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The *Duke of Portland*, the *Traveller*, and
the *Prince Regent*: Three Little-known Vessels
from Australia

THE HAWAIIAN ISLANDS are the most geographically isolated land mass on the globe, but once found by Western sailors, Western history became part and parcel of Hawaiian history. Furthermore, the experiences of Westerners before and after they visited Hawai'i are as much a part of Hawai'i's history as what they did once they anchored. The persons and vessels visiting the Islands wove a network of contacts between the ports of the Pacific Rim and the islands of the Pacific Basin; and thus their experiences in Canton or Callao, Alaska or Australia, came with them to Hawai'i.

Tracing the histories of these vessels, their itineraries, and their contacts with Hawai'i helps to document the maritime history of Hawai'i. These particular ships add to the short list of vessels known to have visited early 19th century Hawai'i via Australia, and their stories are good examples of that interweaving of the Western experience through the Pacific.

I. THE DUKE OF PORTLAND

In early 1810, the British whaler, *Duke of Portland*, sailed into Honolulu harbor, stayed for several weeks, and left again on March 4.

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The vessel is of interest because, during her Honolulu visit, her master was entrusted with gifts and a letter from Kamehameha I to King George III of England. Having duly delivered the letter and gifts in London, Captain Spence and his *Duke of Portland* again fade from view. The only reference to this "British whaler" in Honolulu waters is in Archibald Campbell's *A Voyage Round the World from 1808 to 1812*; it does not appear in lists of British whalers, nor in F. W. Howay's *List of Trading Vessels in the Maritime Fur Trade, 1805-1814*.¹

Howay makes the point that the number of British trading vessels on the Northwest Coast of America had dropped to a mere three by the period 1805-1814. If the *Duke of Portland* had not been in the North Pacific, perhaps she came from the major area of British influence in the South Pacific, Australia. And there she was, in the *Shipping Arrivals and Departures, Sydney, 1788-1825*, not as a whaler but as a convict transport. The *Shipping Arrivals*, the *Sydney Gazette*, and the *Historical Records of Australia* document her brief career down under.²

The *Duke of Portland*, 523 tons, was built in "Bordeaux," registered in London, and owned by Daniel Bennett. She carried 18 guns and a crew of 39. With John Clark Spence as master, she left London on February 26, 1807, "with an India fleet under convoy of the *Antelope*," arriving in Port Jackson on July 27 with 200 male prisoners and some sugar and tobacco (per the *Sydney Gazette*) or female convicts and government stores (per the *Historical Records of Australia*).³ Shortly before her arrival, the Russian ship *Neva* had paid a brief visit to take on wood and water. This was the same *Neva* which in the winter of 1808-1809 would bring the above-mentioned Archibald Campbell to Hawai'i where he first let drop the rumor of Russian interests in Hawai'i and where he joined the *Duke of Portland* in 1810.⁴

On November 7, 1807, the *Duke of Portland* left for England with a cargo of oil, sealskins, and lumber. Her safe arrival in London was not reported in Sydney until almost a year later. On August 3, 1808, she sailed again from England arriving back in Sydney on January 25, 1809 with a cargo of stores.⁵

Also arriving aboard were despatches to the Governor of New South Wales, who reported them seized by the "rebels." The Governor, a Navy man, as were most of his predecessors, had

incurred the wrath of the powerful New South Wales Corps, the largest free force in the colony, whose illegal rum trafficking he had tried to suppress. The officers among these army rebels deposed their navy governor on January 28, 1808. The problem was exacerbated by the unfortunate personality of this governor, one William Bligh, of *Bounty*. A new governor arrived on January 1, 1810, and eventually Bligh was permitted to leave, and the rebels were brought to trial.⁶

During this upheaval, the *Duke of Portland* remained in government control with other transports, the colonial schooner *Estramina*, the armed tender *Lady Nelson*, and *H.M.S. Porpoise*; and the *Sydney Gazette* printed no fewer than four of the required advertisements that nine named persons intended leaving the colony when next the *Duke of Portland* sailed. Her departure was duly noted on May 7, 1809 under Ship News: "On Tuesday last sailed the Duke of Portland on a whaling voyage."⁷

