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Cover picture:

Peggy, consort of George Stewart, holds aloft their daughter, Charlotte, for him to see from his prison in the box on the deck of the *HMS Pandora*. Painting by Roy Andersen (1930 -). Courtesy of Roy Andersen/National Geographic Creative. www.natgeocreative.com

TRACING THE DESCENDANTS OF MIDSHIPMAN GEORGE STEWART OF HMAV BOUNTY

George E Gray

George Stewart (1766-1791)

George Stewart was born in 1766 on the Scottish Orkney Islands in the village of South Ronaldsay. When he was a youngster, the family moved to Stromness, Orkney, which was a major port. Captain Cook, and the future captain, William Bligh, visited that port just prior to Cook's third voyage of discovery and were hosted there by the Stewart family. That visit later led to Captain Bligh taking young George Stewart on board the *Bounty*. Captain Bligh, after the mutiny of the *Bounty* wrote of him:

'Stewart was a young man of creditable parents, in the Orkneys; at which place, on the return of the *Resolution* from the South Seas in 1780, we received so many civilities that, on that account only, I should gladly have taken him with me: but, independent of this recommendation, he was a seaman, and had always borne a good character.'

Subsequent to the *Bounty*'s return to Tahiti after the famous mutiny in 1789, midshipman George Stewart and several others of the original crew stayed on that island when Fletcher Christian left, with nine of the mutineers and a group of native men and women of Tahiti, for an unknown destination (later found to be Pitcairn Island). On Tahiti, Stewart was married according to Tahitian custom to a daughter of a local chief, Tepahu. Stewart called his wife 'Peggy'. By the time *HMS Pandora* arrived at Tahiti in May of 1791 to locate the ex-crewmembers of the *Bounty*, George and Peggy had a child whom they named Charlotte. George and three of the other suspected mutineers voluntarily went on board the *Pandora* immediately after it docked to report the mutiny to Captain Edwards and were soon surprised to be placed in irons. Other mutineers on Tahiti were also soon collected and placed in irons on the *Pandora*.¹

On 8 May 1791 the *Pandora* left Tahiti and, after looking for the rest of the mutineers at several islands, set off for England; however, the ship struck a reef off Australia and sank on 29 August 1791. Stewart was drowned during the sinking according to the testimony of his friend and fellow prisoner on board the *Pandora*, midshipman Peter Haywood.²



Prisoners escaping from HMS Pandora as it flounders on Australia's Great Barrier Reef. George Stewart was drowned with irons on his hands. 1831 etching by Robert Batty from a sketch by midshipman Peter Haywood of the Bounty. (Source: Wikipedia).

Peggy Stewart, the mother

Back on Tahiti, Peggy and her daughter Charlotte resided with Peggy's father until his death and then with her sister's family. *HMS Chatham* arrived at Tahiti, as part of George Vancouver's expedition, on 27 December 1791. Peggy and her child were soon welcomed on board the ship. While the *Chatham* was at Tahiti, they were both often visitors to the ship's officers. They brought many gifts of food and other items to, especially, Edward Bell, the clerk of the ship. Bell documents that Peggy was very concerned about the fate of Stewart. At that time it was not known at Tahiti that his fate had already been determined during the sinking of the

Pandora. After Vancouver with his ship *Discovery* arrived at Tahiti, Vancouver, unaware of Stewart's demise, informed the distraught Peggy that Stewart would be hanged according to existing British regulations. As the *Chatham* left Tahiti, Edward Bell reports in his Journal:

'Peggy Stewart was one of the last who left us - she had come on board in the morning and brought a present of Hogs and fruit; - She was distress'd exceedingly at our going away; - when we were under weigh and She saw she must leave us, with a heavy heart, and her eyes swimming in Tears, she took an affectionate leave of every body but particularly Mr. Johnstone & me, she said she lov'd the English and wished we would come back and live at Otaheite. - Just before she went away, she came into my Cabbin - and ask'd me the same question she she [sic] had often done, whether I thought Stewart would be hung. - I told her I cou'd not tell, - perhaps he would not - she then said "If he is alive when you return tell him that you saw his Peggy and his little Charlotte, and that they were both well and tell him to come to Otaheite, and live with them or they will be unhappy." - she then burst into Tears and with the deepest regret forced herself into her Canoe and as long as we could see her She kept waving her hand.'³

Not long after the *Chatham* and *Discovery* left Tahiti on 24 January 1792 Peggy was said to have died of a broken heart.

