

# Christmas Island of the United States

By BAILEY S. MARSHALL

THE big revolving globe of the world in the Post Office at Washington, D. C., shows Christmas Island carrying this statement—"U. S. and Br. claims."

Over half a century ago Secretary of State William M. Evarts, on April 1, 1879, informed Sir Edward Thornton as follows: "Upon examination of the files of the Department of State, it is ascertained that the American claim to the guano deposits on Christmas Island vested primarily in Mr. A. G. Benson, of New York, under the following circumstances: Mr. Benson, having obtained from Capt. John Stetson, of New Haven, Conn., who is stated to have discovered deposits of guano on the island at some time prior to 1857, a deed of conveyance of all possessory right in the same, dated May 11, 1857, empowered Captain J. L. Pendleton, master of the ship *John Marshall*, of New York, to take possession of the island, which was accordingly done on the 20th of June, 1858, by Captain Pendleton, in the name and on behalf of Alfred G. Benson, of New York, and his associates, in conformity with the Act of Congress of August 16, 1856. The United States Guano Company, the present owners of the guano deposits of Christmas Island, have acquired their title—

"First. By the quit-claim deed of assignment, dated May 11, 1857, made prior to the taking possession by John Stetson and wife, of New Haven, to Alfred G. Benson, of New York. \* \* \*

"Second. By the act of taking possession on the 20th of June in the name and on behalf of Alfred G. Benson. \* \* \*

"Third. By deed dated May 13, 1857, from A. G. Benson, aforesaid to G. W. Benson, of New York, granting all of his right, title and interest therein, conveyed to him by deed from John Stetson and wife.

"Fourth. By deed dated November 24, 1858, from George W. Benson, aforementioned, to the United States Guano Company, of New York, conveying all of his right, title and interest in said discoveries, ceded to him, by deed from A. G. Benson.

"\* \* \* United States Guano Company have given an approved bond in according with the" Guano Act.

"There being no other papers touching the question of ownership \* \* \* and no notification that said company have abandoned the island \* \* \*, they are still considered" its owner. (For. Rel. of U.S., 1888, p. 713).

The USS *Narragansett* (Commander Richard W. Meade) sailed on July 5, 1872, from Honolulu. Her log (meridian to 4:00 p.m.) for July 20, 1872, reads as follows: "Weather clear and pleasant, with moderate trade wind. At 12:20 sighted Christmas Island bearing (pc) SE x E distant about 1-12 miles. Put over the patent log. At 1 changed course to E½E. At 2:55 hauled in patent log, which showed 11¾ knots. At 3:08 called all hands to bring ship to an anchor. At 3:23 came to off Christmas Island with starboard anchor in 12 fms. water. \* \* \* NW point of Christmas Island NNW." The log (4:00 to 6:00 p.m.) reads: "Cloudy and squally, rain at times. Moderate to fresh breeze from Sd to Ed. Made preparations for getting underway. Hoisted propeller. At 5:20 called all hands up anchor. Made all

plain square sail, except mainsail also set. Stood out under sail from Christmas Island. Hauled all the fires except three, from underneath the port boiler for condensing."

"I have the honor to report the safe arrival of this vessel [U. S. Str. *Narragansett*] at this port [Sydney, Australia] on the 21st, twenty-four days from Ebon or Covell Group in the Marshall Islands," reported Commander Richard W. Meade, commanding officer of the *Narragansett*, on September 23, 1872, to Secretary of the Navy George M. Robeson, from Sydney. "Officers and crew all well and no accident, sickness or mishap of any kind during a most trying cruise among the low coral islands.

"The islands visited were as follows: Christmas, Baker, Byron, Peru or Perout, Drummonds, Apaiang, Tarawa, Arhno (otherwise Daniel and Pidder), Mulgraves, and Ebon or Covell group. Byron, Peru, Arhno and Ebon were surveyed and the charts will be sent forward as soon as possible." A cruising report, dated September 30, 1872, shows that Commander Meade, in the *Narragansett*, sailed from Honolulu early in July, 1872, was at Christmas Island on July 20 for one-eighth of a day or three hours, was off Baker Island on July 28 and after visiting the many islands mentioned above arrived at Sydney.