According to passenger Archibald Campbell, the *Duke of Portland* went first to Guadeloupe, off the California coast, where she loaded a cargo of seal oil and skins, then put in at O'ahu for refreshment, where she picked up the letter, gifts, and Campbell. She was still a transport and apparently an unsuccessful whaler later in the voyage.⁸

II. THE TRAVELLER

The letters and gifts from Kamehameha to King George III were duly delivered by Captain Spence, and on April 30, 1812, Lord Liverpool, as Secretary of War and Colonies, acknowledged their receipt in a note "To Tamaahmaah, The King of the Sandwich Islands." Liverpool's letter, along with some reciprocal gifts for Kamehameha, were sent to Governor Lachlan Macquarie at Port Jackson aboard the ship *Mistral*, John Reed master. Macquarie was instructed to "take an early opportunity" of forwarding the items, but Macquarie, acknowledging these instructions on November 17, 1812, noted:

I take for granted that Your Lordship did not intend that I should send a vessel from hence on purpose with this letter and Presents to the Sandwich Islands, the Distance they are at from this Country

being so very great and the Expense of so long a voyage being so considerable.

This was clearly for Viscount Castlereagh, who as British Foreign Secretary, had been questioning Macquarie about the recent high costs he had incurred in running the colony.⁹

In December of 1812, Macquarie placed the gifts aboard the English ship *Hunter*, Captain Robson, who "promised me to deliver them safe" to Hawai'i, but returned after a year without touching at the Sandwich Islands "which the Captain alleged he was prevented from doing by a variety of unforeseen events." Robson probably was avoiding hostilities with American warships in the Pacific.¹⁰

Only three vessel from Australia ventured as far into the Pacific as Tahiti in 1813, two in 1814, one in 1815, and none in 1816. The hostilities of the War of 1812 had made the Pacific an American lake, although H.M.S. *Cherub* and H.M.S. *Raccoon* prowled between South America and Hawai'i, taking into Honolulu their captured prize, the U.S. Ship of War, *Sir Andrew Hammond*.¹¹

Meanwhile, with the end of hostilities, Governor Macquarie hoped to re-establish American trade with Sydney. In late December 1815, however, Lord Bathurst, now Secretary of War and Colonies, wrote to remind Macquarie that with peace, the ports of the colony would be visited by numerous foreign vessels, and such trade ". . . was directly at variance with the navigation Laws of this Country; and although this infraction of them might have been tolerated at earlier periods upon the plea of necessity, it cannot now be defended upon such grounds." Macquarie did not receive this despatch until July 1816.¹²

On February 19, 1815, with Bathurst's restrictive reminder still on the high seas, the American schooner *Traveller* arrived from Canton with cargo for Sydney merchants. Originally registered at New Bedford, she had been taken prize by the Sloop of War *Elk*, then sold by the East India Company's Principal Supercargo at Canton, Mr. Elphinstone. On board were her captain and part-owner William French (nationality not given) and Supercargo and part-owner J. Wilcocks, "an American gentleman," possibly the brother of the American consul at Canton. As she had sailed from Canton with an East India Company clearance and pass for

Sydney, Governor Macquarie granted permission for entry and landing of goods, then left on a tour of inspection to the interior.¹³

On his return, Macquarie found the *Traveller* had been seized as a lawful prize under the Navigation Acts (which Bathurst's December memo would reinstate) by the Reverend Benjamin Vale, colonial chaplain, aided and abetted by Solicitor to the Crown William Henry Moore. Macquarie promptly reversed the seizure, allowed the goods to be landed, and on March 8, 1816, penned off a note to Bathurst explaining the circumstances and providing a useful list of American vessels which had been allowed to visit Sydney since 1788, by way of precedent.¹⁴

