A SOUTH SEAS STATE OF NATURE: 
THE LEGAL HISTORY OF PITCAIRN ISLAND, 1790–1900

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ABSTRACT

Pitcairn Island was uninhabited in 1790 when the mutineers of the Royal Navy’s Bounty settled there with men and women from Tahiti to serve as slaves and wives for the sailors. Murders and accidents claimed the lives the leader of the mutiny, Fletcher Christian, and those of every adult male save John Adams. Adams led the remaining islanders under a benevolent dictatorship for the rest of his life, a South Seas Christian monarchy cut off from the rest of the world. After the island was rediscovered, new settlers arrived, including a delusional Englishman named Joshua Hill who took over the island and ruled the islanders by fear. After he was removed by the Royal Navy, it supervised the island for decades, its ships regularly visiting the island and its officers writing several simple legal codes for the Pitcairners. The islanders consented as they considered themselves to be English and were fervently loyal to Queen Victoria. The British administration was very light for decades, the islanders largely running their own affairs. That changed after a Pitcairner murdered two islanders in 1897. The British realized there was no way to try the defendant short of taking him to London. The solution was to place the island under the High Commissioner for the Western Pacific. The High Commissioner was a British official based in Fiji whose job was to bring law and order to a vast swath of the Pacific and suppress the slave trade among the islands. The High Commissioner

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arranged for a trial for the murderer, who was convicted and hanged. Pitcairn’s government operated under the High Commissioner until 1952 and now is run by the British ambassador to New Zealand.

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I. IN THE BEGINNING: 1789

The revolutionary year of 1789—the year the American constitution took effect—is the time of our story.¹ Entire libraries have been written about Pitcairn Island and how it came to be peopled.² And although the current population numbers only 66 today—having peaked in 1937 at 233—Pitcairn “has always been larger than itself, a parody or a parable of something.”³

The Pitcairners are descended from the English sailors who shipped with William Bligh aboard the Bounty in December 1787. The Bounty’s mission was to bring the breadfruit tree—a cheap and nutritious food source,⁴—from Tahiti to the West In-

1. Dan T. Coenen, Of Pitcairn’s Island and American Constitutional Theory, 38 Wm. & Mary L. Rev. 649 (1997) (comparing Pitcairn to start of American government under the Constitution as the Bounty mutiny happened two days before General Washington took the presidential oath).
2. For a more complete accounting of sources regarding the islands, see Appendix A.
4. See generally John Ellis, A Description of the Mangostan and the Bread-Fruit: The First, Esteemed One of the Most Delicious; the Other
dies to feed the slaves on English sugar plantations. This mission, urged on the government by the planters, sprung from the cutoff of cheap food imports from Britain’s American colonies after the American Revolutionary War\(^5\) and the British trade embargo on America\(^6\) Bligh had been master, i.e., navigator,\(^7\) on Captain Cook’s third voyage to the Pacific—the one touching America\(^8\)—and Cook wrote often of Mr. Bligh in his logs, “never with dispraise.”\(^9\) The renowned Joseph Banks, president of the Royal Society and the naturalist on Cook’s first South Seas mission, recommended him as commander of the breadfruit expedition.\(^10\) When Bligh was appointed, *The Times* noted he was “a man of acknowledged probity and skill, as well as indefatigable attention to duty.”\(^11\)

Tahiti had a well-deserved reputation in England for free love,\(^12\) as this was a place where women sold themselves for an

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6. American Prohibitory Act, 1776, 16 Geo. 3, c. 5; Trade with America Act, 1783, 23 Geo. 3 c. 26; Trade with America Act, 1783, 23 Geo. 3 c. 39; Order-in-Council of July 2, 1783, London Gazette, July 1-5, 1783, at 1 (LG).


8. Donald J. Orth, *Dictionary of Alaska Place Names* 238 (1967) (entry for Bligh Reef in Prince William Sound); In re Exxon Valdez, 270 F.3d 1215, 1221 (9th Cir. 2001) (discussing Bligh Reef, which holed the Exxon Valdez).


11. Daily Universal Register (London), May 11, 1787, at 3. *The Times* was founded in 1785 under this title and assumed its more familiar name in 1788. This same issue had items about John Adams, American minister at London, meeting with George III; the endless Warren Hastings impeachment; and Alexander Hamilton fighting the Whiskey Rebellion.

iron nail.\textsuperscript{13} Bligh obliged his men, and "[t]he women from shore were regularly allowed to spend the nights on board the \textit{Bounty} in glorious Anglo-Tahitian coexistence in the fo’c’sle."\textsuperscript{14} When the \textit{Bounty} weighed anchor in April 1789, the men faced a year on a crowded ship—without women. Soon after sailing, Bligh’s second-in-command, Fletcher Christian, suffered a nervous breakdown and led some of the crew to mutiny,\textsuperscript{15} thereby committing a capital offense.\textsuperscript{16} Bligh and all the loyalists who could fit in a tiny launch were set adrift and miraculously made it to Timor in the Dutch East Indies, three thousand miles away.\textsuperscript{17} Bligh returned to England a hero and again went to Tahiti for breadfruit—this time successfully.\textsuperscript{18} A separate expedition to the Pacific rounded up several mutineers, some of whom were hanged for their part in the mutiny.\textsuperscript{19} But Bligh’s reputation was ruined in his absence through a smear campaign conducted by a perfidious law professor—Fletcher’s brother Edward.\textsuperscript{20}
age of Bligh as a monster has ever since been perpetuated by writers and movie-makers.\textsuperscript{21}

After returning to Tahiti to drop off some of the crew and take on women, the mutineers searched for a good hiding place, coming to Pitcairn in January 1790.\textsuperscript{22} The volcanic island had once been peopled by Polynesians.\textsuperscript{23} It was, however, uninhabited by the time a British captain discovered it in 1767. Henamed it for a young midshipman whose father led the troops that marched on Lexington and Concord and, by the rude bridge that arched the flood, fired the shots heard round the world, thus starting the war that led to Pitcairn’s reoccupation.\textsuperscript{24}

Those first Pitcairn settlers committed another capital offense when, after stripping her upon arrival, they burned the \textit{Bounty}.\textsuperscript{25} Thus Pitcairn’s legal history begins with two hanging offenses. “Pitcairn’s meagre legal history can scarcely be separated from its general history,” since “[n]early all the significant events in its history have . . . legal significance.”\textsuperscript{26}

II. A STATE OF NATURE: 1790

For thirty-five years the islanders existed in almost total isolation.\textsuperscript{27} That apartness has been the defining characteristic of the island’s story and most changes have been brought by outsid-
No ships called for eighteen years after settlement and the fate of the *Bounty* was only discovered in February 1808 by the American sealer *Topaz*. The first English vessel to touch at Pitcairn following its rediscovery was *H.M.S. Briton* in 1814.

“The early history of the settlement is a tale of faction and murder.” The original population had been twenty-seven: nine mutineers plus eighteen Tahitians (six male, twelve female). The islanders related to the first visitors that there had been much violence on the island and Fletcher Christian himself had been murdered by one of the Tahitian men about two years after settlement. One of the mutineers drowned after jumping off a
cliff “in a fit of drunken delirium.” In all, seven Englishmen and all six Tahitian men had been murdered and one Englishman died a natural death. Out of the bloodbath, the surviving mutineer was Alexander Smith, who assumed the name John Adams.

### III. INSTITUTED IN THE TIME OF MAN’S INNOCENCY: 1829

Initially, the islanders were governed by Adams, a benevolent despot. He “had solved every issue of society and government by a complete fusion of morals and politics, and of church and state.” It was lawless in every sense, a legal terrain vague. Singlehandedly the unlettered seaman Adams educated his charges and created a new society, conduct that has been written of heroically:

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39. Cf. Frederic E. Brown, *The Sources of the Alaska and Oregon Codes*, 2 *UCLA Alaska L. Rev.* 87, 88–90 (1973) (describing how there were no laws for even the most basic needs in Alaska from the United States taking possession from Russia in 1867 until Congress in 1884 applied the laws of Oregon to Alaska).
“Many notable cases of religious conversion have been recorded in the history of Christianity, but it would be difficult to find an exact parallel to that of John Adams. The facts are quite clear. There is no question as to what he was and did after all his shipmates on the island had perished. He had no human guide or counselor to turn him into the way of righteousness and to make him feel and shoulder responsibility for bringing up a group of boys and girls in the fear of God. He had a Bible and a Prayer Book to be the instruments of his endeavour, so far as education, or rather lack of education, served him. He may well have recalled to mind memories of his own childhood. But there can be only one simple and straightforward explanation of what took place, that it was the handiwork of the Almighty, whereby a sailor seasoned to crime came to himself in a far country and learnt and taught others to follow Christ.”