William Bligh, who was the Captain of *His Majesty's Armed Vessel (HMAV) Bounty* at the time of the mutiny, was 'honourably acquitted' for the loss of his ship, though many, then and since, have alleged that his tyranny had caused the mutiny. Bligh returned to Tahiti on 9 April 1792 as Captain of *HMS Providence* to collect the breadfruit plants which had been his original mission with the *Bounty*. At that time he described Charlotte as a 'pretty child' but her 'brown-skinned appearance as a result of exposure to the sun made her indistinguishable from native children.'⁴

After the London Missionary Society (LMS) people arrived at Tahiti on 5 March 1797, they soon took responsibility for the young Charlotte.

The missionaries reported their involvement with her as follows:

'Peggy Stewart marks a tenderness of heart that never will be heard without emotion: the daughter of a chief, and taken for his wife by Mr. Stewart, one of the unhappy mutineers. They had lived with the old chief in the most tender state of endearment; a beautiful little girl had been the fruit of their union, and was at the breast when the *Pandora* arrived, seized the criminals, and secured them in irons on board the ship. Frantic with grief, the unhappy Peggy (for so he had named her) flew with her infant in a canoe to the arms of her husband. The interview was so affecting and afflicting, that the officers on board were overwhelmed with anguish, and Stewart himself, unable to bear the heart-rending scene: '... begged she might not be admitted again on board. She was separated from him by violence, and conveyed on shore in a state of despair and grief too big for utterance. Withheld from him and forbidden to come any more on board, she sunk into the deepest dejection; it preyed on her vitals; she lost all relish for food and life; rejoiced no more; pined under a rapid decay of two months, and fell a victim to her feelings, dying literally of a broken heart. Her child is yet alive, and the tender object of our care, having been brought up by a sister, who nursed it as her own, and has discharged all the duties of an affectionate mother to the orphan infant.'⁵

Among these missionaries were a Mr. and Mrs. Eyre. Mrs. Eyre was 62 when they arrived, 25 years senior to John, her husband, and it is assumed she took primary care of the infant while the young girl was under LMS protection.

'Little Peggy'

In 1798, most of the LMS people left the island for Australia because fighting on Tahiti made it difficult for them to remain on the island. However, the Eyre family was among the few who stayed on the island. They managed to persist until 1808 when renewed fighting caused the then king and his followers to leave Tahiti. However, there is no existing record that, at that time, Charlotte Stewart (often called 'Little Peggy' by the missionaries) was with them when they left. A search of the London Missionary Records at the

University of London did not result in any definite information on the location of Little Peggy after 1799. It is assumed she remained in their care until at least 1806 when she was 16. At that time, it is assumed, the missionaries decided that she should leave the island as soon as practical because of the unrest. She was evidently gone by 1808, when missionary Davies reported on the results of his attempts to teach English to the natives. Among his limited successes were three children who were born of native women and European men and whom he named. One of these was reported to be living with the Eyre family, but his report made no mention of Charlotte.⁶

Correspondence between the President of the Queensland Historical Society, F. W. S. Cumbrae-Stewart of Queensland University and the British Council in Tahiti in 1917-1918 includes the statement by Cumbrae-Stewart, 'I understand that she was known as 'Peggy Stewart' and that she was living in 1840.'⁷ Regarding Peggy's early years on Tahiti, Cumbrae-Stewart finally concedes, 'I am afraid that she has left no trace.'⁸ The Queensland Historical Society was unable to find any documentation for his statement, '...she was living in 1840...'; however, one possibility for this statement involves a seaman named John Buffett:

'John Buffett ... was shipwrecked in the Gulf of St. Lawrence, and afterwards cast away on the coast of California, where he was received and cared for in the kindest manner by an old Spanish *comandante* in the place. The latter made every effort to persuade Buffett to make his home in California, but he decided not to do so, and from thence he made his way to Honolulu, in the Sandwich Islands, where he joined the *Cyrus*.'⁹

The whaling ship *Cyrus* was at Pitcairn Island in October 1823 and Buffett was allowed to leave the ship to be a teacher on the island at the request of John Adams, the last of the Pitcairn mutineers. It is thought that the *comandante* in the above quote was José de la Guerra, godfather of Peggy Stewart (María Antonia de la Ascensión) and her daughter. It would be natural for Buffett to tell Adams of his meeting 'Little Peggy,' the daughter

of George Stewart. Later, in 1856, the total population of Pitcairn was resettled to Norfolk Islands, Australia, and the existence of Peggy Stewart in California could have been widely known in Australia as a result of this.

