

Sunday Advertiser

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Where Opportunity Knocked Twice

BY JAMES T. STACKER.

Being a Thumbnail Sketch of C. Brewer & Co., Ltd., With Reference to Peter Cushman Jones, Retired

"Great oaks from little acorns grow" fits capital into very part of the structure that stands in the commercial world as "C. Brewer & Co., Ltd." for this great house has grown from a seed, literally as small as the acorn, to a mighty oak reverenced by the men who are connected closely, or even remotely, with the commercial institutions of this Territory.

The beginning of C. Brewer & Co. may be said to be a chance taken by a Yankee who came round the Horn in December 1817, nearly one hundred years ago, in the brig "Portland Packet," Andrew Blanchard, master. On instructions from the owners the brig was sold, and the cargo went ashore. The inception of the business is usually traced to the arrival of James Hunniwell at that time, though there was an interval of years between the planting of the seed and the budding.

I do not wish to imply that the house of C. Brewer & Co. was established ninety-three years ago, but to say that it is the result of the inspiration Mr. Hunniwell had at that time. Indeed many changes have been made since then but nearly all were made prior to the advent of Captain Charles Brewer in Honolulu in 1825. During the quarter century immediately preceding that date there were a half-dozen different persons building on the structure. Hunniwell came again in 1826 with a cargo of 40 cases of merchandise, and began bartering. He was then master and was given the cargo for his services. There was no coin of the realm in those long ago days; sandalwood passed current, as dust does in the mining states. It is written that on one occasion the arrival of a British ship, the cash sales of the house were but \$104.00, which constituted all of the cash in the vessel. It is written, also, that the sum of \$104.00 was a large part of the sum total of coin in Honolulu at the time.

Whaling Idea. It was not until 1829 that whaling became an industry of importance in Honolulu. When Mr. Hunniwell came first there were no whalers calling here and the bartering was mostly with the natives and the captains of merchantmen happening along. With the arrival of the whalers, came a whalers' exchange and during 1829 the business of the firm was on a cash basis. I have heard that the first invoice of whalebone arriving here cost the importer \$9.00 per dozen and he sold them promptly at nine dollars per piece. Even at that price they were considered a great buy and a competitor offered the high price for the entire consignment, but out of sympathy for the importer the goods would not sell out. This incident has no connection with the house of Brewer & Co. nor its antecedents, and it is mentioned here merely to show the excellent opportunities which came to those who were on the ground long ago. That merchant, however, afterwards went into bankruptcy owing C. Brewer & Co. much money.

Start in 1826. Under the name of "James Hinneford" the house was started here in 1826 but on Mr. Hunniwell leaving for his home in Boston in 1830 he transferred his interests to Henry A. Pierce who conducted the store until 1824 when he took as a partner Thomas Hinckley, the firm being changed to Pierce & Hinckley, continuing for about a year when Mr. Hinckley retired. He sailed from the Islands for his home in Massachusetts, but died at sea before reaching there.

Captain Charles Brewer was master of vessels in the China trade here in the early part of the first century and on his voyages frequently stopped here. He came to Honolulu first in 1822 but returned to Boston and twelve years later, like many another visitor, decided to come back out of the gold fields of "Back Bay" and settle here.

First of the Brewers. It was in 1825 that the name of Brewer first had a place on the sign, and then it was coupled with that of Henry A. Pierce, as "Pierce & Brewer." At the end of eight years Mr. Pierce, who had been away from home for twelve years, decided to retire from active management and return to Boston. That was in 1833 and for the first time the sign in front of the old building on Fort Street reads "C. Brewer & Co." But it remained a short time. There was another firm of business here and a merger was made to Captain Brewer, who had been in the Islands since 1825. In 1841 J. P. B. Marshall and Francis Johnson had a partnership in a general mercantile business. Though still retaining an interest, Captain Brewer transferred the business to his partners in 1842 when he went back East. Two years after the partnership, also, dissolved. The business went over to the new firm of H. Williams & Co.