The Pitcairners’ story thus became a “text for Victorian moralists.” The “attraction of Pitcairn’s story was the miracle of God’s grace triumphing over men’s evil . . . where every beatitude of the gospel had become a way of life.” Pitcairners, a happy, peaceful pious people—teetotalers too!—became, in popular imagination, the proprietors of a Utopia, an Eden, a Paradise, the Elysian Fields in the South Seas. From the earliest articles in the press their religiosity was discussed and praised. The island’s creation myth—sex, mutiny, murder, and wickedness followed by redemption, piety, goodness, and harmony—was Biblical. Inevitably the Pitcairners were held up as role models to the world.

40. Lucas, supra note 34, at 15–16.
43. See generally Samuel Warren, The Paradise in the Pacific, 73 BLACKWOOD’S EDIN. MAG. 647, 656-58 (1853) (Scot.) (discussing piety of islanders), reprinted in Samuel Warren, 1 MISCELLANIES CRITICAL, IMAGINATIVE, AND JURIDICAL 305 (Edinburgh, William Blackwood 1855) and 38 LITTEL’S LIVING AGE 131 (1853); A Real Utopia, N.Y. TIMES, Dec. 17, 1878, at 4 (“this Utopia, this new Atlantis, this home of Paradisic purity”); ALFRED McFARLAND, MUTINY IN THE “BOUNTY!” AND STORY OF THE PITCAIRN ISLANDERS 237 (Sydney, J.J. Moore 1884) (teetotalers); HUBERT HOWE BANCROFT, THE NEW PACIFIC 519 (rev. ed. 1913) (leading American historian calling it “the Terrestrial paradise of Dante”).
44. E.g., Mutineers of the Bounty, 35 NAVAL CHRON. 17, 23 (1816) (Eng.). See also Primitive Life in the Pacific: A Day on Pitcairn’s Island During a Voyage from Australia to San Francisco, 37 AM. NEPTUNE 66, 68 (1977) (report by 1868 visitor: “the strictness of their religious observances is one of their strongest peculiarities”).
45. Louis Le Feure, Pitcairn Island: A Study in the Evolution of Rascality, 77 FORUM 903, 911 (1927) (calling it “Utopia” and tracing the path from evil to good); [NATHAN WELBY FISKE], ALECK: THE LAST OF THE MUTINEERS, OR, THE HISTORY
The first laws, "Mosaic in origin," were enacted around the
time of Adams's death, which occurred in March 1829.46 This
was done at the suggestion of George Hunn Nobbs, an Irish-born
former member of the Royal and Chilean navies who had arrived
in November 1828 and immediately became the island's school-
teacher and pastor.47 Four in number, the laws banned murder,
thief, adultery, and the removal of landmarks; murder was pun-
ishable by death; adultery by whipping and marriage within three
months; theft by threefold restitution.48 The islanders organized
themselves by electing their own magistrate and conducting trials
by jury.49 The islanders, though left on their own by the mother-
land, "consider[ed] the King of England as their sovereign."50

Two years after Adams's death, the islanders expressed fears
of overcrowding to the British government.51 As a result, in 1831
the British arranged to relocate the islanders to Tahiti.52 But
they found it a South Seas Vegas, full of "immorality, saloons,

46. FISKE, supra note 45, at 150. There is disagreement as to whether the laws
immediately preceded or followed the death of Adams. Id. at 128. One source states
a code of laws was signed before Adams's death by the male heads of families. Id. at
150. But Captain William Waldegrave of H.M.S. Serapins reported in March
1830 the laws came after Adams died. John Barrow, Some Recent Accounts of the
Pitcairn Islanders, 3 J. ROYAL GEOG. SOC'Y 156, 160–1 (1833) (Eng.) [hereinafter
Barrow Accounts].

47. Goddard, Raine at 284; KIRK, supra note 13, at 70–72; McLoughlin, supra
note 28, at 142. For more on Nobbs, see MURRAY, supra note 37, at 162-194; H.E.
Maude, George Hunn Nobbs, 2 AUSTRALIAN DICTIONARY OF BIOGRAPHY 288
(1967); and RAYMOND NOBBS, supra note 38.

48. Barrow supra note 46, at 160 (describing laws); John Barrow, The Pitcairn
Islanders, 2 NAVAL MAG. 311, 317 (1837) [hereinafter Barrow Islanders]. Exodus
20:13 ("Thou shalt not kill."); id. 20:14 ("Thou shalt not commit adultery."); id. at
20:15 ("Thou shalt not steal."); Proverbs 22:22 ("Remove not the ancient
landmark.").

49. Letter from Arthur Quintal, Jr., Chief Magistrate of Pitcairn Island, to Rev.
S.C. Damon, Sandwich Islands, (Jan. 11, 1844) in FISKE, supra note 45, at 154. Con-
tra Neill, supra note 31, at 4 ("After [Adams's] death there was no settled form of
government for some years").

Ranee Surnomoye Dossee, [1863] Moore 22 (P.C.) (appeal taken from Sup. Ct. of
("Where Englishmen establish themselves in an uninhabited . . . country, they carry
with them not only the laws, but the sovereignty of their own State").

51. FISKE, supra note 45, at 141. See also SILVERMAN, supra note 3, at 92–95.

52. H.E. Maude, Tahitian Interlude: The Migration of the Pitcairn Islanders to
the Motherland in 1831, 67 J. POLYNESIAN SOC'Y 115 (1958) (IPS), reprinted in OF
ISLANDS, supra note 22, at ch. 7; WALTER BRODIE, PITCAIRN'S ISLAND AND THE
ISLANDERS IN 1850 67-76 (London, Whitaker 3d ed. 1851) (FP) (vital for reproduc-
ing primary source documents), microformed on American Culture Series, Reel 80.3
(University Microfilms)(reproducing official correspondence on relocation); FISKE,
supra note 45, at 141–51 (reproducing account of captain who transported islanders);
Barrow Accounts, supra note 46, at 162–65 (same).
vile dances, gambling, and scarlet women” and returned home after six months.53

IV. JOSHUA HILL: 1831–7

“A small island easily falls under the domination of a boss, who cruelly or subtly intimidates” all opposition.54 History gives us several accounts of adventurers setting up on an island and lording over it, among them Tristan da Cunha in the South Atlantic,55 Swains Island in the South Pacific,56 Niihau in the Hawaiian chain,57 and the Cocos (Keeling) Islands in the Indian Ocean.58 It is such a well-known trope that it even befell the Americans who survived the wreck of the S.S. Minnow.59 And it happened on Pitcairn too.60 Just after resettlement, there arrived “an interfering and slightly insane old busy body who had taken a gratuitous interest in the community and . . . took upon himself the task of correcting and organizing it to his own satisfaction.”61 This was Joshua Hill—another Englishman—who claimed to have been sent by London but was self-appointed and whom the

53. FREDERICK O'BRIEN, ATOLLS OF THE SUN 153 (1922); FISKE, supra note 45, at 143-44.
54. Arthur Lewis, Epilogue to JOHN MORDECAI, FEDERATION OF THE WEST INDIES 461 (1968). This is the American edition of a volume published in Britain as The West Indies and the Federal Negotiations.
58. See generally J.C. Ross, A Visit to the Cocos or Keeling's Islands, 2 COLBURN'S UNITED SERV. MAG. & NAVAL & MIL. J. 113 (1844) (Eng.) (account by the adventurer himself taking over the Cocos Islands). Islands, 25 J. MALAYAN BRANCH ROYAL ASIATIC SOC'Y 1 (1953) (Sing.) (same).
59. Gilligan's Island: The Little Dictator (CBS television broadcast Sept. 30, 1965) (a deposed Latin American dictator is parachuted onto the island by his nation's new government, whereupon the dictator, possessing the only gun, takes command of the castaways). See also Robert M. Jarvis, Legal Tales from Gilligan's Island, 39 SANTA CLARA L. REV. 185 (1998).
trusting islanders accepted. Since he was able to convince a Royal Navy officer of his bona fides, it was understandable that the islanders, ignorant of the outside world, believed him.

Hill proclaimed a Commonwealth with himself as President. He was assisted in his rule by a Privy Council of seven that he alone appointed. Hill clashed with the other Englishmen: Nobbs, who in his roles as teacher and pastor was a power center, and John Buffett and John Evans, who arrived together in 1823. Hill had Evans and Buffet publicly flogged, passed a law to prevent their children from inheriting property, and took away their right to bear arms. With a gun under his seat, Hill lectured the islanders every Sunday, espousing Methodism and condemning the late Adams. Nobbs, Buffett, and Evans fled to Tahiti in 1834.