The Boston brig *Mercury* was involved in the fur trade along the north-west coast of North America, including the Spanish Californias, from 1806 to 1813. During that time, two trips were made to the Sandwich Islands for provisioning, before sailing to Canton, China, to sell their cargo of furs. On the first of these, in November-December of 1807, the then captain, William Heath Davis, left the ship to work for aspiring King Kamehameha and first mate George Washington Eayrs became captain.¹⁰

Captain Eayrs was from a well-established Boston family and had previously served as first mate of the ship *Alexander*, under Captain Brown, which was involved in the Pacific fur trade in the very early 1800s.¹¹ The *Alexander* had her cargo of 491 furs confiscated by Spanish authorities at San Diego, Nueva California¹ in February 1803. This resulted in first mate Eayrs being stranded on shore. After a trying return trip to Boston, he signed on as first mate of the *Mercury*.¹² The second trip to the Sandwich Islands, in December of 1810, was also when the ship was on the way to Canton.¹³

During one of these two trips, Captain Eayrs took on board a young Polynesian woman. I believe it was young Peggy Stewart. It was most likely the second trip, when she was about 20 years old. She sailed with the ship around the Pacific for several years as the *Mercury* was mostly involved in the fur trade along the coast of the Spanish Californias, the Russian settlements in the Northwest of America, and China. On May 7 1813, Peggy gave birth to a daughter on board the ship. At that time, the ship was at anchor while unloading cargo at Bodega Bay, the port for the Russian Fort Ross in Spanish Nueva California.

The ship, with the newly born child of Captain Eayrs and Peggy (Charlotte?) on board, resumed its usual trading for furs, this time along the coast

of Nueva California. Then, on 2 June 1813 the *Mercury* was captured by the Spanish armed merchant ship *Flora* under Captain Nicholas Noe, as it was anchored at Refugio Cove, which was a well-visited illicit trading location north of Santa Barbara, Nueva California.¹⁴

Under the Spanish, trading with the Californias was officially severely restricted and controlled. Although the needs in the Californias were great, largely due to the limitations of the Spanish because of unrest in Europe as well as the ongoing revolution in Mexico, such trading was not legal. The need for supplies for the citizens and soldiers of Nueva California became so critical that Governor Argüello wrote to the Viceroy in Mexico City:

'... A rule of canonical law says: *hace licito la necesidad lo que no es licito por la ley*. [Necessity makes lawful that which by the law is illicit.]'¹⁵

Nevertheless, the ship *Mercury* was captured, Captain Eayrs was placed under arrest and Lt. Jose de la Guerra was appointed his military escort by Governor Arguello. Shortly thereafter, the *Mercury* and its cargo was inventoried and many needed items were taken for use by the government, including about 8,800 in *specie* to pay soldiers at the four Spanish Presidios in Nueva California. Over time the ship, several crew members, Captain Eayrs, his family, and Lt. de la Guerra made their way to San Diego where, on 7 November 1813, the young girl was baptized by Frey Vincent Francisca de Sarria. His entry into the San Diego church record is translated as follows:

'I, the below inscribed commissary prefect of the missions that are in charge of the College of Holy Propaganda, of San Fernando, Mexico, solemnly baptized a girl of about five months of age, born on the sea, daughter of George W. Eayrs of the Anglo-American nation and of the Protestant Religion, who navigating his frigate called *Mercury* on the coast of this sea of California, was captured by Don Nicolas Noe, captain of the frigate *Flora*, and daughter of Margarita Pegue, native of the Sandwich Islands. He, having supplicated me very earnestly, and with much insistence, to administer the Catholic rite of the Sacrament of Baptism to his said little one, in virtue

of serious and repeated promises which he made that on arriving at his land of Boston he would present himself there to the Spanish Consul, that through his help, he might direct himself to Catholic priests from whom in his time he may receive competent instruction in the same holy Catholic Religion, thus I was able to accede to his said petition. I gave for name, Maria de los Remedios Josef Antonia. Her godparents were: Don Jose Antonio de la Guerra y Noriega, Lieutenant of the Company of Cavalry of the Presidio of Santa Barbara, native of the mountains of Santander in Spain, and his legitimate wife, Dona Maria Antonio Carrillo, native of the pueblo of Los Angeles, New California, to whom I explained the obligations which they had contracted; and that it may be in due form, I have affirmed it at this Mission of San Diego, the said day, month and year [7 November 1813]. Fr. Vicente Francisco Sarria.'¹⁶

