

Letter from William Stewart to Rev. G. H. Nobbs

Duplicates (private)

New York, Dec^r 31st 1861
(Pencil note by J. D. McCormick - "The date on the original is Dec 31st 1860")

My dear Sir,

You will receive this along with a letter to your community which I shall feel obliged by your having laid before a full meeting. — You would learn by my letter from Tahiti how we got on upon the voyage to Pitcairn Island, and I now enclose an article which I wrote for a newspaper here as it may interest you. — I did not tell you in my former letter, as I deemed it of no importance, that I had visited your Island under ~~an~~ assumed names for both my vessel and myself. I had been engaged in a somewhat extensive smuggling trade at Sydney which was brought to a premature close by the stupidity of the captain of the Schooner (the Louisa) which I had at Norfolk Island. I was advised by a legal friend to leave New South Wales and I accordingly came away in a vessel which at the time was lying in Jervis Bay. I left a power of attorney with the gentleman who recommended my departure, and I gave him positive instructions to sell every thing and close my store. In place of doing so he kept it open under the charge of a gentleman who had formerly talked of entering into partnership with me, but who never did so, as he had no cash to put into the concern; and the two made away with everything on the premises

and left nothing for any other person. Although the lawyer's deputy had formerly been perfectly free from all illegal acts, after my departure his conduct was so foolish, that he has been prosecuted as a partner in my smuggling transactions and has actually been imprisoned for 2 years. You will have heard many exaggerated reports about my transactions; but the whole substance is that the Sydney Customs Department was not in efficient order, and that I like others took advantage of the uncommon facilities offered for escaping the payment of duties.

Many people have made fortunes in the same way, and even some of those who talked most about my affairs are notoriously known as having risen in the world by the same means. You will say that it was very wrong which must be admitted, but what have you to say to a Mr. Dixon, who was one of the sharers in the profits, and who, to save himself in the eyes of the world - for he pretends great sanctity - has sworn to the most gross untruths.

Sir William Denison was exasperated about his pat being in some sort broken through and consequently - regardless of the natural right of your people to live where they think fit, and to expend their own money as best pleases them - he visits his displeasure on me by a most unwarrantable assumption of authority to which he has not the slightest claim and which only lies in the majority of your community. -

Did I act unfairly toward your people? On the contrary they repeatedly said that they were more comfortable aboard my vessel and their wants better attended to than they had been upon their voyage to Norfolk. What have your people to do with what voyages the Louisa had previously made so long as she conveyed those that were aboard her safely to their destination? I cannot believe it possible that you can all be so lost to honor and independence as to allow yourselves to be treated by Sir William Denison in a way that the Khan of Tartary does not attempt to treat any considerable number of those over whom his despotism extends - Of course when I connect you with what I am writing I do so merely as being one of the community, as I am well aware, and should be sorry to be misunderstood, that personally you have had nothing to do with the matter, and that your voice will always be on the side which you consider just.

Kindly remember me to Mr. Buffet, and when I put "private" upon this letter, do not interpret it as applying to its being kept from his perusal.

It would give me great pleasure to hear from you and also to do anything for you that you may want done in the U. S. States. A letter through Messrs Soares Bros. of Sydney will reach me. Wishing you all health and

happiness.

Believe me, your sincere well wisher
(signed) W. Stewart

The Revd. Mr. Hobbs

rc. rc. rc.

[The envelope was addressed to

The Revd. Mr. Hobbs
Norfolk Island

care of The Bishop of New Zealand

and bears postmarks

Queensbeyan, N.S.W. Feb. 8

Sydney, N.S.W. Feb. 10, 1862

Auckland, N.Z. Mar. 2, 1862

It was probably enclosed in a letter to a friend,
who posted it at Queensbeyan.]

P.S. The article which I enclose was never intended
for your perusal and is truly and simply my
candid opinion. I did not then know how
well Sir William Denison has illustrated what
I say about your becoming a "dependent people",
and you know that no community either ancient
or modern ever became great till they first
shewed that they were independent.

(signed) W. S.

Letter from Rev. G. H. Nobbs to Bishop Selwyn (n.d.)

"Your Goodship will have heard that two families, those of Matthew Young and Moses Young, have returned to Pitcairns; no other embarkations have yet taken place; but other families are holding themselves in readiness; having been promised a passage by the Master of a whaleship, whom we are daily expecting. Such dogged perversity is most lamentable.

The families that have left numbered sixteen persons, three of whom were born here, two of them twins, whom Mrs. Selwyn will no doubt recollect."

Louisa Case - Board of Inquiry, etc.

Five officers of the Customs Department were dismissed and three called on to show cause why they should not be dismissed, following a Board of Inquiry. (S.M. Herald, 15 Feb. 1859).

A magisterial examination followed, which occupied six days at the Water Police Court.

Captain King, who gave evidence, said he left the ship at Hobart and that William Stewart joined it there. He mentioned Logan as the mate.

At the close of the examinations Newton, Manton and Gibbs were committed for trial at the next Criminal Court.

S.M. Herald of 23 Feb. 1859 has 2½ cols. a brief abstract of the evidence given.

Louisa Case - Conspiracy trial

Reported at length in S.M. Herald, 7-11 June 1859. Tried were W. G. Gibbs, Manton and Newton; mentioned in the charge also were Hyman Goldring, James and William Stewart, now absent, as is supposed, from the colony.

Gibbs, obviously the man referred to by W. Stewart in his letter to Hobbs, got two years' imprisonment, Newton one, and Manton was found not guilty; Gibbs was a relative of Colonel Gibbs, the Collector of Customs.