Hill was deposed by a Royal Navy captain in 1837, Edward Russell of H.M.S. Actæon, who revealed to the islanders that Hill had neither credentials nor authority over them. Hill was deported the next year. He made his way back to London, where

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62. See id. at 145; H.E. Maude, The History of Pitcairn Island, ALAN STRODE CAMPBELL, ROSS & ALBERT W. MOVERLEY, THE PITCAIRNESE LANGUAGE 72-73 (1964); Silverman, supra note 3, at 180; Shapiro, supra note 60, ch. 4, John Buffett, A Narrative of 20 Years Residence on Pitcairn Island, 4 THE FRIEND 2, 50-51 (1846) (A first-hand account of Hill's regime from an islander)(FP). An account of Hill by Buffet's granddaughter is Young, supra note 33, at 75-85.

63. Letter from Capt. Charles H. Freemantle, H.M.S. Challenger, (May 30, 1833), in Barrow Accounts, supra note 46, at 164-67. This officer is the namesake of the city in Western Australia.

64. McLoughlin, supra note 28, at 145-46. Rosalind Young refers to “four principal men to support him, to whom he gave the title of elders. These were supplemented by three sub-elders, and four cadets.” Young, supra note 33, at 76. See also W.W.B., An Impudent Fraud: How “Lord” Hill Governed Pitcairn Is., 7 PAC. IS. MONTHLY, 37, 38 (1936); Léonce Jore, «La grande révolution à Pitcairn»: Épilogue de la célèbre mutinerie du «Bounty» [The Great Revolution in Pitcairn: An Epilogue to the Celebrated Mutiny on the Bounty], 102 REVUE POLITIQUE ET PARLEMENTAIRE [POL. REV. & PARL.] 58, 69-72 (1950) (Fr.) (discussing Hill).

65. Lucas, supra note 34, at 11-12; Young, supra note 33, at 54-64.


68. Brodie, supra note 52, at 192; Nobbs, supra note 38, at 30. See also Lucas, supra note 34, at 18 (“Hill... after the most outrageous proceedings [appears] to have practically enforced the banishment of the three Englishmen.”).

69. Letter from Captain the Right Honorable Lord Edward Russell of HMS Actæon, in Valparaiso to the Marquesas, Sandwich, Tahiti, and Pitcairn Islands, 7 NAUTICAL MAG. & NAVAL CHRON. 514, 520-21 (1838) (Eng.) (stating Captain Russell “gave judgment against Mr. Hill, telling the natives who he was, and that he had no longer any power over them” and informed Hill “he must leave the island at the first opportunity”).

70. H.W. Bruce, Voyage of H.M.S. Imogene, Captain H.W. Bruce—Sandwich, Tahiti, and Pitcairn Islands, 7 NAUTICAL MAG. & NAVAL CHRON. 737, 743 (1838) (Eng.) (“Mr. Hill... we brought away at his own request. He had made himself very obnoxious to the natives, having assumed a power and control over them which he
he lobbied the government to be paid for his services by way of printed pamphlets addressed to the Colonial Office and the Admiralty, writings that show clear signs of Hill’s persecution complex and megalomania.  

71. Hill’s lasting contribution to the world was his contribution to literature.  

72. Freed of Hill’s dictatorship, Nobbs, Buffett, and Evans returned.  

V. THE FLY CONSTITUTION: 1838

Pitcairn is closer to South America than Australia. Its connections to South America were strong in the early days as the Royal Navy—whose Pacific Squadron was based in Valparaiso, Chile—looked in on Pitcairn regularly.”  

74. Hill’s tenure showed the need for a proper government.  

75. As did the depredations of visiting sailors, who took advantage of the islands because there were not considered to be under the protection of Britain or any other power.  

had neither authority to do, nor ability to execute effectually; and same being led away to side with him, the seeds of dissension among the people were thus sown.”).  


73. Kirk, supra note 13, at 87.  


76. Id.; Capt. Russell Elliott, H.M.S. Fly, to Rear Adm. Charles Bayne Hodgson Ross, Commander-in-Chief, Pacific Station, (Jan. 25, 1839), in BRODIE, supra note 52, at 82–83. The originals are in the National Archives ADM 1/48 and reproduced at PCR 3-1230 to 3-1243.
One of the visiting captains remedied this problem with a document referred to both as “Pitcairn’s Magna Carta” and its first “constitution,” drafted by Captain Russell Eliott\(^\text{77}\) of H.M.S. Fly and signed aboard his ship on November 30, 1838.\(^\text{78}\) Eliott is said to have claimed the island for Queen Victoria (The islanders wrote her in 1853 saying just that.).\(^\text{79}\) But it is unclear if he explicitly did so.”\(^\text{80}\) However, the language of the laws shows a clear intent that the island be British. The chief magistrate’s oath was:

I solemnly swear that I will execute the duties of magistrate and chief ruler of Pitcairn’s Island . . . by dispensing justice and settling any differences that may arise, zealously, fearlessly, and impartially and that I will keep a register of my proceedings and hold myself accountable for the due exercise of my office to Her Majesty the Queen . . . .\(^\text{81}\)

The islanders were devoted to their sovereign. An attempt by the French to occupy the island in 1849 was rebuffed.\(^\text{82}\) One visitor in the 1870’s reported the first thing he was asked on arriving was “How’s Victoria?”\(^\text{83}\) The British government has publicly stated that its sovereignty over the island began with Eliott’s

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\(^\text{77}\) His name is spelled as “Elliott” with a double “I” in most of the Pitcairn literature but the official Navy List spells it with a single “I.” The Navy List, Corrected to the 20th Dec., 1834, at 15 (London, John Murray 1834) (U.K.). Correspondence from the period in the Privy Council Record repeatedly shows his name as “Eliott.” Eg. PCR 3-1231 (TNA ADM 1/48).

\(^\text{78}\) Maude, supra note 62, at 72-73; Silverman, supra note 3, at 180; Queen v. Seven Named Accused, [2004] I.L.R. 232, ¶¶37-49 (Pitcairn Is. Sup. Ct.). See Brodie, supra note 52, at 82-91 (reprinting Eliott’s report and text of his laws); Bockrath, supra note 54, at 66-69 (reprinting laws). One source says Nobbs wrote the laws and Eliott gave sanction to them. Nobbs, supra note 38, at 34.

\(^\text{79}\) Letter from Arthur Quintal, Jr., Chief Magistrate, to Queen Victoria, (July 27, 1853), in Murray, supra note 37, at 243-4.

\(^\text{80}\) Murray, supra note 37, at 262, writes that the island’s register, which he said was in his possession, states: “This island was taken possession of by Captain Eliott, on behalf of the Crown of Great Britain, on the 29th of November, 1838.” Walter Brodie in his earlier account also states the register contains this information about claiming the island. Brodie, supra note 52, at 116. However, the transcription of the register published in 1929 does not include this passage. See Pitcairn Island Register Book, supra note 34, at 262. In the Privy Council Record is the printed transcription interlincated by photoreproductions of the original, now in the possession of the National Maritime Museum, Greenwich, London. The relevant handwritten page is the same as the printed transcription. See PCR 3-999.

\(^\text{81}\) Brodie, supra note 52, at 84.

\(^\text{82}\) McFarland, supra note 43, at 139-40. The islanders’ feelings about the French were typically British: “We are indeed British subjects and we think it a great privilege to be considered so; and when we see the flag of Old England waving from the staff in front of the schoolhouse, we often remark to each other with grateful hearts, ‘That’s our safeguard from the ugly French!’” Letters from the Pitcairn Islanders, 13 Chambers’ Edin. J. 234, 234-35 (1850) (Eng.) (reprinting letter from pupils of Pitcairn school, Aug. 11, 1847).

\(^\text{83}\) Recent History of the Pitcairn Islanders, 52 Chambers J. Popular Literature Sci. & Arts 730, 732 (1875) (Eng.).
In 2004 efforts were made by attorneys in the first case ever held in the Pitcairn Supreme Court to elicit a ruling that Britain had not properly taken the island and therefore had no authority to bring the case. But because the government had declared Pitcairn to be British, the courts did not disturb that finding.

Eliott’s actions were approved of by his superior officer. The captain that deposed Hill had urged action to be taken by London: “I fear that unless some person with authority from the Government is sent to superintend their internal affairs, that there will be constant quarrels and disturbances upon the Island.” Another naval officer repeated this call in 1844: “I would again take the liberty of pressing on the notice of the Government that this interesting people should no longer be left without more efficient Authority to control them.”