On October 4, 1872, Commander Meade reported to the Secretary from Sydney, that he had the "honor to enclose herewith a letter for the Bureau of Navigation together with charts, plans and hydrographic information in reference to certain islands examined by this vessel during her late cruise in the South Seas. Leaving Honolulu on 6th July, on 20th July anchored off Christmas I'd (Lat. 1° 55' N, Long. 157° 26' 07" W) where finding employees of the American and Phoenix Guano Co. in full and undisturbed possession of the island with the American Flag hoisted over their buildings. I recognized this occupancy, subject to the approval of the U. S. Gov't, and so informed the U. S. Minister Resident at the Hawaiian Islands by letter dated July 28th 1872 from Baker Id. From Christmas I'd proceeded westward passing over the position assigned to Faguin Islands, Lat. 0° 46' N, Long. 172° 00' W. These islands have no existence in the assigned position and are not thought, by mariners in this ocean, to exist at all. On 28th July off Baker I'd delivered a mail to Supt. Denison Hempstead and proceeded to search for Phoebe Island said to exist in Lat. 0° 11' N, Long. 177°, 18' W."

According to a letter dated January 29, 1879, to Secretary of State Ewarts from Sir Edward Thornton, the British granted a license to Dr. Crowther for guano collecting on Christmas Island, who found it unproductive and "the license was canceled at his request in 1869." Fresh licenses "for the same island were granted on the 9th of June, 1871, to Mr. Alfred Houlder," and, "with regard to Christmas Island, when a gentleman, Dr. Weston, went down to survey the deposits thereon, he found on his arrival (July 5, 1872) that the island has a few days previously been taken formal possession of by the United States Ship *Narragansett*, a notice to that effect having been found fixed to a board erected on the shore," and that it was then in the occupation





United States Navy Destroyer in Honolulu Harbor—Don Senick Photograph

of three men in the employ of Mr. C. A. Williams, of Honolulu, "Mr. Houlder requested his license be canceled, which was done." (For. Rel. of U. S. 1888, p. 712.)

Commander Joseph S. Skerrett, commanding the U.S.S. *Portsmouth*, on October 7, 1873, off Honolulu, H. I., reported to Secretary Robeson that "after searching for, and locating if found, all the dangers reported to exist" in the "vicinity of the Island of Kauai, known as Papapa Rock," he would "gradually work to the Southward and Eastward, continuing the examination, until I reach the islands known as Palmyra, Samarang, Washington, Fanning, and Christmas, making thorough examinations of them."

The log of the *Portsmouth* shows that she anchored at Christmas Island on January 14, 1874. The log for January 15, 1874, reads: "At 8:30 [a.m.] sent 1st Launch and 1st Cutter on shore to obtain sand and wood. Lt. J. E. Noel and party commenced survey the Islands. The *Portsmouth* sailed on January 22, 1874.

On April 30, 1888, Secretary of State T. F. Bayard, wrote Mr. Henry White, Minister to Great Britain, that "a despatch recently received from Mr. Merrill, United States Minister Resident at Honolulu, advises the Department that Her British Majesty's ship *Caroline*, commanded by Sir William Wiseman, had returned to Honolulu, after three weeks' cruise, in the course of which her commander had taken possession, on behalf of the Government of Great Britain, of the three islands known as Fanning, Christmas, and Penrhyn, lying from 1,000 to 1,800 miles southerly from Oahu."

"In view of this intelligence, it is proper to recall to Her Majesty's Government the correspondence exchanged with

my predecessor, Secretary Evarts, by Sir Edward Thornton, in 1879, relative to the possessory right to Christmas Island of which the British occupation is now reported."

"It seems proper, under the circumstances, and in default of more precise information, to reserve all other questions which may grow out of the reported occupation of the island." (Foreign Relations of the United States, 1888, p. 712).

Mr. White, on May 4, 1888, wrote a letter on this subject to Lord Salisbury who, on May 24, 1888, replied, but made out no good claim, as compared to that of the United States, to Christmas Island. Lord Salisbury cited the visit of the New Zealand merchantship *Regno*, the hoisting of the British flag over the island on April 17, 1882, and the taking possession for a New Zealand firm; the visit of H.M.S. *Constance* in October of 1884; and the visit of H.M.S. *Satellite* in November of 1885; and stated that no Americans were found in possession of Christmas Island. (For. Rel. of U. S., 1888, p. 727.)