Charges were filed against Reverend Vale, and Solicitor Moore was dismissed from office. Bathurst, replying to Macquarie on February 6, 1817 (and assuming his despatch of the previous December, which answered Macquarie's questions about the application of Navigation Law to foreign vessels, had by then been received), censured Macquarie for his actions against Vale and in subsequent despatches censured him also for action against Moore, whom he ordered reinstated. It took several exchanges of despatches before the charges against Vale were dropped and Moore's discharge was validated.¹⁵

Unconcerned with this colonial problem triggered by her arrival, the *Traveller* left May 1, 1816, "on her way to the North West Coast of America," and "Mr Wilcocks, the owner of that vessel, had in a very handsome, liberal manner, offered and agreed to touch at the Sandwich Islands" to deliver Liverpool's letter and the gifts, with a cover letter from Macquarie explaining the delay.¹⁶

The *Traveller* actually sailed first to the Galapagos and the coast of Peru, then back to Hawai'i, arriving in Honolulu on November 8, 1816, where she presumably discharged her commission. She also visited Kaua'i for a week before sailing on to Bodega Bay. Howay's single reference to the *Traveller* notes that in 1817 she was on the California coast and "had come from Sitka." Ogden's "Trading Vessels on the California Coast, 1786-1848" shows her only in the California coastal trade from December 25, 1816 until October 30, 1817, when she was seized at Lareto, confiscated and, as of December 17, under Spanish colors.¹⁷

Her master for this trip to Hawai'i is given as James Smith

Wilcocks. The William French who sailed her to Sydney is no longer mentioned in reference to this vessel; in August 1817 a William French, possibly the same person, is recommended to become a New South Wales settler. His relationship to the William French who was active as supercargo, owner, and shipper in 1820's and 1830's Hawai'i is not known. Judd's *Voyages to Hawaii Before 1860* does not list the *Traveller*, Wilcocks, or French.¹⁸

III. THE PRINCE REGENT

Macquarie's 1815 cover letter to Kamehameha listed one gift still to be delivered:

I have very lately received orders from His Royal Highness the Prince Regent of England, to have a small vessel built here for the use of Your Majesty, and to send her to the Sandwich Islands when built and completed for so long a voyage. It is accordingly my intention to begin to build this vessel as soon as one now on the stocks here for the use of the government is completed—which I hope she will be in about four months hence: our limited means here only admitting of building one vessel at a time; but every exertion will then be made to finish the vessel intended for Your Majesty, which will be sent to Your Majesty as soon as completed.¹⁹

During the War of 1812, H.M.S. *Cherub* and H.M.S. *Raccoon* had received friendly treatment in Hawai'i, whose King Kamehameha, according to Captain T. T. Tucker of H.M.S. *Cherub* “. . . considers himself a subject of the King of England, and all that the Islands afforded was at my command” for the supply of His Majesty's vessels. Tucker also noted that it was the custom of the Islands to expect a gift in return, and what Kamehameha wanted was a Western-style vessel. Tucker urged that a small vessel be sent as a means of keeping the Sandwich Islands friendly to the British after the war, in the face of a growing American presence.

This proposal was reviewed by the Lords Commissioners of the Admiralty, and on July 27, 1815 Lord Bathurst wrote Governor Macquarie to build at Sydney a small vessel and send it, either in

frame or completed, to Hawai'i "to be presented to the King in the name of His Royal Highness the Prince Regent."²⁰

Macquarie acknowledged on March 18, 1816 and included notice of this gift in his cover letter which went with the gifts on the Traveller, but this new responsibility towards the Sandwich Islands took four years to discharge. Of 40 tons burthen, the *Prince Regent* was launched on April 7, 1819, but before it was even off the stocks, Bathurst had written Macquarie that the vessel could be used by Lieutenant P. R. King, then on his way to New South Wales to complete the exploration of the continent of Australia before the French Exploring Expedition could arrive. King chose instead to buy the *Mermaid* for these voyages, returning to Sydney from his first exploring trip before Captain Louis de Freycinet appeared in November 1819. The *Prince Regent*, meanwhile, served as tender to H.M.S. *Dromedary* on a trip to New Zealand for ships' timber, was appointed to escort the expedition for the new settlement at Port Macquarie, and carried despatches around the colony before being sent to the Islands on October 16, 1821, in company with the colonial cutter *Mermaid*, now under the command of J. R. Kent.²¹