But this was met with skepticism in London, a top colonial official writing in 1846 that the island and its people were

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86. See Christian v. The Queen, [2006] UKPC 47 ¶9 (appeal taken from Pitcairn Is.), citing Coast Lines, Ltd. v. Society Nazionale di Navigazione (The Fagernes), [1927] P. 311 (A.C.) 324 (Eng.). Cf. Nyali v. Attorney-General, [1956] 1 Q.B. 1, 15 (Eng.) (“The courts rely on the representatives of the Crown to know the limits of its jurisdiction and to keep within it. Once jurisdiction is exercised by the Crown the courts will not permit it to be challenged.”); Post Off. v. Estuary Radio, Ltd. [1968] 2 Q.B. 740 at 755 (Eng.). In a case from the San Juan Islands—now a part of Washington State but then disputed between the United States and Canada—the court dismissed a sovereignty question because it was a political question for the executive to resolve. See Watts v. United States, 1 Wash. Terr. 288, 295–6 (1870). See also Legal Status of Eastern Greenland (Den. v. Nor.), 1933 P.C.I.J. (Ser. A/B) No. 53, at 46 (Apr. 5) (holding a sovereign need not exercise its powers extensively in a territory to be sovereign over it); Clipperton Island Arbitral Award of King Victor Emmanuel III, Jan. 28, 1931, 26 AM. J. INT’L L. 390, 393-94 (1932), translating 2 REPS. INT’L ARBITRAL AWARDS 1105 (holding that when a territory is uninhabited sovereignty is perfected from the moment possession is taken and no other state disputes that possession).

87. Letter from Rear Adm. Charles Bayne Hodgson Ross, Commander-in-Chief, Pacific Station, to Charles Wood, Sec’y of the Admiralty, (Feb. 8, 1839), in PCR 3-1244 to 3-1249 (TNA ADM 1/48).


of no more use to the Nation at large, than if they were settled in the Interior of Africa. Yet we are constantly making them Presents, sending Ships to visit them, permitting Naval Officers to make a sort of code for their Government, & to appoint rulers over them; and, now, one of those Officers recommends that a [governor should] be appointed and a Missionary sent out to take care of this little hamlet which has, already, become too populous for the subsistence of its Inhabitants. My own opinion is that the kindest & wisest thing [would] be to convey them all, as opportunity may offer, to New South Wales, the nearest British Colony[,] or to New Zealand, where they might be very useful.90

The basic system codified by Eliott endured for generations and in 1937, a colonial officer reported that Pitcairners were “deeply attached to their system.”91 Nonetheless, there was Nineteenth Century criticism of the form of government when it went to Norfolk Island with the Pitcairners in 1856:

One thing is most certain, that is, that the present form of government by an elected Magistrate will never do, and must be stopped at once, for there is neither justice nor order. Everybody is so closely related, and everybody lives in a 'glass house', and is afraid to throw a stone, so that the Chief Magistrate dare not administer even justice, or he would be pounced upon at once, and is in a constant fear of how a decision will be regarded by others, who may, and would retaliate, if they do not approve.92

The constitution provided for a magistrate chosen by universal adult suffrage—making Pitcairn the first place in the world to grant women the vote.93 Elections were initially held on New

Year’s Day, with the magistrate chosen by plurality. To avoid a repeat of the Hill years and to check Nobbs’s power, the magistrate was required to be a native-born islander. The magistrate, who exercised judicial and executive power, governed with two councilors. One was chosen by the people, the other by the magistrate.

The laws limited the authority of the magistrate. They required him to keep a journal “so that no one shall plead ignorance of the law for any crime he may attempt, and to annually visit landmarks and replace those damaged. It forbid the islanders from “bringing up things that are past to criminate others with a view to prevent justice with the case before the magistrate.” The laws imposed rules on dogs, cats, and hogs, established a school and made education compulsory, enacted a conservation law for timber, forbid “bringing up things that are past to criminate others with a view to prevent justice with the case before the magistrate”, appointed churchwardens, forbid the killing of white birds, regulated trade with passing ships so spirits could not be brought back, and regulated the


94. *Brodie*, supra note 52, at 84 (reprinting election regulation); Emily M. McCoy, *The Pitcairn Island Miracle in Ethnology*, 57 INDEPENDENT 712, 713 (1904) (article by the daughter of Pitcairn’s leader). Later elections would be held on Christmas Day. PAC. ISLANDS Y.B.301 (Stuart Inder ed., 12th ed. 1977); Murray, supra note 37, at 100; J.B. Claydon, *Report [to the Governor of Pitcairn] on Administrative Visit to Pitcairn Island, Jan. 30, 1954*, ¶163, in PCR 6-2585 (FCO PIT 2/XIII-3) (describing 1953 election, which took place at 6 a.m. on December 25).

95. *Brodie*, supra note 52, at 84.

96. *Id.* at 85.

97. *Id.* at 84.

98. *Id.* at 85 (Law No. 1 stating magistrate governed with consent of the people and cannot assume power on own).

99. *Id.* at 86 (Law No. 1).

100. *Id.* at 90 (Law No. 8). This is the familiar English custom of “beating the bounds.” See Ebenezer Cobham Brewer, *Brewer’s Dictionary of Phrase & Fable* 97 (Harpercollins 15th ed. 1995).

101. *Id.* at 88–89 (Law No. 6 requiring notice be given of plans to harvest timber, forbidding the stockpiling of wood, and forbidding one from cutting down another’s windbreak) and 89–90 (Law No. 7 to conserve timber).

102. *Id.* at 86 (Law No. 2).

103. *Id.* at 86–7 (Law No. 3).

104. *Id.* at 87 (Law No. 4).

105. *Id.* at 87–8 (Law No. 5).

106. *Id.* at 88–9 (Law No. 6 requiring notice be given of plans to harvest timber, forbidding the stockpiling of wood, and forbidding one from cutting down another’s windbreak) and 89–90 (Law No. 7 to conserve timber).

107. *Id.* at 88–9 (Law No. 6).

108. *Id.*

109. *Id.*

110. *Brodie*, supra note 52, at 90.
public anvil and sledgehammer. Serious cases were to be referred to the captains of passing British warships for adjudication as were any appeals of minor cases. The laws also made Pitcairn the first British territory to require children to attend school.

The island was frequently visited at this time with the rise of the American whaling industry. In some years, visiting ships came fortnightly, as the islanders welcomed visitors in the Nineteenth Century.

VI. ADMIRAL MORESBY AND NORFOLK ISLAND: 1850's

Rear Admiral Fairfax Moresby, the Commander-in-Chief of the Royal Navy's Pacific Station, visited in 1853 and urged the Pitcairners to make revisions to their laws. Among his suggestions were requiring the magistrate to be at least twenty-eight, raising the voting age to twenty, and requiring laws be approved at public meetings of heads of households and "elders." He also recommended the magistrate try to mediate disputes before referring them to a jury of heads of households and elders. The islanders ratified all these ideas.

111. Id. at 90–1 (Law No. 10 required return of tools else the borrower would be liable for their replacement).
113. McLoughlin, supra note 28, at 152.
115. Brodie, supra note 52, at 249 (twenty ships called in 1849).
117. See Notes of Admiral Moresby’s Address to the Pitcairn Islanders, (May 17, 1853), in PCR 3-1326 to 3-1341 (TNA ADM 1/5618).
118. See generally id. Elders were those at least twenty-eight years old who were not heads of households.
119. Id.
120. Letter from Arthur Quintal, Chief Magistrate, and Thomas Buffett & Edward Quintal, Councillors, to Rear Adm. Fairfax Moresby, Commander-in-Chief, Pacific Station, (May 18, 1853), in PCR 3-1342 to 3-1345 (TNA ADM 1/5618). These changes have been referred to in some sources as a new constitution. E.g., Sue Far-
With renewed fears of overcrowding expressed to Admiral Moresby, the British government arranged a second exodus. This time, the entire population of 163 crossed the Pacific in 1856 for the former prison island of Norfolk, an isolated rock between the North Island of New Zealand and New Guinea. Again, homesickness arose and three years later, sixteen returned, followed by others in 1864. But most of the islanders remained on Norfolk, and their descendants still live there to this day. Today's Pitcairners are consanguine with the mutineers, with only limited outside blood having come into the community in the last 150 years. Upon reoccupation of Pitcairn, the legal *status quo ante* resumed in 1864.

VII. SETTLEMENT: 1870's

Admiral Algernon Frederick Rous de Horsey visited in 1878 and reported the code had changed somewhat. He noted:


123. See generally A Native [Rosalind Amelia Young], The Mutineers of the "Bounty": The Pitcairn Islanders From 1859–80, 22 Scribner's Monthly 54 (1881) (describing years after return); Young, supra note 33, at 137–87 (same).

124. Clarke, supra note 122, at 147.

125. Ernest Schubert, Pitcairn Island Today, in Alan Strode Campbell Ross & Albert W. Moverley, The Pitcairnese Language 26 (1964); Pitcairn Island, Sydney Morning Herald (Sydney, N.S.W.), June 13, 1876, at 3 (NLA) (reporting two shipwrecked sailors had joined the community). Cf. Marc T. Greene, Lonely Isle, 45 Asia & the Am. 588, 591 (1945) (stating immigration was needed for island's survival).

