

# THE PROMISE OF PITCAIRN'S ISLAND

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La Plata, 1900, Buenos Aires, Republic of Argentina

Fletcher Christian and John Adams and the other 6 Bounty Mutineers, together with their 8 Tahitian wives and 10 Tahitian men, left Tahiti on the pirated H.M.A.V. Bounty vessel bound for a place unknown. Christian stumbled on to the idea for Pitcairn's Island after thoroughly reading over the available British naval maps he had access to on the Bounty. He chose Pitcairn's Island as their destination, though none of the crew had ever been there, because the island was evidently one of the remotest places on Earth and was not properly identified on the naval maps by sufficient designation of its longitude (although its latitude was properly identified as about 25° 2' S).

[1]

Within days of leaving Tahiti; supplied with a dozen or so pigs and chickens, as well as dozens of breadfruit trees and banana trees and sweet potatoe plants and assorted flower and vegetable seeds; the ship was directed by Christian to sail along a latitude line of 25 degrees W in the hope of discovering the mysterious Pitcairn's Island. The British members of

Christian's crew, those that came over from the Bounty mutiny, with the exception of John Adams and Ned Young, were unruly and aggressive and difficult to supervise. These 5 crew members became disillusioned and impatient with Christian almost immediately after the ship had departed on its last voyage. They (among the 5 particularly McCoy and Quintal) threatened Christian's authority and he took it upon himself to oversee the ship's passage at gunpoint to complete the trip to Pitcairn.

Later on the island, these disgruntled and angry British sailors would spread their animosity towards the 10 Tahitian men. The Pitcairn crew was misguided from the start by not thinking to pair up each Tahitian man with their own spouse from the time they prepared to leave the Tahitian Islands. Intense jealousy over the marriages of the British sailors to their Tahitian women (and the poor treatment of the Tahitian men by the Bounty mutineers) eventually erupted on the island and several killings took place within the first few years on Pitcairn's Island. Christian was one of the first to be killed. The 8 Bounty mutineers and all 10 Tahitian men were reduced to just Adams and Young within 3-5 years on the island. But despite the violent nature of those first few years on Pitcairn's Island (1787-1793), the 8 island

marriages between 8 British sailors and their respective 8 Tahitian spouses produced over 20 children in the first generation on the island.

From these 20 children of presumably mixed British-Tahitian descent in the first generation of the island, the island eventually blossomed to a population of over 300 people within 60 or so years (about 1850). In the successive generation, overseen by Adams, the lone surviving British sailor after Young passed on from illness in about 1800, there was apparently less violence. There is no question that the members of the Pitcairn crew had the potential to create an island paradise on Pitcairn when they landed in about 1787. The island was 2 square miles in size, with about a 1 mile length and a 2 mile breadth, just enough room to accommodate the Bounty crew and their counterparts. The island was heavily wooded with enough trees to build sufficient and sturdy housing for everyone. And the island was incredibly remote, far away from any British naval routes or from any other naval expeditions, as it were, in the Eastern part of the South Pacific. The succeeding generations of British-Tahitian descent were riddled with crimes of sexual violence committed by the men against the women and other problems connected with malaise. Also the pigs that were brought to the island initially

in 1787 reproduced quite successfully and were overrunning the island within 5 to 10 years. [2]

To their credit Adams and Young turned to Christian faith and the Holy Bible after the intensely violent early period on the island. Adams went through Christian's belongings after Christian was killed and recovered Christian's Holy Bible. Adams used the bible to guide the initial 20 or so progeny, and he was called the "father" to these children. In 1814 an American whaling vessel came across Pitcairn and discovered the strange population of 20 British-Tahitian children together with several Tahitian women and John Adams. The American vessel reported the discovery to British authorities and the British investigated and later granted Adams clemency for the mutiny incident. Adams lived on to the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century and died in his 60's of old age. The Pitcairn crew thus had the potential to achieve a paradise on their island, but human frailties and poor oversight caused the disintegration of the social order on their island paradise within the first generation and this disharmony carried forth, to some extent, into the subsequent generations. However, in the remnant population of the British-Tahitian Pitcairn Island descendants, that are now scattered across islands in the South Pacific, with some members located as far away as New Zealand and elsewhere, there may

persist the early Christian faith and teachings introduced to their people by John Adams and Ned Young, in the very early days of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, from a Holy Bible found with Fletcher Christian's belongings. [3]

## References

- [1] *The Bounty: The True Story of the Mutiny on the Bounty*, by Caroline Alexander, Harper Perennial, London, 2003.
- [2] *The Pitcairners*, by Robert B. Nicolson, Pasifika Press, Auckland, 1997.
- [3] *After the Bounty: The Aftermath of the Infamous Mutiny on the HMS Bounty—An Insight to the Plight of the Mutineers*, by Cal Adams, a descendant of John Adams, Bounty Mutineer, Self-published, Sydney, 2008.