The *Mermaid* and *Prince Regent*, as was common practice for vessels sailing east from Australia, sailed first to the South Pacific, stopping at Huahine in February 1822, where they refreshed and where they offered passage to Hawai'i to William Ellis, Daniel Tyerman, and George Bennet of the London Missionary Society. The two vessels parted company outside Huahine, the *Mermaid* reaching Kawaihae, Hawai'i on March 27. Still alone, she sailed for Honolulu on April 11 and entered the harbor on April 16, having waited outside over the Sabbath. Captain Kent promptly went ashore, told the new King Liholiho his errand, and delivered the letter from the governor of New South Wales:

His Majesty appeared exceedingly gratified by the present of the schooner, as a pledge of good-will, on the part of the British Government, with which he wishes to secure and perpetuate alliance, even as a vassal of King George, so that he may rely on his personal protection.²²

It is not clear when the schooner *Prince Regent* finally arrived. On May 1, 1822, however, at noon, Captain Kent formally delivered her to Liholiho, who came on board to take possession. When Kent proposed taking down the English colors, Liholiho said no and acknowledged his dependence, for friendly protection at least, on England. Royal salutes were fired from on shore, followed by an English feast at the King's house, at Kent's expense. The *Prince Regent* was wrecked a few months later on the east coast of O'ahu. The *Mermaid* returned to Sydney on January 24, 1823 with a letter of thanks "from the Chief":

Oahu, Sandwich Islands
21 August, 1822

May it please Your Majesty

In Answer to Your Majesty's letter from Governor Macquarie, I beg leave to return Your Majesty my most grateful thanks for your very handsome present of the Schooner *Prince Regent*, which I have received at the hand of Mr. J. R. Kent.

I avail myself of this opportunity of acquainting your Majesty of the death of my late father Tamehameha, who departed this life the 8th day of May, 1819, much lamented by his subjects; and having appointed me his successor, I have enjoyed a happy reign since that period, and assure Your Majesty it is my sincere wish to be thought as worthy your attention as my father had the happiness to be during the visit of Capt. Vancouver; the whole of these islands having been conquered by my father, I have succeeded into the Government of them, and beg leave to place them all under the protection of Your most Excellent Majesty, wishing to observe peace with all Nations, and be thought worthy the confidence I place in Your Majesty's wisdom and Judgement.

The former idolatrous system has been abolished in these islands, as we wish the protestant religion of Your Majesty's dominions to be practiced here. I hope Your Majesty may deem fit to answer this as soon as convenient, as Your Majesty's good council and advice will be most thankfully received by Your Majesty's Most devoted and obedient Servant,