Captain King, who gave evidence, said he was James Stewart's brother-in-law. Stewart married his sister. He was captain of the Louisa for only a short time - left her soon after she sailed from Sydney on 7 Oct. 1858. (Presumably William Stewart took over from him at Jarvis Bay). Goldring was owner of the Louisa (see extract from British Register of Shipping).

James Stewart

Waugh & Cox's Sydney Directory, 1855

James Stewart, H. M. Customs, Pyrmont St.

Sands & Kenny's Sydney Directory, 1858/9

James Stewart, H. M. Customs, 43 Pyrmont
St, Pyrmont

James Stewart, Custom-house agent,
Circular Quay

See also under Louisa

Louisa

also Atimano, James & William Stewart.

Louisa, schooner, arrived from Launceston, 8 Feb. 1858.

Advertisement in SM Herald of 12 Feb. 1858: -

"For sale - the clipper Yacht, Schooner Louisa, 77 tons register, built at Cowes, Isle of Wight, for Her Majesty's Government, of the very best materials, and regardless of expense: coppered and copper fastened throughout (copper house pipe), well found, and notoriously the swiftest craft in Australia. The above vessel is now lying in Sydney Cove. . . . She shifts without any ballast, and is peculiarly suited to the island trade. For further particulars apply to Captain Wineborough, on board, or to Henry H. Beauchamp, 41 King St."

This advertisement continued for weeks, and there is no record of a sale, but on Apr. 26 she was entered out for Wellington, Capt. Honeyman, Raidley & Co. agents. She returned on 14 June, agents now Messrs. L. & S. Spyer, merchants of Wynyard Square. On Sept. 3 she left for New Caledonia, Capt. King.

Capt. J. H. Watson has a note "The Notorious Louisa" in the Scottish Australian, July 1917, p. 5671/3. He gives the facts of her departure from Sydney on 8 October, 1858, and the picking up of the Stewarts, and says Logan took command when

King left her. He has Anderson's story of her being seen at Norfolk Island under name of Mary Ann, Capt. Wilson in command, and what the people told him about the name Louisa being distinctly seen under the paint of the new name.

Watson adds "W. Stewart was a wine and spirit merchant".

There was a William D. Stewart a wine and spirit merchant in Sydney at that time, a partner in the firm of Tucker & Co. There was also a William Stewart, a hotel-keeper.

In the W. W. Bolton Papers (Mf. Ms. A 3372) there is a copy by Bolton of a ms. by J. H. Young, "Atimano", written in 1928. Young states of William Stewart, "In 1858 he was a wine and spirit merchant at Sydney, his brother James being a Customs House Agent at the same place". He has the same story about the Louisa leaving Sydney, but has the error of saying that Capt. Anderson met her at Norfolk Island under the name of Mary Ann. It looks as if Young copied Watson, in this respect incorrectly, as he refers to Watson's note.

He says also "It has been stated since the death of William Stewart that the Louisa proceeded from Abod Howe Island to a South American port, calling at Bora Bora Island on her return towards New Zealand, where

during 1859 and 1860 arms and ammunition were supplied from her to the Maori warriors."

of William Stewart he writes: - "He was born in the north of Ireland in 1825 of Scotch Presbyterian ancestors. He was tall, fully six feet in height, of a striking presence, with a long black beard and black hair (but partly bald), and with piercing dark eyes widely opened and set well apart as may be seen from attached photograph, which is full of character. He was fairly well educated, speaking French, some Spanish and Portuguese and some Hindustani. He had been in the Army in India as a young man, and subsequently in the wine business in Spain and Portugal. He was a man of the world, a good judge of Wines and Liquors but rarely drank to excess: he played cards but had the reputation of gambling in moderation. He was a charming host and companionable with those he liked but masterful and arrogant with those who opposed his wishes. He was a strict disciplinarian, but was considered by his employees to be always just. He was generous, as he proved on many occasions, but could drive hard bargains in business matters.

He died in his home at Atimara on 24 Sept. 1873 at the age of 48, reputedly of disease

of the liver. He had just been declared insolvent, and this blow was considered to have hastened his death. He had married Eliza, one of the six daughters of Andrew Gibson and his native wife Moehauti a Pupa. Gibson was a much respected English merchant in Papeete.

Stewart was familiarly and generally named Big William, not alone for his fine physique but because all he did was on a colossal scale. (This is according to local information given to Young).

He had visited Tahiti in 1862 and obtained a lease of 900 acres from J. G. Oramond. He then induced his brother-in-law, Augusto Soares, a Portuguese financier of London and Paris, to form an association styled The Polynesian Plantation Co., which was succeeded in 1863 by the Tahiti Cotton and Coffee Plantation Co. Ltd. of London, capital £100,000 stg., general manager Augusto Soares, manager at Tahiti William Stewart. Stewart, after visiting London, returned to Tahiti at New Year 1864. The estate had a freehold in 1867 of 17,000 acres, and was named Terre Eugénie.

Stewart's brother James carried on a small mercantile business at Papeete and also had a store at Atimaono, managed by

William Keane. Having decided to quit Tahiti, he sold out to Keane, who purchased by means of a loan from William Stewart. Later James sued William for fr. 100,000 and won the case and got the money, though actually he was in debt to William. He left behind him debts of fr. 60,000 and no books of account. It was reported that not long afterwards he died in a jail abroad under sentence for fraud. Local report gave the place as Suva, Fiji.

The Tahiti Papers (British Consulate - In-Letters, vol. 6, 1867/73, p. 39) show him active in 1870 in the partnership of Collie & Stewart. He wrote from San Francisco on 25 June 1870 to Consul Miller re the action William was about to bring against him in the court of Tahiti. In this letter he wrote also "Mr. Collie has succeeded beyond our expectations in Australia, and we have every prospect of being able to start a permanent line of steamships between this port & Sydney". He signed "J. B. M. Stewart".