126. McLoughlin, supra note 28, at 156.

127. See U.K. Colonial Off., Pitcairn Island: Report Received from Rear-Admiral de Horsey, Commander-in-Chief on the Pacific Station 6 (London, H.M.S.O. 1878) [hereinafter de Horsey] [reprinting code]. See also A Worldlet Within the World, 140 Living Age 185 (1879) (commenting on de Horsey's report); Young, supra note 33, at 201–11 (report by islander on de Horsey's visit and quotes his report at great length).
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The almost puerile simplicity of the laws is perhaps the best evidence of the good conduct of the people. The law is, in fact, merely preventive, no case of theft, fornication, or use of profane language (apparently the only three crimes contemplated as possible) having been known to occur since the laws were drawn up.\(^{128}\)

The admiral stated the code was undated but had been drawn up by James Russell McCoy when he became magistrate,\(^{129}\) which occurred in 1870.\(^{130}\) The code was clearly based upon the \textit{Fly} laws of 1838 as it began with the magistrate's oath and duties.\(^{131}\) All lawmaking power was vested in him, but he could convene the heads of families to discuss new laws.\(^{132}\)

The code made contempt of the magistrate an offense.\(^{133}\) Making false claims was banned.\(^{134}\) Blows except in self-defense were outlawed;\(^{135}\) theft was punishable by restitution and a fine.\(^{136}\) Lovers were fined and any offspring of the union was to be supported by the father for life.\(^{137}\) Swearing was punishable.\(^{138}\) So was taking coconuts from the other side of the island.\(^{139}\) Informants got half the fines imposed on thieves, fornicators, profaners, and coconut smugglers.\(^{140}\) There continued to be laws regulating hogs, dogs, cats, and fowl.\(^{141}\)

Admiral de Horsey encouraged more attention be paid to Pitcairn by London because of the island's poverty, isolation, and Britishness: "Her Majesty the Queen does not believe possess in any part of the world more loyal and affectionate subjects than this little knot of settlers."\(^{142}\)

\begin{thebibliography}{99}
\bibitem{128} \textit{De Horsey}, supra note 127, at 1.
\bibitem{129} \textit{Id.}
\bibitem{130} \textit{Nicolson}, supra note 60, at 244–6.
\bibitem{131} \textit{De Horsey}, supra note 127, at 6.
\bibitem{132} \textit{Id.}
\bibitem{133} \textit{Id.} (Law No. 6).
\bibitem{134} \textit{Id.} (Law No. 1).
\bibitem{135} \textit{Id.} (Law No. 5).
\bibitem{136} \textit{Id.} (Law No. 2).
\bibitem{137} \textit{Id.} (Law No. 3). On Norfolk, fornication was punished by the tremendous fine of £10! \textit{Colonial Off., Pitcairn Islanders} at 22 (reprinting Norfolk Island Law No. 40).
\bibitem{138} \textit{De Horsey}, supra note 127, at 6 (Law No. 4).
\bibitem{139} \textit{Id.} (Law No. 6).
\bibitem{140} \textit{Id.} (Laws No. 2–4, 6).
\bibitem{141} \textit{Id.} (Laws No. 8–11).
\end{thebibliography}
But the admiration of de Horsey was not shared by Captain Bouverie F. Clark of H.M.S. Sappho, who visited in 1882. In his report, he stated the primary occupation of the island’s men was thieving aboard passing ships. He reported on the squabbling between families and was informed by the magistrate that petty larceny was rife.

Clark said government was not working because the islanders were divided on family lines and suggested London send an outsider to take charge. He stated their “fervent loyalty has also been much exaggerated” and claimed the Pitcairners would readily transfer their allegiance to any foreign power sending supplies. Clark also said the utopia commonly imagined abroad was not borne out by reality.


144. SAPPHO, supra note 143, at ¶15.

145. Id. at ¶20. Cf. H. H. Montgomery, THE LIGHT OF MELANESIA: A RECORD OF THIRTY-FIVE YEARS MISSION WORK IN THE SOUTH SEAS 26–27 (1896) (writing of the Pitcairners’ cousins on Norfolk Island that they needed “a magistrate from outside. At present, as they are all related, the magistrate is uncle or cousin to every soul amongst them, and it must be hard indeed for the embodiment of the law to resist the pleadings of his relations”).

146. SAPPHO, supra note 143, at ¶21. Pitcairners have more recently been reported to be interested in being annexed by France because of British slights. Simon Winchester, MUTINY FOR FRENCH BOUNTY, THE GUARDIAN (London), June 12, 1993, at 26; York Membery, BOUNTY ISLAND SHAPES UP FOR FINAL MUTINY, SUNDAY TIMES (London), Apr. 16, 2000, at 29. But the claims of disloyalty have been denied by the Government in the House of Commons. E.g., 238 PARL. DEB., H.C. (6th Ser.) (1994) 544W (U.K.).

147. SAPPHO, supra note 143, at ¶22. Bockrath, LAW ON REMOTE ISLANDS at 80–81 suggests the Heisenberg Uncertainty Principle might be at work on Pitcairn. For example, the colonial officer H.E. Maude, in 1940–41 to write a new code, wrote: “They had a custom which they called ‘hypocritting the stranger,’ which meant that they gave an appearance of strict austerity to the outside world. For instance, being Seventh-Day Adventists they naturally never touched any alcohol, and when I used to ask them why they had a bottle of brandy lying on the shelf they invariably replied that it was to run in their hair, which they alleged made it grow luxuriantly, and when we attended [a] wedding . . . no-one alluded to the fact that the bride, who was being married for the first time, had for her bridesmaids three of her children.” SUSAN WOODBURY, WHERE OUR HEARTS LIE STILL: HARRY AND HONOR MAUDE IN THE PACIFIC ISLANDS 160 (2003). The islanders converted en masse to the Adventist faith in the 1880’s. See generally YOUNG, supra note 33, at 229–36; Karen Nugent, IT ALL STARTED WITH A CRATE OF Pamphlets, TELEGRAM & GAZETTE (Worcester, Mass.), Feb. 13, 2000, at A1; Herbert P. Ford & Wilona Karimabadi, THE BOUNTY and the Bible, ADVENTIST WORLD, Jan. 2009, http://www.adventistworld.org/index.php?issue=2009-1001; P. Harry Ballis, RELIGION ON PITCAIRN ISLAND: THE FIRST HUNDRED YEARS, ADVENTIST HERITAGE, Fall 1979, at 40. A reporter in 2004 made the island sound like something out of Shirley Jackson’s “The Lottery” and claimed “hypocritting the stranger” was still going on, stating “the dissembling tradition” dated to John Adams’s stories to the first visitors. MARKS, supra note 142, at 165–66. An attorney sent by the Governor of Norfolk (and of New South Wales) to investigate the Pitcairners’ cousins on Norfolk Island in 1885 wrote similarly: “Here, the whole system,
at the request of the islanders: "That from henceforth, July 2, 1882, no strangers are to be allowed to settle on the island."\textsuperscript{148}

The captain acted because previous settlers had run amok; a decade before Clark visited another Navy captain reported that immigrants ignored the Pitcairn laws and there was no legal way to keep them from settling.\textsuperscript{149}

Another captain who visited in 1884 transcribed the laws. This copy is similar to Admiral de Horsey’s.\textsuperscript{150} This version spells out who can vote—all adults who have reached twenty-one—and that the magistrate must be at least thirty.\textsuperscript{151} There were now twenty-three laws, up from the eleven after Clark’s immigration law was added.\textsuperscript{152} The laws on attacking others, insulting the magistrate, coconuts, and animal control remained, but the law against stealing was missing.\textsuperscript{153} A new law, dated October 1882, was added on goats.\textsuperscript{154} The law against fornicators—with its reward for informants—was complemented by this provision: “No two persons of different sex are permitted to lie in bed or have any such unlawful connection, but must be tried and punished.”\textsuperscript{155} Making false reports “for jealousy or revenge” was punishable.\textsuperscript{156}

and everything arising from it is rotten. The whole thing is a great falsehood from John Adams’s time until now. And unless an immediate stop is put to this kind of thing, the consequences will be most disastrous. It really appears to me wonderful that a small community like this should have succeeded in so completely gulling the whole world into the belief that they are an isle of saints. I believe there is more immorality of all kinds here, according to population, than in any other civilized part of the world.” Extract of a Letter from Henry Wilkinson, Q.C., to Lord Augustus Loftus, Governor of Norfolk Island & New South Wales, in \textit{Papers Relating to Her Majesty’s Colonial Possessions: Reports for 1883, 1884, and 1885, 1886, [C. (2d series) 4842]}, at 227–8, in \textit{45 P.P. (1886) 1, MF 92.337–9, IUP Colonies 24.}

Other correspondence between Wilkinson and Loftus, also highly critical of the Norfolkers, is printed in that report, \textit{ supra}, at \textit{ supra note 92}, at 279–88.


151. \textit{Id.}

152. \textit{Id.} at 7–8.