In 1845 Benjamin F. Snow, who some years ago appears on the charts of the Pacific Ocean, was admitted to membership and afterwards, in 1850, succeeded to the business and carried it on under

his name until 1856 when he departed for New York, leaving B. W. Field to manage, but not as a partner.

That plan fell to Charles Brewer II, nephew of Captain Brewer. This young man had been with the captain for two years. He was in business at the same time as Mr. Snow and in the same line. In 1850 he was joined by Sherman Peck and again the firm became "C. Brewer

and Peck during his short connection with it the profits have grown and grown. What Charles Brewer II did before Peck went with him is not at record. His office force was H. A. P. Carter, as outside and side man, and John O. Dominis as bookkeeper. The latter became husband to Editha, subsequently Queen of Hawaii. H. A. P. Carter became minister to the United

States. The firm received consignments of goods from Chas. Brewer & Co., of Boston, sold them and invested the proceeds in hides, skins and whalers' exchange. The latter was always drawn at ten days sight and sold to parties here at anything from 4 to 10 per cent discount. Merchants banked their money and when the whalers arrived in October and November the drafts were taken and the money used to pay off the crews. Sometimes pay day would have to be postponed until money could be secured and it frequently happened that merchants would have to borrow at three to five per cent a month. But even at that rate they made good profits. All kinds of foreign money was in circulation in those days and Brewer had no shortage of it. Mexican dollars and Spanish gold pieces were used and the "real" was good money though it was often made by cutting a shilling, or a two bit piece in two. This was taken as 12 1/2 cents in Lahaia as late as 1891, and there may be some in circulation there now.

Commission Business. In the early days the profits of the concern came from handling the goods which were sent out from Boston on consignment. Later sugar became a feature and as early as the days of Charles Brewer II the house had one plantation, on Maui, known as the Brewer Plantation with an output of 200 tons, with the extraction about 55 per cent sugar, so that nearly half was in molasses. This "Charles" Brewer was always glad to show his customers. On one occasion he knuckled the bang from a barrel and as it happened to be a warm day the stuff came out with a spurt, drenching Mr. Brewer's white suit of clothing.

Carter a Partner. After Mr. Brewer died and the business was succeeded to by Mr. Peck he took in as partner, his clerk H. A. P. Carter, and as far as the records show without asking for capital. Charles Hunt, who had come out from Boston succeeded Mr. Dominis in the books and eventually became a partner, putting \$5,000 into the business. Mr. Peck does not seem to have put any capital into the business but he certainly came in for a share of the very handsome profits.

As time went on other persons were taken into the business, among them Lehaiah Peterson, who remained six years. In 1857 the firm bought from James Robinson & Co. and Thomas Cummins a three-fourths interest in the

Waikua plantation, and in 1857 the profits grew so rapidly that they were credited to the partners semi-annually.

In 1856 Lehaiah Barrett entered the firm bringing with him the agency for Waikua Plantation. He retired in March 1859, the year that John Dominis Brewer, a graduate of Harvard '57, came out around the Horn to begin his service with the firm as clerk. All this

time the profits of C. Brewer & Co. increased and in 1859 both Brewer and Peterson were admitted as partners, the latter dropping out at the end of a year.

P. C. Jones Admitted. On January 1, 1871, a new partner was admitted to the firm and as this article was intended, primarily, with special reference to his connection with it a good deal of space has been used for the purpose of getting down to the kernel. The "New Boy" was Peter Cushman Jones, who after almost forty years connection with the house of C. Brewer & Co. has retired to private life. Six months after Mr. Jones entered the firm, Sherman Peck died and his body was prepared for burial to be shipped to the East. In those days "ballbearing" at funerals was not all honor; it meant work, for it was customary, when it was intended to ship the remains away, to put the body into a lead-lined coffin containing alcohol, putting the lead container inside one made of kauri. The weight of the combination was all a man of ordinary strength could handle. Mr. Jones was a pall bearer at the funeral of Mr. Peck.

