

The Jenny Interviews and Other Sightings: Needle(s) in the Proverbial Haystack(s)

By Dr. Donald Albert

On April 28, 1789, acting Lieutenant Fletcher Christian disposed “Captain” William Bligh and 18 crew from the HMAV *Bounty* just off Tofua, South Pacific Ocean. Bligh’s successful open-boat journey to Timor ranks among the greatest survival stories in naval history. Christian’s returned to Tahiti, failed settlement at Tubuai, and eventual “rediscovery” of Pitcairn Island are well known among *Bounty* enthusiasts.

Hundreds, if not thousands, of books and articles have been written on the *Bounty/Pitcairn* Island Saga over the last 230 years, including those written by naval officers, early visitors, descendants (Rosalind Amelia Young, Glynn Christian), journalists, and scholars from most notably history, but also those with credentials in anthropology, sociology, geography, and even psychology.

Prior to Henry Evans Maude’s (1958) article published in *The Journal of the Polynesian Society* (Volume 11, 1964) titled “In search of a home: From the mutiny to Pitcairn Island (1789-1790),” the *Bounty’s* post-mutiny peregrinations from its return to Matavia Bay, Tahiti, on June 6, 1789 and the “rediscovery” of Pitcairn Island on January 15, 1790, were sketchy at best.

Maude, a former colonial administrator and subsequent research fellow at the Australian National University, located two “lost” newspaper articles pertaining to the *Bounty* and Pitcairn Island. These articles contained interviews with Teehuteatuaonoa (aka Jenny), the consort initially of mutineers Alexander Smith (John Adams) then Isaac Martin. In these interviews Jenny provided geographic references and clues that elucidated the *Bounty’s* path post mutiny.

Jenny’s accounts also illuminated life on Pitcairn Island, especially the violence that occurred during its first 10 years. Maude had found the proverbial needle in the haystack, actually two needles, one buried in the *Sydney Gazette* and the other in the *Bengal Hurkaru*. Since then, *Bounty/Pitcairn* Island scholars have oft cited these two items in their notes

or references. Teehuteatuaonoa’s version of places and events have been judged more reliable than those of John Adams, alias Alexander Smith, the last surviving mutineer, whose proffered multiple and conflicting versions over the latter course of his life.

While John Adams had to be wary of the British Admiralty arresting, court martialing, and hanging him, Jenny did not have to contend with the same intimidation. While facts gleaned from the Jenny interviews are akin to a treasure chest filled with gold and silver coins, her accounts must be scrutinized nonetheless. This short piece describes her two interviews and their main contributions in unraveling the post-mutiny wanderings and happenings. The author recommends that further studies employ diligence before assuming her accounts are sacrosanct. While there are more gems in the Jenny interviews that will likely prove useful to *Bounty/Pitcairn* Island scholars, there are some errors or inconsistencies worth noting.

The Interviews and Two Other Encounters

Since Maude’s “In search of a home” published in *The Journal of the Polynesian Society* in 1958 brought the Jenny interviews to the attention of scholars, the *Sydney Gazette* and *Bengal Hurkaru* and its reprinting in the *United Service Journal* have become must citations for scholars investigating the *Bounty-Pitcairn* Island Saga.

This first interview appeared in the *Sydney Gazette and New South Wales Advertiser* on July 17, 1819. A digital copy of the original article and transcript is available via Trove from the National Library of Australia <https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/2178824/494298>. This first newspaper article is from an anonymous author, but the title or byline is credited to the British and Foreign Bible Society. The editors included an introductory paragraph before quoting an account from a “Gentleman of Sydney” recently returning from the Society Islands who conversed with Jenny shortly after her

return to Tahiti after 28 years away. Here, Jenny's voice was filtered through two or more male actors: the gentleman of Sydney, and presumably by the editors of the *Sydney Gazette*. The authorship for the first interview is variously attributed to the *Sydney Gazette*, Teehuteatuaonoa, Jenny, or with both names, one in parentheses. Like some contemporary authors, I prefer using Teehuteatuaonoa to recognize both the female and Polynesian origin of this information.

The second interview was first published in the *Bengal Hurkaru* in 1826, a newspaper for British colonial administrators and expatriates residing in India. This article was reprinted in 1829 in the *United Service Journal*. A transcript of the 1829 article is available from the *Pitcairn Island Encyclopedia*, via the TEEHUTEATUAONOA ("Jenny") entry, then click "See also "Jenny" interview" <https://library.puc.edu/pitcairn/pitcairn/jenny.shtml>.