153. \textit{See} \textit{id.}

154. \textit{Id.} at 8 (Law No. 22). An attorney who visited in 1937 to review the legal code found that “[i]n reading [the goat law] one breathes the very air of Pitcairn.” \textit{James ScottNeill, Ten Years in Tonga} 184–85 (1955).

155. \textit{Condition, supra} note 150, at 7, 8 (Laws No. 2, 8).

156. \textit{Id.} at 8 (Law No. 12).
By the terms of a law enacted by the British Parliament in 1887, Pitcairn was deemed a "settlement," as it was a British possession acquired through neither conquest nor cession. But that status had no immediate effect on Pitcairn Island.

VIII. PARLIAMENTARY PROCEDURE: 1893

In October 1892, Captain Eustace Rooke of H.M.S. Champion drafted a new code. He suggested enlarging the number of officials, and the islanders agreed:

Whereas, We have witnessed in the past, that, thro' lack of strength and firmness, on the part of government officers, some evil has resulted, and,

Whereas, We believe that a larger number of officers would tend to make a stronger government, and that plans for the public welfare would be executed with better success, therefore,

Resolved, That we heartily indorse the plan of having a government consisting of a parliament of seven, with power to legislate, to plan for the public good, to execute all decisions of the court, and to see that all public demands are attended to without any unnecessary delay.

The new system was a parliamentary form of government effective January 1, 1893; it consisted of a seven member legislature elected annually with a president, vice-president, secretary, and judge chosen from the parliamentarians. Decisions of the
judge were appealable to the island’s parliament, as in England at the time.\textsuperscript{161} Sex was on the mind for Rooke’s codified laws on bastardy, adultery, fornication, and voyeurism.\textsuperscript{162} Two laws dealt with making false accusations.\textsuperscript{163} Wife beating was outlawed.\textsuperscript{164} Attacking others was criminal, but self-defense was codified, as was carrying a concealed weapon.\textsuperscript{166} Shooting in the village was banned.\textsuperscript{167} The laws also protected animals from cruelty.\textsuperscript{168} The coconut law reappeared, plus a new one to protect sugar cane.\textsuperscript{169} Those “staying around, meddling, or interfering with [public officials] in their business, and thus hindering work, or in any was causing trouble” could be punished.\textsuperscript{170} Labor on public works was expected of males fourteen and up.\textsuperscript{171}

IX. THE WESTERN PACIFIC HIGH COMMISSION: 1898

Two murders on Pitcairn in 1897 prompted action to put the Pitcairn government on a firmer legal footing. So he could marry another, Henry Albert “Harry” Christian slit the throats of his


\textsuperscript{162} Shapiro, \textit{supra} note 60, at 292 (reprinting Law 4, criminalizing fornication); \textit{id.} at 292 (reprinting Laws 5 and 6, criminalizing adultery); \textit{id.} at 292-93 (reprinting Law 7, criminalizing fornication: “It shall be unlawful for two persons of the opposite sex to associate together . . . to create scandal, or to endanger the morals of the rising generation by their evil example.”); \textit{id.} at 293 (reprinting Law 8, criminalizing voyeurism: “It shall be unlawful for anyone of the opposite sex to intentionally remain near the place where the women and girls do their washing.”).

\textsuperscript{163} Shapiro, \textit{supra} note 60, at 293 (reprinting Law 9, making it an offense “to raise a fake report against his neighbor out of malice or revenge” and Law 12, making it an offense to “bring forward any charges against anyone, said charge . . . having a month previous to the time of its being made known to the parliament, and produced for the sake of malice or revenge”).

\textsuperscript{164} Id. at 294 (reprinting Law 13).

\textsuperscript{165} Id. at 293 (reprinting Law 11).

\textsuperscript{166} Id. at 294 (reprinting Laws 14 and 15).

\textsuperscript{167} Id. at 295 (reprinting Law 21).

\textsuperscript{168} Id. at 295–6 (reprinting Laws 16 and 17).

\textsuperscript{169} Id. at 296–7 (reprinting Laws 24 and 25). \textit{See also Pitcairn Islands: Sad State of Affairs, Barrier Miner} (Broken Hill, N.S.W.), Mar. 27, 1899, at 3 (NLA) (finding humor in laws on coconuts, dogs, and cats).

\textsuperscript{170} Shapiro, \textit{supra} note 60, at 297 (reprinting Law 27).

\textsuperscript{171} Id. (reprinting Law 26).
lover and their child and cast their bodies into the sea.\textsuperscript{172} British officials debated what to do, and one thought the only solution was to bring Christian to London for trial at the Old Bailey.\textsuperscript{173} The Attorney-General and Solicitor-General recommended to the Colonial Secretary that Pitcairn be brought under the authority of the High Commissioner for the Western Pacific so that Christian might be tried in the High Commissioner's Court.\textsuperscript{174}

The Western Pacific High Commission\textsuperscript{175} (W.P.H.C.) was created in 1877.\textsuperscript{176} Britain's goal for the High Commission was to better provide for government and justice in the Pacific after earlier laws had proven ineffective.\textsuperscript{177} A principal evil the High

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
  \item Letter from Capt. Henry H. Dyke, H.M.S. Comus, to the Sec'y of the Admiralty, Nov. 10, 1897, in PRC 4-1615. \textit{See also Tragedy at Pitcairn Island, The Mercury} (Hobart, Tas.), Aug. 16, 1898, at 2 (NLA); \textit{Murder by Pitcairn Islander, The Argus} (Melbourne, Vic.), Oct. 17, 1898, at 4 (NLA).
  \item Minute of Edward Wingfield, Permanent Undersec'y of State, Colonial Off., Febr. 14, 1898, in PCR 4-1628 to 4-1629 (TNA ADM 1/5618). The Offences Against the Person Act, 1861, 24 & 25 Vict., c. 100, § 9 (Eng.) states: "Where any murder or manslaughter shall be committed on land outside of the United Kingdom . . . every offence committed by any subject of Her Majesty . . . may be dealt with . . . in England or Ireland . . . as if such offence had been committed" there). The entire debate in London is in documents at PCR 4-1618 to 4-1680 (TNA CO 225/55).
  \item Western Pacific Order, 1877, § 7, 68 B.S.P. 328, 14 H.C.T. 871, \textit{issued pursuant to authority granted} by Pacific Islanders Protection Act, 1877, 38 & 39 Vict., c. 51, § 6. \textit{See also Pacific Islander Protection Act, 1872, 35 & 36 Vict.,} c. 19 (earlier statute with same purpose)Revisions were made in the Western Pacific Order, 1877, by the Western Pacific Order, 1879, 70 B.S.P. 277, 14 H.C.T. 1245; and Western Pacific Order, 1880, 71 B.S.P. 294, 15 H.C.T. 752. All were superseded by the Pacific Order, 1893.
  \item \textit{E.g., Offences at Sea Act, 1806, 46 Geo. 3,} c. 54 (providing for prosecution of crimes at sea, itself a response to the ineffectiveness of the Offences at Sea Act, 1586, 28 Hen. 8, c. 15, and Piracy Act, 1698, 11 Will. 3, c. 7); \textit{Murders Abroad Act, 1817, 57 Geo. 3,} c. 58 (providing for criminal prosecution); \textit{New South Wales Act, 1823, 4 Geo. 4,} c. 96, § 2 (giving jurisdiction to try offenses in the Pacific to Supreme Courts of New South Wales and Van Dieman's Land [Tasmania]); Australian Courts Act, 1828, 9 Geo. 4, c. 83, § 4 (continuing that jurisdiction). The background for the 1817 act is discussed in \textit{Ward, supra} note 74, at 31-40. The 1856, 1698, and 1817 laws are discussed in 2 \textit{Francis Pigott Taylor, Nationality, Including Naturalization and English Law on the High Seas and Beyond the Realm} 89-90 (1907).
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotesize}
Commissioner was to combat was the kidnapping and enslavement of Pacific natives by ruthless planters in Peru, Queensland, and elsewhere.178 (America was partly to blame because its Civil War drove cotton prices higher and led to new plantings of that crop worked by slaves.)179 An extensive documentary record had been laid before Parliament about these problems.180

The W.P.H.C. was based in Fiji, 3,320 nautical miles from Pitcairn.181 (French Polynesia occupies most of the space between the two.)182 Arthur Gordon, Fiji’s governor in the 1870’s, had been a strong advocate for creating the High Commission to bring law and order to the Pacific.183

The High Commissioners—with one exception—were concurrently Governors of Fiji until the two posts were separated in 1952.184 Though the Fiji Legislative Council as early as 1908


180. E.g., Correspondence Regarding the Removal of Inhabitants of Polynesian Islands to Peru, 1864, [C. (1st ser.) 3307], in 66 P.P. (1864) 607, MF 70.547; Correspondence Relating to the Importation of South Sea Islanders into Queensland, 1867–68, H.C. 391, in 48 P.P. (1867–8) 537, MF 74.582–3, IUP Australia 25; Correspondence Respecting Outrages Committed upon Natives of the South Seas, 1874, H.C. 232, in 45 P.P. (1874) 507, MF 80.386–7.

