren zu kämpfen haben, wie ich schon im Jahre 1839, wo sie land gefunden. Seine Schiff sind die stärksten, und so müßte man genug Material mitbringen, um sie über den Winter zu bringen.*

At the moment, there are two South Pole exploration ships around, the Erebus and the Terror, under captain Ross. In a couple of days, they'll be heading south - you know that last year they were forced to turn back. But they were deep in the south already, 78\* latitude where they found land.  
His ships are as strong as you can make them, with enough material to burn on board to survive the winter period.

\*The latitude mentioned above was the southernmost point ever reached by humans for a long time. James Clark Ross (1800-1862) discovered the Ross Sea in 1841, Victoria Land and the volcanos Erebus and Terror, later the names of his ships. He once again sailed to Antarctica in November 1841, but the polar ice was so massive that he had to return.



2/4s  
2s/4d converted to:  
verschafft 40  
Verschot f 1.40 Debit  
1 guilder 40 cents (debit Britain).  
Added by the Dutch border office.  
26 3/4  
26 3/4 ggr. Debit Prussia.

8  
8d  
E  
3d (mirror-inverted?)  
160  
160 cents

Reverse:  
SHIP-LETTER PLYMOUTH  
Applied in Plymouth  
13 JAN 1842  
Engeland over Rotterdam  
EMMERICH 17 1

2/10  
2 fl. 10 (= 130 kr.)

**New Zealand (then colony of Britain):** 1841. Partly paid letter from Auckland, written on 5 October to Giessen, transported as a ship letter on the barque Planter directly from Auckland on 6 October (The New Zealand Journal vol. 3, 22.1.1842 edition), via Coromandel Harbour 12 October (northern island, The Sydney Herald, 29 November 1841 edition), to Plymouth and London 13 January 1842 (hence, arriving two months earlier than the previous letter written on 13 September 1841). It was sent on to the Netherlands and Prussia (Emmerich 17 January) arriving on 20 January 1842. All of the unpaid portion was paid by the recipient under the 1839 regulation. Tariff:

Prepaid: Ship letter NSW:	3d*	(paid by Ernst Dieffenbach)
Unpaid: Ship letter Sydney-England:	8 d	
Sub-total British portion:	2s/4d = 1 f. 40	= 140 cents (28d x 5 = 140 cents, Moubrey, p497)
Dutch portion:		20 cents
Sub-total:		160 cents resp. 23 1/2 ggr.
Prussian portion:		3 1/4 ggr.
Sub-total:		26 3/4 ggr.
Thurn & Taxis portion:		5 1/2 ggr. (reason for higher fee unaccounted for)
Sub-total:		32 1/4 ggr. x4 = 129 kr.
Delivery fee:		1 kr.
Due:		130 kr. = 2 fl. 10 kr.

(not discernible what 17 1/4 and 34 1/4 is related to)

# 4. Return to Britain

1842

Surprisingly, Dieffenbach did return to England on the Planter after all, since "the circumstances in England made that move necessary." On 12 January 1842, his memorable New Zealand expedition ended when the ship arrived in Plymouth, bringing Dieffenbach back to England after almost three years.

*I arrived here two days ago, following a very happy journey of 95 days from New Zealand, around Cape Horn.*

*Plymouth 14 January 1842  
Dieff's Planter*

**LECTURE ON THE COLONIZATION OF NEW ZEALAND.**  
On Wednesday evening, the 19th instant, a lecture upon New Zealand was delivered by Mr. J. C. Mathews, Superintendent of Emigration to the West of England Board of the New Zealand Company, which acquired an additional interest from the presence of Dr. Dieffenbach, the Naturalist of the Company, who had just arrived from Auckland by the Planter, (now in Plymouth harbour.).