In consequence of his demise, a division of the profits of the concern was necessary. Mr. Carter had been adding to his holdings in the firm and was fast becoming a rich man. He spent a large part of 1871 in Europe for he was now the largest owner in the business. The year 1874 brought some reverses owing to the failure of a local house, but in addition to a division of the profits each member of the firm was credited with eight per cent interest on his capital invested.

More Agencies. In that year the firm took the agency for Oronima and Princeville plantations, both of which were indebted to Welch & Co., of San Francisco and Williams Diamond & Co., and an arrangement was made with them for a settlement. That was the beginning of the very pleasant relations that have existed between the two firms for so many years.

There was an arrangement with another shipping firm over there but it was not so pleasant for the reason that some of the people connected with it had the get rich quick germ at work in their systems and began boring holes in redwood posts to be shipped here and filled them with tins of opium. The stuff was seized.

Their Word was Good. In those days, more than now, planta-

tions were in need of funds for the between season and that year was a particularly hard one. A local banker found it impossible to make further advances so Welch & Co. were appealed to. The money was forthcoming and there was no demand for notes or security, Mr. Welch remarking that the word of Brewer & Co. was good enough for him. A few years later every dol-

lar of the overdraft, which was a large one, was wiped out.

The year 1876 was the most profitable for the firm up to that time, the reciprocity treaty, the passage of which was due in a great measure to H. A. P. Carter, Hawaiian Minister to Washington, having gone into effect.

Shipping Interests. The firm had reached a stage where it was sometimes called upon to help sailing or steam vessels out in the matter of their expenses. It is of record that this was done at a loss in several instances and the presence of John D. Brewer in New York at a time of the arrival of a vessel saved the firm a good deal of money for the home agents, for the vessel failed and was on the point of causing a loss to Brewer & Co. A loss of more than \$5,000 occurred in this way in the case of the "Persia." The firm took the captain's draft, which on its presentation was protested and never a dollar of the money came back.

A hard year for the firm came in 1879, when the partners found themselves cramped for money, owing to developing some large interests and by the death of John D. Brewer. In this year Mr. North, who had charge of the books tendered his resignation and recommended George H. Robertson, "Hide Boy," for the place. The latter had been with the firm for ten years and had made good, but in spite of this Mr. Jones opposed the promotion because he did not think he had the necessary experience on the books. But his advancement was made and the Hide Boy was a success for on New Year's day of 1880, a holiday, the two met on the street about four o'clock in the afternoon. Mr. Robertson reported that his trial balance was off, the plantation accounts made up and the final entries made.

Another hard times party was in 1880, but the storm was weathered, though the profits fell off considerably and the division was not as cheering as formerly. The next year pulled things out gloriously and the firm declared a semi-annual dividend of the profits. The next year was also a successful one and in 1883 the firm decided to incorporate with a capital of \$600,000. P. C. Jones was elected first president of the corporation. The records of the firm and corporation show conclusively that both have been well managed. It seems incredible that another firm in Honolulu could make a better showing. In 1899 Mr. Jones resigned as president and was succeeded by the late Charles M. Cooke.

Another incident that cannot be overlooked is the removal of the business from Queen street, where it was conducted for fifty years, to Fort street. But that is going back and looking backward for it was on Fort street, less than two blocks from the present site, where the first trading was done by the firm.

Splendid Records. George H. Robertson, the present vice-president and manager of the company, entered its employ in 1869 and has continued uninterruptedly ever since in various capacities, always going ahead, and it is the wish of his legion of friends that he may be spared to continue for many years longer.

Barring two years, 1891-92, Mr. Jones served always as president until he resigned in 1899.

P. C. Jones. Peter Cushman Jones arrived in Honolulu October 2nd, 1857, having made the voyage around Cape Horn in the "John Gilpin," the journey occupying 118 days. I have a suspicion that he bore the brand of the Bostoners, for he says that as he walked up Fort street on his way to the residence of John Ladd, then at the corner of Beretania and Union, he passed the coral building above King street, where the Boston Block now stands. In the doorway were three young men and he overheard one of them say, "There goes another coming fellow from Boston. We had better raise ten thousand dollars by subscription and send him right back home."