181. McLoughlin, supra note 28, at 139.

182. For the French proclamation of March 10, 1882, claiming Tahiti, see 79 B.F.S.P. 152. An account by the British consul at Tahiti at the time of the French move on the islands in the 1840’s is George Pritchard, The Aggressions of the French at Tahiti (Paul de Deckker ed. 1983).


184. Martin Wight, British Colonial Constitutions, 1947 76 (1952); 262 Parl. Deb., H.C. (3d ser.) (1881) 1115–16 (stating first W.P.H.C. and second governor of Fiji kept W.P.H.C. post when he went to New Zealand as its governor in
called for the posts be severed because Fiji needed a full-time administrator but was ignored. The High Commissioners superintended a collection of islands, most lightly populated, strung across a vast span of the Pacific. It was an area “greater than that occupied by the Russian Empire.” In addition to his duties as Governor of Fiji, the High Commissioner at various times oversaw many other islands operating under a hodgepodge of constitutional arrangements. Among these islands were the Gilbert and Ellice Islands, modern Kiribati and Tuvalu; the Union Islands, now Tokelau; the protectorate over Tonga; the British Solomon Islands Protectorate; the Cook Islands; the Anglo-French condominium of the New Hebrides, now Vanuatu; and the Anglo-American condominium over Canton and Enderbury Islands in the Central Pacific. Even today,

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186. Alexander Pulling, *Pacific Islands*, 10 *Encyclopædia of the Laws of England with Forms and Precedents* 245 (A. Wood Renton & Max A. Robertson eds. 2d ed. 1908); Harry C. Luke, *From a South Seas Diary*, 1938–1942, at 9 (1945) (Luke was High Commissioner 1938–42); Wight, *supra* note 184, at 77; Alexander George Herder Grantham, *Via Ports: From Hong Kong to Hong Kong 78* (1965) (Grantham was High Commissioner 1945–7); Roberts-Wray, *supra* note 157, at 895; 522 *Parl. Deb., H.C. (5th ser.*) (1953) 356 (stating that after the move to Honiara, the High Commissioner governed 60 main islands and the furthest of his domains, the Line Islands, were 3,000 miles from his headquarters).

187. G. William Des Vœux, *My Colonial Service in British Guiana, St. Lucia, Trinidad, Fiji, Australia, Newfoundland, and Hong Kong with Interludes* 353 (Nabu Press 2010) (1903) (author was Acting Governor of Fiji, 1878–79, but not acting W.P.H.C. as the Chief Justice of the High Commissioner’s Court served as acting W.P.H.C. under the Western Pacific Order). For an excellent map showing the breadth of the W.P.H.C.’s territory see *British Islands, supra* note 157, at 47.


190. See generally *Pacific Order, 1893, § 6(1)*; Morrell, *supra* note 181, at 269–79.

191. See generally *Pacific Order, 1893, § 6(1).*

192. See generally *Pacific Order, 1893, § 6(1) (referring to Tonga by its older name, “the Friendly Islands”)*; Morrell, *supra* note 178, at 310–29.


195. Id. at 349–60.

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most of these islands are thinly populated, e.g. Tuvalu, a chain 360 miles long with ten square miles of land, has 10,500 residents.197 “Despite the great scope of the Western Pacific High Commission’s responsibilities and their vast geographic sweep, the W.P.H.C. office in Fiji was a modest, one might say pinchpenny operation,” with only eleven employees in the 1930’s to govern the entire British Pacific.198

Pitcairn was outside the ambit of the W.P.H.C. as originally constituted.199 But Britain’s Colonial Secretary possessed authority to extend the High Commissioner’s jurisdiction.200 To prosecute Christian, the Colonial Secretary on May 3, 1898, followed the Law Officers’ advice and placed Pitcairn under the W.P.H.C.201 In practice, the High Commissioner for decades delegated his authority for Pitcairn to the British consul at Tahiti.202

All judges of the Supreme Court of Fiji were Judicial Commissioners for the Western Pacific for purposes of trial in the High Commissioner’s Court for the Western Pacific. Appeals

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202. See Dupont, supra note 175, at 1206. For examples of these appointments, see 83 U.K. Foreign Off., Foreign Office List and Diplomatic and Consular Yearbook for 1910, at 356 (1910) (noting Arthur Longford Sholto Rowley, appointed consul at Tahiti in 1908, was also appointed Deputy Commissioner for the Western Pacific in 1909); id. at 369 (noting Robert Teesdale Simons, appointed consul at Tahiti in 1894, was also appointed Deputy Commissioner for the Western Pacific in 1903); 48 William Hepworth Mercer & Arthur Ernest Collins, Colonial Office List for 1919, at 417 (1919) (noting W.J. Williams, consul in the Society Islands, was “Deputy Commissioner, Pitcairn Island”).
went to the Supreme Court of Fiji. After the Colonial Secretary put Pitcairn under the High Commissioner, the Christian murder was referred to the High Commissioner's Court. The chief police magistrate of Fiji, Hamilton Hunter, was made a judicial commissioner to try the matter and was sent to Pitcairn aboard H.M.S. Royalist to hold court on the island. Christian was tried before Hunter and two officers of the Royalist sitting as assessors. The court returned a conviction and a sentence of death; Christian was removed to Fiji where he was hanged.

X. THE REST OF THE STORY

Things had come full circle. Mutiny begat hangings “from the highest yardarm in the British fleet” and the Pitcairn kill-
ing spree of the 1790's led to a new society. The murders of the
1890's led to another lawful hanging and placing a new British
administration over Pitcairn. A lawyer sent in 1937 to review the
island code was struck by how the Pitcairn laws were "interesting
for the good sense which prompted them and for the very sim-
plicity of the language in which they [we]re framed. The Pit-
cairners ha[d] done a good job on their island."\(^{210}\)

The Western Pacific High Commissioner continued to over-
see Pitcairn until 1952, when Pitcairn received its own colonial
government.\(^{211}\) But the Governor of Fiji continued to concur-
rently serve as Governor of Pitcairn until Fiji's independence in
1970.\(^{212}\) Since then, the British ambassador to New Zealand has
been Governor of Pitcairn and the administration of the island
has been conducted from the British consulate in Auckland.\(^{213}\)

In 1904, the British consul at Tahiti and Deputy Western Pa-
cific High Commissioner rewrote the laws and ended the parlia-
mentary system by returning the island to the previous magis-
trate system.\(^{214}\) The laws were rewritten in 1940 by another
Deputy High Commissioner, but the old ways survived and were
simply recodified.\(^{215}\) The island today elects a mayor, a deputy
mayor, and a council who have limited authority.\(^{216}\) Ultimately,
legislative power rests solely in the governor's hands.\(^{217}\) The gov-
ernor has exercised this power frequently in the past decade, so
that Pitcairn now has a statute book of 797 pages.\(^{218}\) The flurry
of lawmaking came as most of the adult men on Pitcairn were
charged with having systematically raped the girls of the island

\(^{210}\) HALLIWELL'S FILM, VIDEO & DVD GUIDE 2005, at 595 (John Walker ed. 20th ed.
2004) (the Author has repunctuated the text from Halliwell to reflect Laughton's
delivery).

\(^{211}\) NEILL, supra note 154, at 185–86.


\(^{213}\) Fiji Independence Act, 1970, c. 50 (U.K.); Fiji Independence Order, 1970,

\(^{214}\) FOREIGN & COMMW. OFF., PARTNERSHIP at 62; Salt v. Fell, [2008] 3
N.Z.L.R. 193, ¶¶4-5 (litigation between island commissioner, Salt, and Pitcairn gov-
ernor, Fell).

\(^{215}\) See generally SIMONS, supra note 160.

\(^{216}\) See Pitcairn Island Government Regulations, 1940, 1941 W. Pac. High
Comm'n Gazette 359 (Fiji).

\(^{217}\) Local Government Ordinance, 1967 § 3 (Pitcairn Is.) (codified as amended at LAWS OF PITCAIRN, HENDERSON, DUCIE AND OENO ISLANDS ch. 11 (Paul Julian
Treadwell comp. 2010), available at http://government.pn/Laws/index.html) [herein-
after LAWS].

\(^{218}\) PITCAIRN CONST., art. 36(3) (Governor may legislate without consulting Is-
land Council).
for decades. And in 2010 another big change arrived—an elaborate constitution with as many articles as there were inhabitants of Pitcairn. This is a big change from the 19th Century, when a visitor claimed the islanders “have laid down a rule for themselves—a golden one—NEVER TO MAKE A LAW UNTIL IT IS WANTED.”