**Plymouth, 14 January 1842**  
ship **Planter**

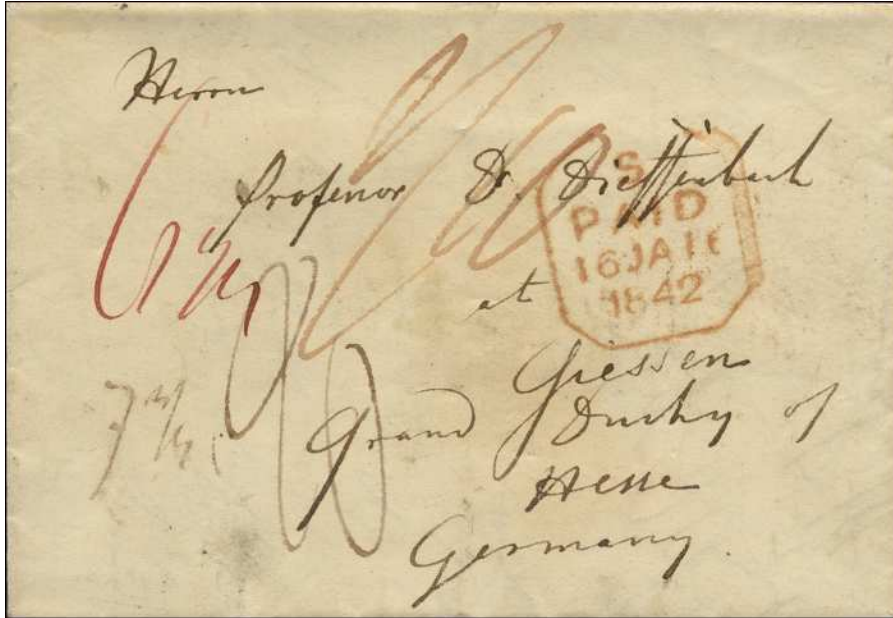
New Zealand Journal from 22 January 1842 on Dieffenbach's arrival in Plymouth aboard the Planter.

*100*  
1s/10d

*6 3/4*  
6 3/4 ggr.

*7 3/4*  
7 3/4 ggr.

*90*  
20 cents



Reverse:



England via Ostende  
Applied in Ostend.  
Used: 1837-1841

*32.*  
32 kr.

**Plymouth:** 1842. Partly paid letter to Giessen dated 14 January, written two days after his return from New Zealand while still on the barque Planter, transit via Belgium 18 January, and Prussia, tariff see letter below.

In London, Dieffenbach had ample opportunity to report on his journey: "...and can hardly avoid the many invitations I'm receiving. Tomorrow, the minister for the colonies has asked me to come by. Lord Stanley asked me to share my views on what state New Zealand is in." (Letter from 25 January 1842, posted on 26 January).

His report called "Travels in New Zealand" was published in 1843 in London.

*7 3/4*  
7 3/4 ggr.

*6 3/4*  
6 3/4 ggr.

*90*  
20 cents



*13 - 1/10*  
*21 - 1/10*  
*1 - 1/10*  
10d British  
1s/0d sea  
1s/10d

Reverse:



*32.*  
32 kr.

