

Christmas Island of the United States

“ONE of the prettiest of the island possessions of the United States in the Pacific is Christmas Island,” reported the *Pacific Commercial Advertiser* of Honolulu on October 21, 1897. Up to recently that was the general impression of the island discovered by Captain James Cook in 1777 but not claimed by him for Great Britain.

“Great Britain claims the sovereignty of this island by virtue of the proclamation of November 28, 1919, but the ownership is in dispute, the United States appearing to have a just claim,” asserts the “Sailing Directions for The Pacific Islands,” which is issued under authority of the Secretary of the Navy.

Sovereignty of the United States over Christmas Island is not destroyed, or even impaired, by another country raising its flag over the island, occupying it, or leasing it to individuals.

American policy does not include the acquisition of territory beyond the normal American sphere of influence. Therefore, the United States is withdrawing from the Philippines—with probable relinquishing of Guam. However, not only does the United States possess excellent rights to claim Christmas Island, but it lies within the American sphere of influence in the Pacific.

Christmas Island is located about 1,161 nautical miles south of Honolulu and about 200 sea-miles northeastward of American Jarvis Island. It is within the same group as American Palmyra and American Kingman Reef, with Washington (named for George Washington) and Fanning Islands (to which America has solid claims) intervening. It is one of the largest of the coral islands and has an average height of fifteen feet with several hills at thirty-five to forty feet. The land area is about two hundred square miles.

A map, called “Aina Moana,” made by the American Missionaries in Hawaii in 1840, shows Christmas Island under the name of “Kerisema” and belonging to “Amerika.”

President Franklin Pierce approved the Guano Act on August 18, 1856. Essentials of it are quoted on page twenty-one of the last August number of this magazine. This law of the United States provides that when an American citizen discovers a deposit of guano on an island, rock or key, within the lawful jurisdiction of any government and shall take peaceful possession thereof and occupy the same, the President may consider it “as appertaining to the United States.” The President is authorized to “employ the land and naval forces of the United States to protect the rights of said discoverer,” of such islands.

While the above law provides that it is not necessary for the United States to retain possession of an island after the guano has been removed, it does not require that American sovereignty over any island, such as Christmas, claimed under the law, be relinquished for any reason.

At least three American guano companies were organized. The United States Guano Company claimed Christmas, Howland and other islands. American warships visited the Guano Islands.

“On the 18th of January, 1856, Commodore Mervine sailed from San Francisco in the frigate *Independence*, touching at Hilo and Honolulu on his route, having been ordered by the Secretary of the Navy to take possession of Jarvis and New Nantucket [Baker] Islands in the name of the United States government, and also to survey the same and bring home specimens of guano,” published the *Pacific Commercial Advertiser* on January 28, 1858. “He only surveyed New Nantucket [Baker] Island,” and “left this island without effecting a landing by the agency of his officers, or allowing Mr. Benson [Agent of Guano Company] to attempt it in a ship’s boat.” Commodore Mervine came in for bitter criticism in Hawaii. The U. S. S. *St. Mary’s* (Davis) visited Baker and Jarvis Islands.

Captain John Stetson of New Haven, Conn., examined Christmas Island prior to 1857, and “possession was taken, June 20th, 1858, by — *Continued on Page Twenty-Nine*