The record seems clear that Christmas Island belongs to the United States.

#### "HAWAIIAN PEARL OYSTER"

"Hawaiian Pearl Oyster, *Pinctada Galtsoffi*," is the sign visitors see over some big mother-of-pearl oyster shells in the Bureau of Fisheries, Department of Commerce Building, in the same room as the fine aquarium. Beneath that sign also may be read the following: "Taken from Pearl and Hermes Reef in 1930 by U. S. Bureau of Fisheries Expedition. Pearls abundant, shells used for buttons and mother-of-pearl articles."



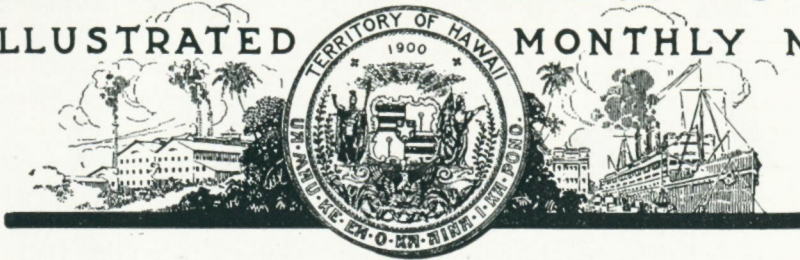
# Paradise of the Pacific

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No. 1

## Hoolaulea

The sugar and pineapple festival, known as the Hoolaulea, will be held in Honolulu February 22-26, 1939. More power to it.

## Hawaii's Sun-Tanned Finger Beckons

Hawaii's sun-tanned finger hospitably beckons to thousands of Americans and others to come "Nearer the Sun."

## Christmas Island and Palmyra

Hoist the American Flag over Christmas Island and forget about Palmyra for naval purposes.

## Overlooked Honolulu Geography

A news item recently announced that Los Angeles, Rome, New York, Sydney, Chicago and Vienna were the six largest cities by area. The world seems to have overlooked the magnificent proportions of Honolulu's land and water acreage.

## San Francisco World Fair

The San Francisco World Fair—the Golden Gate International Exposition—will open in February, 1939. Visitors will find a Magic City on man-made Treasure Island in San Francisco Bay. The Hawaiian Committee, with Sherwood M. Lowrey as chairman, has seen to it that Hawaii is splendidly represented.

## A Divided Fleet

Two canals and one fleet—or two fleets and one canal.

## Cocktail Bars on Airplanes

"Have one on me" may soon be heard high up in the sky—at the bar of a Sky-Clipper.

## Federal Government Buys Oranges

The Federal Government is buying oranges (following grapefruit purchase plan already announced), according to an announcement on December 15, 1938, by the Federal Surplus Commodities Corporation. The oranges will be turned over to state relief agencies for distribution to the needy. Let's hope that Pineapples of Hawaii never become paupers in the federal poor-house.

## An Admiral and General for Hawaii

Military and naval command in Hawaii is of such vital importance to the American Nation that a General and an Admiral—not a mere Major-General and Rear-Admiral—should direct National Defense here.

## Papaya and Avocado

It is unlikely that the avocado of Hawaii will successfully compete with its relative of California in continental markets; but the papaya has a prosperous future.

## American Language

One of the most patriotic things an American citizen can do is to speak the American language. It would be well if only the American language was permitted in our newspapers and other publications, and over the radio.

## "Ghost Town" of San Francisco

San Francisco is terribly worried over being tagged with the sobriquet "Ghost Town" as a result of its loss of maritime, and other, supremacy, caused by labor, and other, troubles. Honolulu should be on the alert to keep the "ghosts" away from the Paradise of the Pacific.

## Buoys For Missing Airships

There must be some sort of a non-destructible buoy that will become automatically released from a huge airship about to sink "without trace," to indicate the disaster-spot.

## Plebiscites

"Suppose, for instance," editorialized the *Star-Bulletin* of September 9, 1938, "that Japan were to demand the right to interfere with the United States government in the administration of the Hawaiian Islands because so large a number of Island residents are of Japanese ancestry?"

## Relief Map of Pacific Basin

A relief map of the Pacific Basin—with the oceans actually water—will be exhibited at the Golden Gate International Exposition that opens at Treasure Island, San Francisco, next month. Such a map, on permanent exhibition at Honolulu, would help Hawaii.