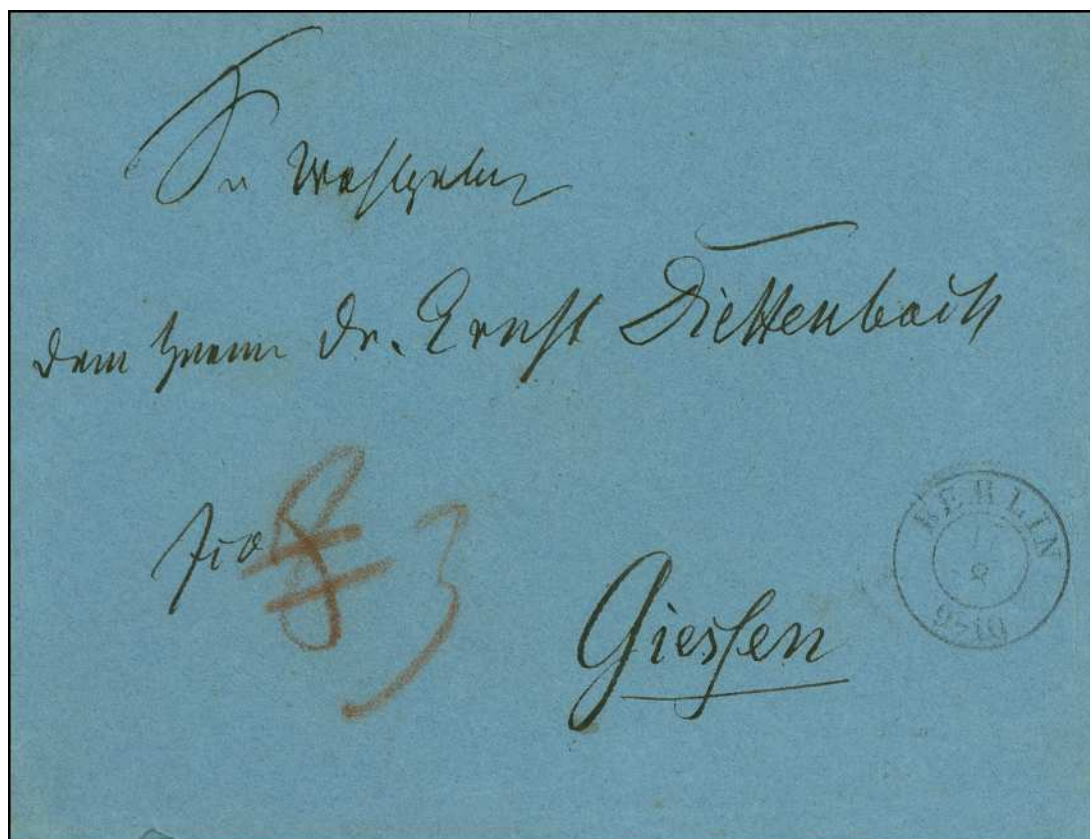
**London (Kensington, incorporated in 1889):** 1842. Partly paid letter dated 26 January to Giessen, transit see letter above. Tariff:

Prepaid:	1s/10d (beyond London)
Unpaid: Belgian portion:	20 cents resp. 2 3/4 ggr.
Prussian portion:	3 1/2 ggr.
Sub-total:	6 1/4 ggr.
Thurn & Taxis portion:	1 1/2 ggr.
Due:	7 3/4 ggr. x4 = 31 kr. + 1 kr. delivering fee = 32 kr.

- Soon after his return found himself at odds into frictions with the NZC (with the exact reasons for the argument being unclear).
- In England, Dieffenbach remained without a permanent position; following the colonization of the South Seas, England lost any interest in him.
- In 1843, he returned to Germany, but Giessen kept barring him from a job at the university. **His cousin, Johann Friedrich Dieffenbach, tried to help him**, but even the acquaintance with Alexander von Humboldt didn't get him anywhere - the latter put in a word for him, but that was to no avail.
  - Only after the 1848 revolution did he get permission to stay in the Grand Duchy of Hesse.
- In 1848, he qualified as a professor (the professors checking his work confessed to not knowing the English language; Dieffenbach would only publish something on geology in German once in a while).
  - 1850: professorship of geognosis and geology in Giessen
    - 1851: marriage, two daughters
  - 1855: Dieffenbach contracted typhus and passed away
    - His death didn't cause any stir in Germany.
- Only in New Zealand was he held in high esteem. The Maori people came up with a eulogy when they learned about his death in 1847. **It was the irony of his tragic fate that they confused him with his cousin...**

**None of Ernst Dieffenbach's books was ever translated into German.**

**He remains largely unknown in Germany to this day.**



8 sgr.  
Paid in  
Berlin.  
3 sgr.  
Credit to  
Taxis.

**1846 ca.** Prepaid letter (cover) sent from Berlin 17 August (Prussia) to **Ernst Dieffenbach** in Giessen (Grand Duchy of Hesse - Thurn & Taxis) written by his famous cousin **Prof. Dr. Johann Friedrich Dieffenbach**.



**Johann Friedrich Dieffenbach (1792-1847)** was one of the most ingenious surgeons in the first half of the 19th century.

In 1829, he became lead physicist in the surgery department at the Charité, in 1840, he was appointed director of the surgical university clinic in Berlin.

He successfully carried out thousands of operations (facial surgery, squinting, clubfoot). He was among the first physicians to use ether anaesthesia as a surgical innovation.