I understand the plan was not carried out and Mr. Jones has said more than once he would have compromised for half the money, as he had but sixty cents in his pocket. That was one of the reasons for his walking from the ship to the residence of Mr. Ladd. The other was the absence of vehicles for hire.

And Time levels all things very much as Death squares most accounts. The young man who was willing to contribute toward the fund for the relief of the "young fellow from Boston" was Henry A. P. Carter, at that time in charge of curing the hides which the firm bought and later a partner in the firm and subsequently Hawaiian minister to Washington. Beside this he was the father of the young man who became governor of the Territory.

Early Employment. The leveling process began when years after Mr. Jones was admitted to partnership in the firm with Mr. Carter, Jones' first employment was with Barnum W. Field, then with B. F. Snow and finally with Wilcox & Richardson, in the ship chandlery business, where he remained for some years, eventually becoming a partner. But C. Brewer & Co. had its business eye on the young man and offered him a good chance, which he decided to accept. When he told Mr. Richardson what he intended doing that gentleman said, "You go back to your books and stay there, credit to yourself any salary you think you are worth." Mr. Jones continued with the firm for a few years longer, eventually buying the interest of Mr. Wilcox, conducting the business profitably until January 1, 1871, when he yielded to the end for his services and became a partner with a seven-twenty-eighths interest in the firm.

Caught in Arctic Ice. Mr. Jones, in his business of ship chandlery, had acquired an interest in two whalers, their value being about equal to that which the firm held in the whaler "Arctic." Believing he would bring the business of the whalers into the firm, Chas. Brewer & Co. sent out from Boston a large consignment of stores for the fleet. But that year was disastrous to the whalers. All but seven were caught in the ice and the two in which Mr. Jones had an interest were among those lost. The "Arctic" came back safely. Of the stores sent was a consignment of 10,000 pounds of bread, which spoiled, and most of the stuff was fed to chickens.

Charles R. Bishop's Rescue. This had a rather depressing effect upon the spirits of the junior member of the firm, but it was nothing compared (Continued on Page Eight.)



& Co.," this time for keeps, for no sign writer has been called upon in all these years to change it except to add the word "limited" at the end. Sixty-one years as one firm is going some.

Business Profitable. From the very beginning the profits of the business have been large. As far back as 1861, when Sherman Peck succeeded to the business on the death of Charles Brewer II the good side of the ledger showed more than two thousand dollars profit. This Mr. Peck, by the way, had been in business in Lahaia where he had amassed "a fortune" of \$60,000 and gone back East only to fall in with sharpers in a speculative pool and be swamped. He came back to the Islands once over, bringing what was left of the wrecked fortune and invested \$5,000 with Brewer II.

In the Advertiser of September 1850, I find the advertisement of the firm, and the "Friend" of December of that year announces the introduction of Mr. Peck into the business and the removal from the old coral building on Fort Street to a place on Queen Street near the Bethelmarket.

Had Mr. Peck remained in business he would easily have gathered in the shovels he lost through the sharpers in the East. He is not the only person, however, who was against larger toads in larger puddles for I have inside information that others of Brewer & Co. had a similar experience.

No Boston Connection. The Brewer part of the firm has been, for most of the time in its existence, a name only. There have been forty years and years when not one of the name resided here. From 1826 until the present day there has been but four Brewers associated with the Honolulu firm for the Boston house of Charles Brewer & Co. has had no connection whatever with this one. A very early partner in the early nineties I remember Joseph Brewer he was later for a visit but he had nothing in common with the Honolulu business. Note the distinction in the two institutions. One reads "Chas. Brewer & Co.," and the other "C. Brewer & Co., Ltd." But in spite of the absence of a Brewer connection, the house has existed and will continue to exist; in Honolulu until there is no call for corporations and in Boston until the incident of the "Tea Party" shall have been forgotten and Bunker Hill crumbles to dust.

Royal Consort as Bookkeeper. Starting with the earnings of Sher-