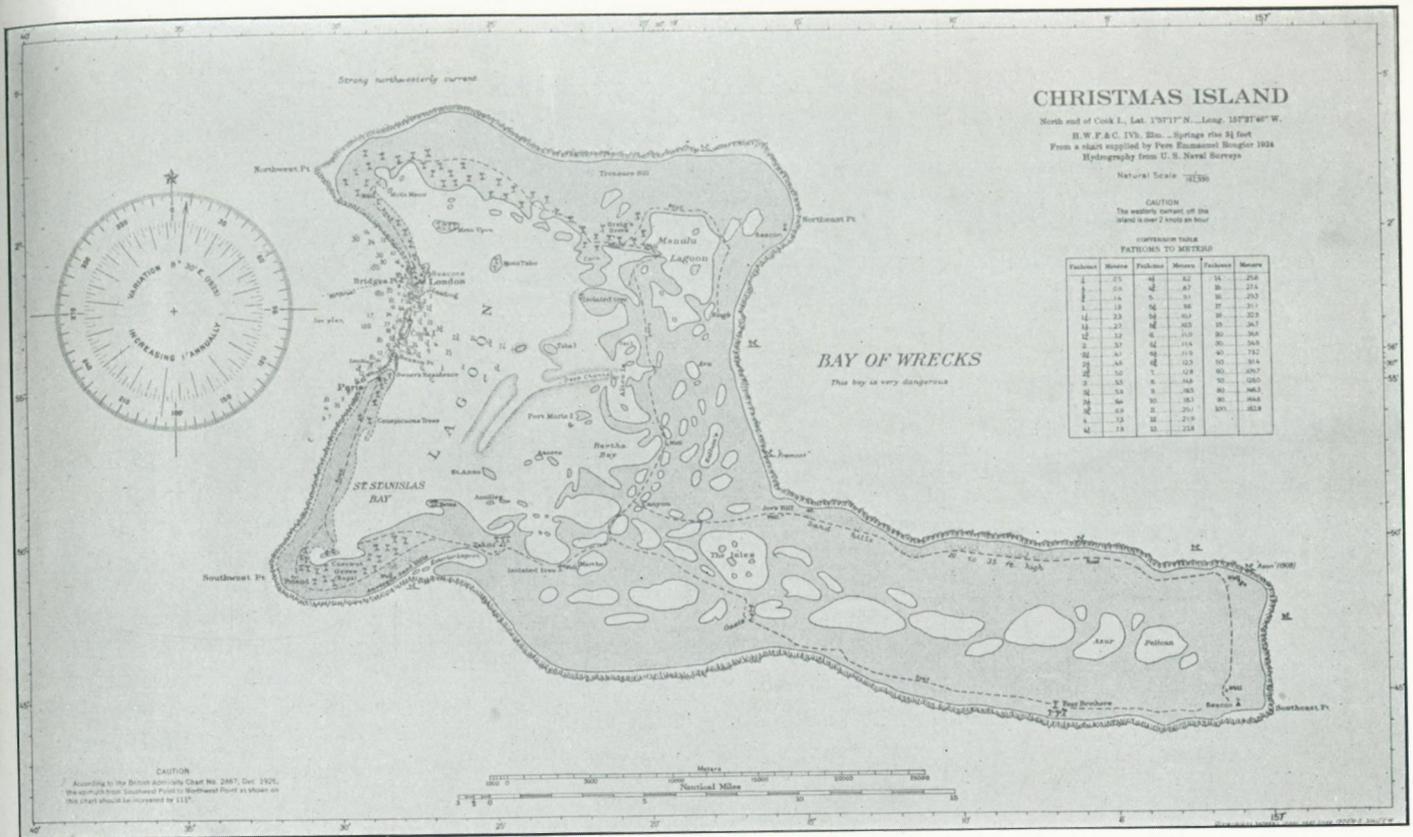
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U. S. Navy Chart No. 1839, Christmas Island — Made from Surveys of U. S. S. Portsmouth, 1874

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Continued from Page One

Captain J. L. Pendleton, of the ship *John Marshall*, in behalf of A. G. Benson and associates, under a deed from Stetson dated May 11, 1857," according to the U. S. Navy Sailing Directions. Captain Pendleton was the Commodore of the American Guano Fleet and commander of its flagship *John Marshall* which, after a "stay of thirty hours at Christmas" Island on her homeward-bound voyage, arrived at Honolulu, August 16, 1858.

The *Josephine* (Stone), carrying Captain Turner and Charles Judd as passengers, arrived at Honolulu on June 23, 1858, from Jarvis Island after "touching at Christmas Island." Many other American vessels visited Christmas Island during this guano period.

"Malden's, Christmas, Howland's, Arthur's and others to numerous to mention," are claimed by the United States Guano Company, reported *The Friend* of July 15, 1859.

Christmas "island continued in the Guano Islands list held by the United States Treasury Department and was bonded in 1859," explains the U. S. Navy Sailing Directions. "Others, through British authorities, obtained li-

censes, but gave them up, and in 1872 it was found that the island had been taken possession of by the U. S. S. *Nar-ragansett*, and it was then occupied by three men of Honolulu."