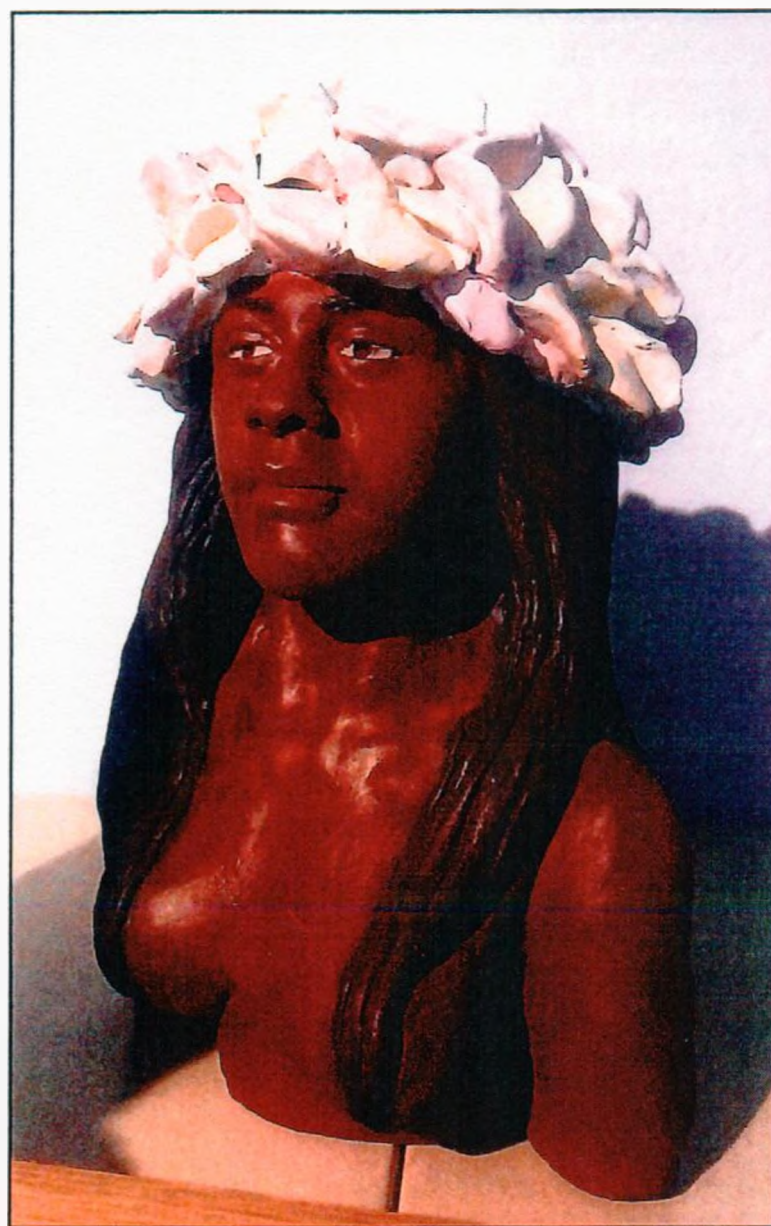
Frost stated that the account from the *Bengal Hurkaru* was reprinted in the *United Service Journal* with minor changes to phrasing (Frost, 2018, p. 308), but without access to both versions, I could not verify this. I have not been able to locate a physical or digital copy of the original publication in the *Bengal Hurkaru*.

While the Library of Congress has contributed digitized editions of the *Bengal Hurkaru* from 1805 to 1834 to its digital newspaper collections, the October 2, 1826, issue is not currently available (see <https://www.wdl.org/en/search/?collection=bengal-hurkaru-newspaper-collection>).

In this second newspaper article, Jenny was interviewed by Reverend Henry Nott and Captain Peter Dillon in Tahiti. Both individuals spoke Tahitian and translated and transcribed her words. Again her voice is filtered through the male perspective, however benign. This account just as the first interview requires thoughtful analysis to ensure that her female perspective survived interpretation, transcription, recounting, and editing.