Just prior to the 1815 transfer of Lt. de la Guerra back to Santa Barbara as *comandante* of that presidio, Frey Fernando Martin baptized Captain Eayrs' common law wife Peggy. The church records it as follows:

'#4198 Royal Presidio of San Diego
4 May 1815

In the Church of the Royal Presidio of San Diego, I solemnly baptized an adult woman of about sixteen years of age, native of the Isle of San Duich [*sic*], who came in the company of George, of the Anglo-American Nation, of the Protestant Religion. To understand this recently baptized person, I refer you to entry #4069. I gave her the name of Maria Antonia de la Ascension. Her godparents were Don Jose Antonio de la Guerra y Noriega, Lieutenant of the Cavalry Company of the Royal Presidio of Santa Barbara, and his legitimate wife, Dona Maria Antonio Carrillo, native of the Pueblo of Los Angeles in this New California. Fr. Fernando Martin.'¹⁷

In September 1815, Lieutenant de la Guerra was transferred back to Santa Barbara, where he and his wife cared for Peggy Stewart and her daughter. In his letter to Governor Sola, dated 9 August 1816, Jose de la Guerra confirms that Peggy and Maria were both living in his household at the request of Eayrs. Translated, the letter reads as follows:

'Maria Antonia de la Ascension Stuard, sponsor and Goddaughter of mine known by the nickname 'Peggy', sailed with Mr. George Gayus (note: *Gayus* was the Spanish equivalent of *Eayrs*) for about four years as his own woman; she stays with me, with her daughter by George, who is also my Goddaughter, since October, 1814, at which time he sailed for San Blas, and since his first woman was unfaithful and ran away from him, George begged me to keep them in my home and now they stay with me, she and her daughter, like my own family through the Spiritual Parenthood per the baptismal ritual that they received, because I'm Godfather of them both; and about the sailor who they say has been staying here, they could be wrong, I never heard that up to now. It's about all I can say in answer to your official inquiry dated the first of the current month, God pray for your Majesty of Sovereign Governor, Don Pablo Vicente de Sola,

Santa Barbara, August 9, 1816
Jose de la Guerra y Noriega'

(signature)¹⁸

Under Spain, non-Spanish people were generally not allowed as settlers, especially in Nueva California, and de la Guerra's letter served to explain the continued presence of his godchildren.

On 19 October 1817 Frey Antonio Ripall married Peggy Stuart to Joseph Antonio Secundino Olivera, a soldier at the Royal Presidio of Santa Barbara, son of Juan Maria Olivera and Maria Guadalupe Briones.¹⁹ After her husband passed away in December 1828, Peggy lived on as a widow until she, too, died 30 January 1871.²⁰ The 1870 U.S. census includes her as Maria Antonia Stuard, living with her daughter in Santa Barbara.²¹

With her husband, Maria Antonia had several children that carried the Olivera family name. After her husband died, she also had children with Benjamin Foxen and George Rice. All of these children carried the Polynesian DNA from their mother.

The daughter, young Maria de los Remedios Josef Antonia Eayrs, grew up in the Presidio at Santa Barbara and as she grew into womanhood, she

had several affairs. The first was with James Burke by whom she had two daughters, and the second was a lasting affair with Isaac Sparks. Sparks was a Catholic with a legal Catholic family in Saint Louis, Missouri, and, therefore, was not free to marry Maria Antonia Eayrs. However, they lived together for over 20 years and had three daughters and possibly a son who died at an early age. Sparks was a very successful citizen of early Santa Barbara and was the owner of property in that city as well as two Mexican Land Grants.ⁱⁱ

It was my hope that the study of the mtDNA of the two early Polynesian women in California would confirm their origin to be Tahiti. With this goal, I have obtained the Mitochondrial DNA from Pitcairn Island of a direct female descendant of Tevarua, who was one of the Tahitian women that left her home island with Fletcher Christian and the other mutineers on 23 September 1789, and two of the direct female descendants of Maria Antonia, the first American child born in what is now California. The Haplogroup for all three samples is B4a1a1a3, with a genetic difference of 1. This indicates a close Polynesian connection but, unfortunately, not necessarily to Tahiti. I have not found a common ancestor for the three. Nor am I apt to find this, since the records for early Tahiti are scarce; however, there were a number of ships that sailed between the two island groups in the 1800-1809 period, and several Christian Tahitians were known to be in the Sandwich Islands by the early 1800s. Among these ships, for instance, was the ship *Myrtle*, Captain Barber, which was involved in the Northwest fur trade. Capt. Barber may have known George Washington Eayrs since he was also involved in the early Northwest American fur trade. Therefore, I am continuing to seek records that might include how Charlotte/Little Peggy came to the Sandwich Islands from Tahiti prior to December 1810. This is to substantiate the connection between the hundreds of descendants of the two Polynesian women to midshipman George Stewart of the *Bounty*.