The U. S. Surveying Ship *Portsmouth* (Skerrett) "visited Palmyra, Washington, Fanning's and Christmas Islands, surveying each," and arrived at Honolulu on February 2, 1874, reported the *Hawaiian Gazette*, February 4, 1874. "Captain Skerrett and his officers found it to be no holiday employment, for example to survey Christmas Island in a sailing vessel, as it was well known that that Island was found to be laid down far from correctly on the Admiralty Chart published as late as 1870," recorded *The Friend* of March 2, 1874. The early history of this island is filled with interesting tragedy.

"As we kept our Christmas here, I called this discovery Christmas Island," recorded Captain James Cook in 1777. Heinrich Zimmerman, called it Sandy Island while Lieutenant John Richman asserted that Cook termed it Turtle Island. Many vessels of many nations have visited the island since that early year. Only a few may be mentioned.

"The yams, melons, and cocoa-nut, which Cook planted on this spot, have all disappeared; as well as the bottle, containing an inscription which he left to commemorate his discovery," wrote F. D. Bennett of the *Tuscan* that visited Christmas Island in 1834.

"It appears a number of ships have been there," to secure cocoanuts, recorded Surgeon F. H. Tresilian, of the *Briton* that was wrecked on the Island in 1836, "as many of the trees were cut down, with a variety of English and American ships' names marked on them, but none were dated later than 1834. The American whaler *Charles Frederick* picked up the *Briton's* survivors and carried them to Kauai.

According to Findlay's Directory, Captain Scott, R. N., of H. M. S. *Samarang*, visited Christmas Island, in 1840. The Bremen ship *Mozart* (Schelling) was wrecked on the Island in 1847. The American whaler *J. E. Donnell* rescued her crew.

In January of 1848, the Chilean ship *Maria Helena* went ashore on Christmas Island. The passengers and crew were carried to Honolulu by the French ship *Sarcelle*. The event was commemorated with a grand fete in Honolulu at Robinson and Company's Hall, in April, 1848. The Grand March of the Ball

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The bark *J. C. Fremont* was stranded on Christmas Island in November, 1856. Her wreck and cargo were sold to J. I. Dowsett. The brig *John Dunlap* and schooner *Dolphin* were sent to bring the cargo to Honolulu in 1857. The horses taken down to aid in the work all gave out.

Brigham's Index to the Islands of the Pacific, and Stewart's Pacific Islands, assert that Great Britain annexed Christmas Island on March 17, 1888. The *Pacific Commercial Advertiser*, in April of the same year, states that it was H. B. M. S. *Caroline* that did the annexing. British sovereignty over Christmas Island was proclaimed November 28, 1919 but the United States never acknowledged British claims or British sovereignty over it.

A scientific expedition of the Bishop Museum visited Christmas Island in 1923.

"Christmas Island is the next tiny island most calculated to leap suddenly out of the most boundless reaches of the Pacific and assume an international importance," wrote Henry Wood, of the United Press, in the *Honolulu Advertiser*, November 29, 1936. "Following the colonization of the Baker, Jarvis and Howland Islands by the United States as plane bases in a proposed line to New Zealand, Christmas Island, it is declared is the next of the Pacific atolls that is calculated to become suddenly important."

The Associated Press at Suva, Fiji Islands, on February 20, 1937, reported that the sloop *Leith* departed, that day "with a Fiji Government wireless officer and complete radio plant for Christmas Island." The *New York Times*, February 21, 1937, explained that "the sailing indicated Great Britain intended to perfect her claim to Christmas Island, the largest and most desirable of a number of scattered mid-Pacific islands whose



Dock at Christmas Island



Christmas Island

ownership has been disputed with the United States for years."

"British moves to perfect sovereignty over Christmas Island, potential air-base on routes to the Antipodes, stirred speculation today as to whether the United States might dispute ownership," reported the Associated Press from Washington on February 23, 1937. "The United States has contested the British claims to the island on several occasions in the past. State Department declined immediate comment today on sailing of the British sloop *Leith* with equipment for a radio station to be erected on the atoll. They referred all inquiries to historical references and diplomatic correspondence which showed the United States had made no recent effort to assert its claims but has never relinquished



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Chapel on Christmas Island

them." The *Honolulu Star-Bulletin* of July 25, 1937, stated that a radio operator sailed aboard the New Zealand cruiser *Achilles* from Honolulu for Christmas Island, to relieve a radio operator who had established a station there in the preceding February.

