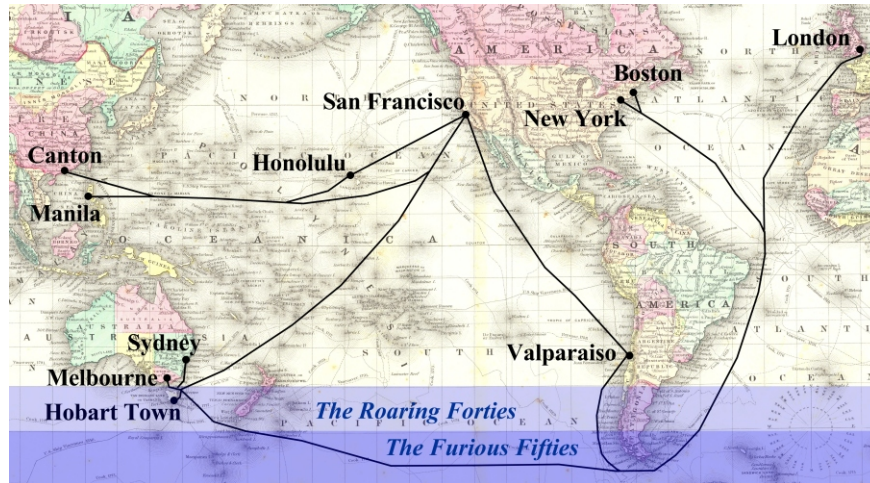


Clipper Ship Routes



In the 1840s a faster sailing vessel, the Clipper ship, began to be built in the United States and to a lesser extent in Great Britain. The term had previously been used to define any fast sailing vessel, those usually making 150 miles per day, but the term became almost synonymous with the unique brand of American Clipper that was designed specifically for high speed sailing. Built to carry small, valuable cargo, speed became more important than cargo capacity and the size of the hold was reduced, the bow sharpened, and the total area of sail increased. The fastest of these ships, including several built by Boston naval architect Donald McKay, could travel more than 350 miles a day in good winds.

The era of dominance of the American Clipper ships in the China and Australia trade lasted from about 1845 to 1859 when several of the fastest, the so-called extreme Clippers, were made in American shipyards. They were particularly important after the discovery of gold in California and Australia. After the Crimean war began in 1853, many British steamers were pulled off the usual routes to Australia to serve as troop transports thereby increasing the importance of the Clipper ships in the handling of mail.

The Clippers plied the seas, via Cape Horn, between Liverpool and Melbourne, New York and San Francisco and established records for speed which have never been equaled under sail. The *Lightening* made a record 436 nautical miles in 24 hours.

Strong winds played an important part in the speed on the clipper ship routes around Cape Horn. Between latitudes 40°S and 50°S the very strong prevailing winds are aptly named "The Roaring Forties" by sailors while the name "The Furious Fifties" is used for the latitudes between 50°S and 60°S where even stronger winds are the norm.

The American owned clipper ships operated without mail contracts and the mails they carried were treated as ship letters upon arrival at ports. Mail originating in the Australian States was usually taken by mail to Melbourne before carriage by private Clipper ship and those also show ship postage due upon arrival. However, a few of the British clippers did have mail contracts and the mail they carried could be prepaid to destination.