Unfortunately, the original ship's log for the *Mercury* has not been found. It might verify the origin of young Peggy. It also would have been valuable at the hearings of the United States-Mexican Claims Commission. This commission

was formed in 1839 and eventually approved a settlement on the *Mercury* case. It is assumed, however, that Mexico would find the information in the log would be embarrassing to their position on the case and, therefore, it was not brought forth.

It is my hope that the publication of this article will result in information on Little Peggy's life between the death of her mother and her own arrival in the Sandwich Islands.

Any corrections, additions or comments are solicited by the author at: gray850b@aol.com

Notes

- i. Under Spain, the Californias were officially known as Antigua and Nueva California. The 1823 Mexican Constitution named them as Baja and Alta California.
- ii. The California descendants of the two 'Peggys' are included in various family trees such as the extensive Porter (John) tree. For instance, in Ancestry.com, search under Public Member Tree, Peggy Stewart, b. 15 Aug 1790 Tahiti, d. 30 Sept. 1821, Santa Barbara, Santa Barbara Co., CA, USA.
1. Sven Wahlroos, *Mutiny and Romance in the South Seas: A Companion to the Bounty Adventure* (Lincoln, NE: iUniverse.com, Inc., 2001), 105-106 and 519-21.
2. Edward Tagart, *A Memoir of the Late Captain Peter Heywood, R.N. with Extracts from His Diaries and Correspondence* (London: Effingham Wilson, 1832), 80.
3. Edward Bell, *Journal of Edward Bell: Voyage of HMS Chatham to the Pacific Ocean, Vancouver's Expedition, 1791-1794* (Alexander Turnbull Library MS-Papers-6373-46), 112.
4. <http://pandorawreckancestors.net/family-histories/george-stewart/>
5. James Wilson, *A Missionary Voyage to the Southern Pacific Ocean Performed in the Years 1796 1797 1798 in the Ship Duff Commanded by Captain James Wilson* (New Delhi: Isha Books, 2013, reprint.), 346.
6. C. E. Newbury, ed., *The History of the Tahitian Mission, 1799-1830. Written by John Davies, Missionary to the South Sea Islands with Supplementary Papers ...* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1961), 108.
7. National Archives, London, UK Foreign Office Records: FO68718 (1917-1923), letter of 22 April 1918 from W. S. C. Stewart to British Consul, Papeete, Tahiti.
8. National Archives, letter of 30 Sept. 1918 from F. W. S. Cumbrae-Stewart (Univ. of Queensland) to W. J. Williams (Acting British Consul, Tahiti).
9. Rosalind Amelia Young, *Mutiny of the Bounty and Story of Pitcairn Island, 1790-1894* (Honolulu: Univ. Press of the Pacific, 2003), 33.
10. Adele Ogden, *The California Sea Otter Trade, 1784-1848* (Berkeley, Calif.: University of California Press, 1941), 160.
11. Robert Ryal Miller, *A Yankee Smuggler on the Spanish California Coast: George Washington Eayrs and the Ship "Mercury"* (Santa Barbara, CA: Santa Barbara Trust for Historic Preservation, 2001), 14.
12. *ibid.* Miller, 15.
13. *ibid.* Ogden, 162.
14. Paul J. Lareau, *The 'H.M.S. Bounty' Genealogies*. 4th ed. (St. Paul, Minn.: n.p., 1999), 17.
15. Eric P. Hfvolbøll, 'The Property God Has Given Me: A Brief History of the Ortega Family's Rancho Nuestra Señora del Refugio,' *Noticias. Quarterly Magazine of the Santa Barbara Historical Society*, 3, no. 3 (Autumn 1990), 57.
16. Barbara Juarez Wilson, *From Mission to Majesty: A Genealogy & History of Early California and Royal European Ancestors* (Baltimore: Gateway Press, 1983), 79.
17. *ibid.* Wilson, 82.
18. *ibid.* Wilson, 52-53.
19. Thomas W. Temple II, *Santa Barbara Mission Records*, Mats 1, Book 51.
20. *ibid.* Miller, 95.
21. Bureau of the Census, 1870 Census, Santa Barbara, San Diego County, CA, Township 2, Line 29.

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