Some recent scholarship credits Teehuteatuaonoa as "author," while other authors indicate Jenny, or a combination of the two with one or the other names in parentheses. Still other authors credit Nott and Dillon, the *Bengal Hurkaru*, or the *United Service Journal*. While these bibliographic inconsistencies are rather inconsequential, again I prefer to credit the interviewee as author using her Polynesian.

There were two other occasions that Jenny enters the public records. Samuel Topliff authored an article in the *Salem Gazette* on January 16, 1821, titled "Pitcairn island." Herein he reports that Mr. Downs, second officer of the *Sultan*, landed Jenny on "Nooaheevah" (The Marquesas) on May 31, 1818, via Coquimbo (Chile) and Pitcairn Island. After three



Figurine of Teehuteatuaonoa by Robert Brown, located at the Pitcairn Island Study Center, Pacific Union College, Angwin, California. (Photograph by author).

months in Nooaheevah she made it to Tahiti aboard the *King George*, when in March 1824 she met Captain Kotzebue, a Russian explorer and naval officer. He recorded a short account of their encounter that appeared in *A New Voyage Round the World in the Years 1823-1826* (Kotzebue, 1830).

There is some disagreement as to Jenny's command of the English language. During Captain Kotzebue's happenstance encounter with Jenny in Tahiti during March 1824, he noticed that she "spoke English well enough to carry on a conversation ..., but with a foreign accent" (Kotzebue, 1830).

Whereas, the “Gentleman” from Sydney reports that she “can speak neither English nor Tahitian, but a jumble of both” (*Sydney Gazette*, 1819). Which is it? Since the Reverend Nott and Captain Dillon both spoke English and Tahitian, might the 1826 account be a more authentic rendition of Jenny’s words than the 1819 interview? Perhaps, but the other issue is that all her words were shifted through a male sieve – the interviewers, writers, and editors that packaged her words for public consumption were all men. The extent to which these translations, interpretations, and summaries altered her thoughts is difficult to determine, but should at least be considered to have had some influence.

Contribution to Bounty/Pitcairn Island Research

After locating the lost interviews, Maude was able to reconstruct the post-mutiny path of the *Bounty* (Maude, 1958). One significant geographic clue recounts the *Bounty* sailing “between two mountainous islands, but the wind was so strong they could not land” (Teehuteatuaonoa, 1819). Maude (1958) identified these as Hunga Ha’apai and Hunga Tonga (28 miles northwest of Nuku’alofa, Tonga’s capital).

Although separate islands in 1789, these recently merged after an underwater volcano began erupting in December 2014 (Hughes, 2014). Maude’s investigation is a masterpiece of geographic sleuthing, so I won’t attempt to steal his thunder. I have, however, placed the *Bounty*’s track per Maude, within a Google Earth project so that one can “fly” from one island to another.

This project is titled “Teehuteatuaonoa aka Jenny: The most traveled woman of the Bounty,” and is currently under review with an academic journal. In that project, I captured screenshots and included detailed captions for each island along the *Bounty*’s path from Matavia Bay on June 6, 1789, to Pitcairn Island on January 15, 1790, including images encompassing locations along Jenny’s return voyage to Tahiti on the *Sultan* 28 years later (Albert, 2020).

Aside from demystifying the track of the *Bounty* after the mutiny, these interviews are a great source of the “marriage” arrangements on their nascent settlement on Pitcairn Island. Jenny goes into great detail on the sequence of deaths and killings that permeated the early years on Pitcairn Island. She

mentioned the birth of children, marriages, and other significant events like the arrival of the island’s first visitors. Jenny talks about the farming and hunting, making of tapa cloth, and other facets of surviving on this isolated speck of land.

Scrutinizing the “Facts”

While perhaps 90 percent (author’s guess) of the facts in the two interviews are most likely accurate, and have been used to substantiate much of what is known about the post-mutiny track of the *Bounty* and the early years on Pitcairn Island, the Jenny interviews should not be considered error free nor fully explored.

The first interview contains several alternative spellings or errors in naming. This is certainly understandable given aforementioned language and interpretation difficulties. For example, mutineers John Mills appears as John Main, and John Adams, alias Alexander Smith, is listed as Adams Smith. Mutineer McCoy appears as M’Koy, but even English natives have been known to use alternatives (Mickoy, McKoy).