Tamehameha, 2d
King of the Sandwich Islands

NOTES

- ¹ Archibald Campbell, *A Voyage Round the World From 1806 to 1812* (Honolulu: U of Hawaii P, 1967) 157, hereinafter cited as Campbell, *Voyage*; Frederick W. Howay, *A List of Trading Vessels in the Maritime Fur Trade* (Ottawa: Royal Society of Canada, 1930-34), hereinafter cited as Howay, *List of Trading Vessels*; Bernice Judd and Helen Y. Lind, *Voyages to Hawaii Before 1860* (Honolulu: U P of Hawaii, 1974), hereinafter cited as Judd, *Voyages to Hawaii*.
- ² Howay, *List of Trading Vessels*, sect. 2, 1930:III; *Shipping Arrivals and Departures*, Sydney, 1788-1825 (Canberra: Roebuck Society, 1977) 1807, hereinafter cited as *Shipping Arrivals*; *Sydney Gazette and New South Wales Advertiser*, 1807 (Brisbane: Archeology Branch, Queensland, 1983); James McClelland, *James McClelland's Authentic Australian Convict & Pioneer History*, vol. 1, bk. 2 (Silverdale: New South Wales, 1978); *Historical Records of Australia* (Sydney: Library Committee of the Commonwealth Parliament, 1914-), hereinafter cited as *HRA*.
- ³ *Shipping Arrivals*, July 1807; *Sydney Gazette*, 2 Aug. 1807; *HRA*, 6:618.
- ⁴ *Shipping Arrivals*, June 1807; *Sydney Gazette*, 21 June 1807; Campbell, *Voyage* 157.
- ⁵ *Shipping Arrivals*, July 1807 and Jan. 1809, n. p. 62; *Sydney Gazette*, 22 May and 16 Oct. 1822; *HRA*, 6:618.
- ⁶ *HRA*, 7:131; *HRA*, 9:v-vi; Kenneth S. Allen, *That Bounty Bastard* (New York: St. Martin's P, 1977) 108-14.
- ⁷ *Sydney Gazette*, 12 Feb., 12 and 19 Mar., 2 and 9 Apr., and 7 May 1809.
- ⁸ Campbell, *Voyage* 157.
- ⁹ *Shipping Arrivals*, Oct. 1812; *HRA*, 7:474 and 609. This was Robert Jenkinson, 2nd Lord Liverpool.
- ¹⁰ *Shipping Arrivals*, July 1812; Macquarie, letter to Kamehameha, 12 Apr. 1816, FO & Ex, AH.
- ¹¹ *Shipping Arrivals*, 1813-1816; Judd, *Voyages to Hawaii*, "Tucker" and "Cherub," 1814.
- ¹² *Shipping Arrivals*, 1813-1816:16-7; *HRA*, 8:648; *HRA*, 9:42; (Henry, 3rd Earl) Bathurst's despatch no. 60 was sent via *Atlas*, which, per *Shipping Arrivals*, arrived in Sydney 22 July 1816.
- ¹³ *Shipping Arrivals*, 1813-1816:101; *HRA*, 9:42-3.
- ¹⁴ *HRA*, 9:42-7.
- ¹⁵ *HRA*, 9:48-9, 206-07, 329-31, 385, 491-95, 761-62, 822, and 824.
- ¹⁶ Macquarie, letter to Kamehameha.
- ¹⁷ *Shipping Arrivals*, Feb. 1816; Adele Ogden, *Trading Vessels on the California Coast, 1786-1848*, ts., Bancroft Library, U of California at Berkeley, 1979:234-35, hereinafter cited as Ogden, *Trading Vessels*; Howay, *List of Trading Vessels* 1817.
- ¹⁸ *HRA*, 9:47; no land grants were issued to William French through Nov. 1825, per *HRA*, 10; Ogden, *Trading Vessels*, "Traveller," "French," "Wilcocks"; Judd, *Voyages to Hawaii*, does not include a William French.
- ¹⁹ Macquarie, letter to Kamehameha.

²⁰ *HRA*, 8:624-27.

²¹ *HRA*, 9:83; *HRA*, 10:184 and 822; *Shipping Arrivals* reports a transport of the same name which arrived from London in Jan. 1820. Under coastal vessels "Prince Regent, HM Col Sch" is listed six times between 28 May 1820 and 16 Oct. 1821.

²² William Ellis, *Polynesian Researches* . . . , vol. 4 (London, 1859): 33-5, hereinafter cited as Ellis, *Polynesian Researches*; Daniel Tyerman and George Bennet, *Journal of Voyages and Travels* . . . (London, 1831), 11 and 15 (Apr. 1822), hereinafter cited as Tyerman and Bennet, *Journal of Voyages*.

²³ Ellis, *Polynesia Researches* 4:40; Tyerman and Bennet, *Journal of Voyages*, 1 May 1822; *Shipping Arrivals*, January 1823; *HRA*, 11:22; Robert C. Lydecker, "The Archives of Hawaii," in *HHS Papers* 13 (Honolulu: HHS, 1906): 11, states that "this is the vessel that had been promised the King by Vancouver," but there is no such reference in any of the correspondence between the British Foreign Office and Governor Macquarie. Also in AH is the list of gifts sent in 1812 and Liverpool's letter to Kamehameha.