“For generations [Pitcairn’s] name has been a synonym for isolation, its people the children of loneliness. A little world that sprang into being amid violence and bloodshed it worked out its own destiny.” After decades of minimal involvement by Britain, it took the legal conundrum of how to prosecute a murderer to bring the island into an organized government. But once the murderer Harry Christian was hanged, Britain again took a laissez-faire approach to the island for a century until crime once more spurred it to action. And now in its third century, the legal pendulum on Pitcairn has swung far in the opposite direction. The British government, with its heavy-handed and undemocratic approach toward the island’s affairs, seems to have taken cues from Charles Laughton’s Bligh.

The island began with mutiny and murder and its story “has been transformed over time into near myth, casting a spell of its own on poets, historians, and Hollywood producers in its passage from dark adventure to pastoral idyll.” Supposedly “[f]rom [Pitcairn’s] petty history the philosopher of another planet could reconstruct the whole of human society.” An overstatement, surely, but its story does give us a remarkable example of the law in miniature.


221. METOIXOE, Pitcairn’s Island, SYDNEY MORNING HERALD (Sydney, N.S.W.), Oct. 19, 1850, at 3 (NLA). The same rule is stated—sans capitals—in Murray, supra note 37, at 255.


APPENDIX A: OTHER SOURCES ON THE PITCAIRN ISLANDS

The author recommends the following sources for general legal history of the Pitcairn Islands:

- David Silverman, Pitcairn Island (1967), and Robert W. Kirk, Pitcairn Island, The Bounty Mutineers and Their Descendants (2008) (both are among the best histories of the Pitcairn Islands).

- [John Barrow], The Eventful History of the Mutiny and Piratical Seizure of H.M.S. Bounty: Its Cause and Consequences (London, John Murray 1831) (author had access to all official papers), reprinted in an abridged and illustrated edition as The Mutiny of the Bounty (Gavin Kennedy ed. David Godine 1980) (the first book-length account after Blight’s);

- William Bligh, A Narrative of the Mutiny on Board His Majesty’s Ship Bounty and the Subsequent Voyage of Part of the Crew, in the Ship’s Boat, from Tofoa, One of the Friendly Islands, to Timor, a Dutch Settlement in the East Indies (London, George Nicol 1790), reprinted in William Bligh & Edward Christian, The Bounty Mutiny 1-66 (Penguin Classics 2001) (Captain Blight’s published account of the mutiny);

- Donald J. Orth, Dictionary of Alaska Place Names 108 (1967) (U.S. Geological Survey Professional Paper No. 567) (Sir John Barrow, Second Secretary—the chief civil servant—of the Admiralty for four decades, was a promoter of Royal Navy polar exploration and is the namesake of America’s northernmost city);

- D. Bonner Smith, Some Remarks About the Mutiny on the Bounty, 22 Mariner’s Mirror 200-201 (1936) (Eng.) (Barrow’s book is the foundation upon which all later works draw).

- Sven Walhroos, Mutiny and Romance in the South Seas: A Companion to the Bounty Adventure 289 (1989) (an extremely useful book with a narrative chronology and an encyclopedia of all people and things connected with the mutiny and Pitcairn).

The author also found the following works on Pitcairn Island possessing noteworthy historical significance (they are listed in chronological order):

- [Nathan Welby Fiske], Aleck: The Last of the Mutineers, or, The History of Pitcairn’s Island 133-38 (Amherst, Mass., J.S. & C. Adams 2d ed. 1843) (ostensibly
a biography of the last of the mutineers but focusing more on the mutiny and the islanders);

- Walter Brodie, Pitcairn’s Island and the Islanders in 1850 67-76 (London, Whitaker 3d ed. 1851) (FP) (vital for reproducing primary source documents), microformed on American Culture Series, Reel 80.3 (University Microfilms);

- Thomas Boyles Murray, Pitcairn: The Island, the People, and the Pastor, to Which Is Added a Short Notice of the Original Settlement and Present Condition of Norfolk Island 117-24 (London, Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge 12th ed. 1860) (Murray was a top official of S.P.C.K. and his book continued to be revised and reprinted as late as 1909);

- Diana Jolliffe Belcher, Mutineers of the Bounty and Their Descendants in Pitcairn and Norfolk Islands (New York, Harper & Bros. 1871) (best-selling, biased account—Belcher’s stepfather was convicted of mutiny against Bligh—that brought the notion of Bligh as monster to a new generation);

- Alfred McFarland, Mutiny in the “Bounty!” and Story of the Pitcairn Islanders 237 (Sydney, J.J. Moore 1884) (account written by New South Wales judge);

- Rosalind Amelia Young, Mutiny of the Bounty and Story of Pitcairn Island, 1790–1894, 21-31 (5th ed. Mountain View, Calif., Pac. Press Publishing Ass’n 1894) (the only book-length account by a native of the island);

- Harry L. Shapiro, The Heritage of the Bounty: The Story of Pitcairn Through Six Generations 88-105 (1936) (account by American anthropologist particularly useful for reproducing legal texts);

- Luis Marden, I Found the Bones of the Bounty, NAT’L GEOG. MAG., Dec. 1957, at 725 (lengthy article with excellent contemporary material on Pitcairn);

- H.E. Maude, The History of Pitcairn Island, ALAN STRODE CAMPBELL ROSS & ALBERT W. MOVERLEY, THE PITCAIRNENE LANGUAGE 45-101 (1964) (comprehensive account by colonial officer—who became a highly respected Pacific historian—who spent months there in 1940’s);

- ROBERT B. NICOLSON, with BRIAN F. DAVIS, THE PITCAIRNERS (Univ. of Haw. Press 1997) (1965) (excellent account by an Australian);

- IAN M. BALL, PITCAIRN: CHILDREN OF MUTINY AT 30 (1973) (study by the Australian-born New York correspondent of London’s Daily Telegraph focusing on daily
life of the Pitcairners from personal experiences and interviews); 

- **Spencer Murray, Pitcairn Island, the First 200 Years** (1992) (good account of Twentieth Century history, usually neglected in the Pitcairn literature); 

- Trevor Lummis, Pitcairn Island: Life and Death in Eden (1997) Lummis (recounting story from settlement to removal to Norfolk in 1856 and which was heavily relied on by judges in the 2004 rape prosecutions); 

APPENDIX B: A NOTE ON SOURCES

Bluebook states that “a parallel citation to an Internet source with identical content may be provided if it will substantially improve access to the source cited.”224 Many printed sources relied upon by the Author are available online. This is indicated by an abbreviation following the print citation rather than clutter the footnotes with addresses that are impossible to retype.225 These abbreviations are:

(AO)=Project Archive, wwwArchive.org;
(FP)=Fateful Pitcairn, www.pitcairn.fatefulvoyage.com;
(LG)=London Gazette, www.london-gazette.co.uk;

A number of items cited are from archives. The archives are abbreviated with the archival record numbers indicated where known:

(WPA)=Western Pacific Archives, Special Collections, University of Auckland Library, Auckland, New Zealand.226

The archival documents cited herein were reproduced in the appellate record submitted to the Judicial Committee of the Privy Council in its consideration of Christian v. The Queen.227 These items are cited as PCR (“Privy Council Record”) followed by a two-part page number, e.g., 1-150 means volume one, page 150. (N.B. The pagination is continuous through all volumes.) The archival file numbers were supplied by Ned Fletcher, a New Zealand barrister who worked for the prosecution on the Pit-

225. Id. at 168 (stating exact addresses should not be used if “long, unwieldy, or full of nontextual characters”).
cairn case. The Author has reviewed the documents only through the PCR. Because the PCR is not readily available to scholars, the Author has deposited electronic copies with the Pitcairn Islands Study Center, Pacific Union College, Angwin, California;\textsuperscript{228} the Pacific Collection, Thomas Hale Hamilton Library, University of Hawaii, Honolulu; and the Center for Adventist Research, James White Library, Andrews University, Berrien Springs, Michigan.

"P.P." indicates the British Parliamentary Papers, some of which have been filmed by Chadwyck-Healey in its House of Commons Parliamentary Papers Series. The cite "61 P.P. (1897) 161, MF 103.499–500" means the document was at page 161 of volume 61 of the Session Papers—akin to the U.S. Congressional Serial Set—for the 1897 session of the House of Commons, and the document is on microfiche numbers 103.499 and 103.500 of the Chadwyck-Healey edition.\textsuperscript{229} In some years, there were multiple sessions of Parliament, which are marked thusly: (1857 Session I). "IUP" refers to the selective Irish University Press 1000-Volume Series of British Parliamentary Papers, 1801–1899, giving the division (e.g. "Australia") and volume number the report appears in. Britain’s Parliamentary Debates, a.k.a. Hansard, are online at http://hansard.millbanksystems.com (covering 1803–2005) and http://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/hansard (covering Commons debates from 1988 to date and Lords debates from 1995 to date).

\textsuperscript{228} See Book on Pitcairn Given to PUC Library, 153 Adventist Rev. & Sabbath Herald 1338 (1976).