"Reliable sources said today Secretary of State Cordell Hull is studying old documents relating to Pacific Islands with probable result that the United States may lay claim to many of them which have possibilities as airplane bases," wrote the Associated Press in Washington, March 3, 1938. "Among the islands whose ownership is reported under dispute are Christmas, Fanning and Washington." All "are listed on most maps as British, although some note that they are claimed by the United States." The "British have a 'Commission of the Western Pacific' which has been given jurisdiction not only over British islands but any other islands not under the jurisdiction of some nation."

There should be no delay in raising the Stars and Stripes over Christmas Island.

The photographs illustrating the above story of Christmas Island are used thru the courtesy of Commander Eugene V. Coffin, Commanding Officer of the Coast Guard Cutter *Taney*.

"MAGIC ISLANDS"

"My sister and I wish to thank the people of these Magic Islands for a most wonderful visit, for no people could have been more gracious," said Representative Marvin Jones as quoted in the *Star-Bulletin*, on September 29, 1938. "We are carrying with us many happy memories and the hope of seeing you again. Aloha." Mr. Jones was one of the co-authors of the Costigan-Jones Sugar Act of 1934, which created the first discrimination against Sugar of Hawaii.

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No. 10

Primary and Elections

Primaries will be held on October 1 and general elections on November 8. Hawaii expects every man and woman, eligible to vote, to exercise their rights of suffrage.

Morale of Hawaii

Hawaii is the most vital part of American defenses in the Pacific area. That the civilian population of Hawaii possess perfect morale is imperatively essential to a successful American National Defense. Discrimination—withholding rights and privileges guaranteed to American citizens by the Constitution of the United States, from the People of Hawaii—is a blow at the national security of the United States.

Two Fairs

Hawaii County Fair at Hilo and Twenty-First Maui Fair—both in October—should be attended by all.

Property and Life

Under the spirit of the Constitution, which is more important, life or property?

Depression

What a depression there'd be if everybody ate only the food they should eat, drank only required fluids, wore only essential clothing, smoked only needful amounts, and bought only such other material as their health and happiness required.

Welfare

Do your bit.

Mid-Pacific Carnival

Between 1906 and 1918 the greatest and biggest festive date on the Hawaiian calendar was the Mid-Pacific Carnival and Floral Parade. A revival of it would benefit Hawaii and please the visiting world.

Solo—Non-Stop—California to China

Eastward or westward! Who? When?

Economic Life-Stream of Hawaii

Sugar, Pineapples, Cattle, and Other Livestock, Tourists, National Defense.

Serenity of Hawaii

Hurricanes, typhoons and cyclones may devastate and kill in other American parts but it is "Hawaii the Serene," the gift of Nature. If only Humans would leave it thus.

Rain

Hawaii is blessed with plenty of rain which never annoys except when it gathers in lakes in our city thoroughfares. It takes no "expert from the Continent" to tell us how to efficiently and expeditiously get rid of it.

Too Much Like the Mainland

Contiguity, by aviation and radio, to the Mainland is a mixed blessing. Too bad, but we're getting more continental every day in almost every way.

The "Unholy Alliance"

How many citizens of Hawaii recall the sweet "Unholy Alliance" and the promises that it would be demolished?

Pidgin-English

If you think Pidgin-English in Hawaii is grotesquely humorous you ought to hear some American citizens on the Continent talk their broken Italian-American, German-American, Polish-American, Scandinavian-American, Pennsylvania-Dutch, not to mention some of the American dialects used to express American-Porto-Rican and Virgin-Island thoughts.

Sugar Day

Sugar is an important part of the foundation of Economic Hawaii. Let us recognize that fact with a Sugar Day.

Indecently White

Shark-bait some calls them. An occasional feminine beauty at Waikiki Beach, without benefit of clothing, seems so alluringly white that she is almost nudely indecent.