Notice the interesting juxtaposition of the mutineer’s real and alias surnames: Adams Smith, rather than his *faux* name Alexander Smith or his real name, John Adams. In this account, Jenny’s husband’s name appears as Isaac Madden rather than Isaac Martin; this is understandable given these variations sound similar. The garbling of names in Jenny’s first interviews might be attributed to the difficulty translating through a foreign accent (Captain Kotzebue, 1830).

There are less spelling errors permeating the second interview, perhaps because of editorial oversight, with the last surviving mutineer alias correctly given as Alexander Smith, including his actual name John Adams within parentheses. These spelling inconsistencies are rather inconsequential given the treasure trove these interviews are to *Bounty*/Pitcairn Island scholars.

Errors

In the second interview, she mentioned that “one of the mutineers was mortally wounded with a spear” in a skirmish with the Tubuains. While most of this is correct, the spear stabbing that occurred on September 13, 1789, was not fatal. According to James Morrison (1792), Thomas Burkett

was struck on one of his ribs on his left side with a spear, but lacked the “force to break it.” Richard Skinner scuttled Burkett to the *Bounty* where his wounds were dressed, and was in fair condition later that same day. Burkett, however, was ultimately arrested in Tahiti by Captain Edward Edwards of the HMS *Pandora*. Burkett lived to die another day ... just over three years later on October 27, 1792, his lifeless body swung on the starboard yardarm off the mizzenmast of the HMS *Brunswick*.

In another instance, Jenny described the death of Vahineatua, one of the Polynesian consorts as the result of being pierced in her pregnant belly by a menacing goat. One would think that such an ignominious death would not be fabricated, and surely remembered.

However, Vahineatua died on Tahiti during the failed immigration in 1831, long after Jenny had left Pitcairn Island (Nicolson, 1997). Jenny attributed the death of John Williams’ wife, Faahotu, to a disease of the neck or scrophulous within a year of arriving on Pitcairn. While Jenny is likely correct, one version has her falling off a ledge collecting seabird eggs, then a not uncommon cause of death on Pitcairn Island (Nechtman, 2018).

Clarifying False Statements

Jenny disproves Ian Ball’s speculation that the first-born child of the mutineers and consorts occurred during the *Bounty*’s trek to Pitcairn Island (Ball, 1973). She noted that the assistant gardener, William Brown, baptized the infant about one year after arriving on the island. However, she states the child’s name as Friday October Christian, contrary to most contemporaneous accounts that favor Thursday October Christian (Albert, 2020).

Corroborating Observations

Of Thursday’s sister Mary Ann Christian, Jenny finds it important to state that she remained unmarried. When Jenny left on the *Sultan* in 1818, Mary would have been 25 years old; however, marriages were occurring at younger ages then. Other visitors to Pitcairn Island would inevitably mention Mary’s single status as if that was earthshaking news. For Jenny to mention Mary’s marital status, being single in the mid-20s must have been unusual.

Fitzsimons (2018), in his recent *Mutiny on the Bounty*, used Jenny’s accounts to hypothesize that

the mutineer who shot a native in the back while standing on the *Bounty* gunnel was no other than John Adams. There were nine mutineers onboard, and we know it wasn’t Christian as Jenny records his displeasure. That leaves eight potential murderers. Since John Adams was the only living mutineer when Jenny recounted this event, Fitzsimons assumes she neglected to provide a name to protect Adams.

While Adams and Young killed Quintal, they were protecting themselves from a death threat if one or the other didn’t hand over a wife. Adams didn’t have a history of wanton violence, so I didn’t think he shot the native. Jenny might have also been protecting the name of her deceased consort Isaac Martin, but again he didn’t have a history of cold-blooded murder. It would be interesting if this question was ever answered, but I don’t think we will ever know. Jenny does not provide enough information in her interviews to justify pinning the murder of this native on John Adams.

Conclusion

The Jenny Interviews have provided much valuable information for *Bounty* Saga scholars. Without these published accounts, much would remain unknown or muddled about the post-mutiny lives aboard the *Bounty* and on Pitcairn Island. The *Sydney Gazette* and *Bengal Hurkaru* interviews still provide clues and ideas for pursuing future research. However, as valuable as the Jenny interviews have been, the author encourages these documents to be scrutinized and critically reviewed before assuming that all statements in these documents are valid. I suspect that there is more academic mining awaiting *Bounty*/Pitcairn Island scholars who explore the Jenny interviews.

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