

## The Old Complaint of Stephen Reynolds

David A. Ward

On August 15, 1855, a Honolulu jury found that Stephen W. Reynolds, a resident merchant since 1823, was "a lunatic and of unsound mind, with occasional lucid intervals, . . . incapable of the government of himself or the management of his lands, tenements, goods and chattels . . . in a state of lunacy since the 26th day of April last."

Since Reynolds was 73 years old at the time, the jury's finding appears to have been accepted without question ever since, and his disabilities and eccentric behavior have been attributed to senility and possibly, particularly in the opinion of those who do not admire him, to a hereditary mental weakness.

In his daily journal, which he kept faithfully from 1823 to August 28, 1855, Reynolds made no reference to any serious illness before 1851, and considering sanitary conditions in Honolulu then, he seems to have been an unusually robust person.

On January 5, 1851, however, he wrote: ". . . I was very unwell, griping & relax, tho't I had been eating or drinking something. . . ."

He reported severe pains in his teeth on February 3, and that his face was swollen on February 16. This condition soon passed, but on June 20, he mentioned feeling weary and listless.

He seems to have continued in this state until December, 1851, to judge from the following journal entries:

July 27. . . . Slept in the forenoon from 10 to 12.

August 3. . . . I had the blue devils, did not sleep til eleven.

September 3. . . . very unwell, remained all day. At  $\frac{1}{2}$  past 1, sent for Doct. Rooke, who came, left pill & a bottle of snake root. Very poorly, no one called in. . . .

September 5. . . . quite sick, physic operating, made me feel ill. . . .

September 6. . . . felt rather weak . . . went home quite fatigued, afternoon slept awoke much better.

September 9. . . . felt rather better.

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September 10. . . . Fine more, hot day, had to go home, to bed, to sleep. Afternoon, towards night felt much better. . . .

September 13. . . . Quite poorly all day, pain over my kidneys. . . .

September 15. . . . Doct. Rooke called in, in evening, sent some pills, told me to wear flannel round small of my back.

September 25. . . . very poorly all day. . . .

September 28. . . . Very unwell all day. Kept my bed most of the day. Read some, in Law books. . . .

September 30. . . . I was very poorly, afternoon went over to see Doct. Newcomb. He gave me some pills. . . .

October 2. . . . my health improving a little. . . .

October 5. . . . afternoon slept. Felt very sleepy all day. . . .

October 8. . . . Matilda 21 years old today. . . . Afternoon, at home, felt better. . . .

October 9. . . . I was very unwell, got home at 1 p.m. went to bed, for the afternoon. . . .

October 11. . . . went home at 1.15, kept my bed till 5 p.m. . . .

October 12. . . . very unwell all day. . . .

October 13. . . . Sent for Doct. Newcomb to come and see what was the matter with my groin. He said it was a rupture!! I doubted. . . .

October 15. Fine morn, had quite an attack in my left eye, of a nervous kind, very painful. . . .

October 16. . . . very poorly. . . .

October 17. . . . very poorly all day. . . .

October 18. . . . was quite unwell. . . .

October 19. . . . a very bad day, pains in my head, laid on the bed all day, did not get to sleep til after midnight. . . .

October 20. . . . felt tolerably well. Capt. Baily came, and Mesmerized me, but could not put me to sleep. He called at 8.30 in morning and 5 p.m. . . .

October 21. . . . very bad night, one of the most severe pains in my head I have experienced. . . .

October 22. Beautiful morning. Coming round the corner by Hubertson's a severe shock of left eye, very severe, such pain. I got into the store lay down on counter. In about half an hour, pain subsided a little so that I went home, bathed my head in warm water. It relieved. After breakfast used warm water again. Pain eased but drew the eyelash down threw the sight so as to look to the right attacked on the right side of my head, with severe pains. . . .

October 23. Fine morn. Too unwell to go to the store. Pain in head, severe.

October 24. Fine morn. Pain in my head very severe. Kept house all day.

October 25. Fine weather. Unable to go out, only about the house.

October 26. Fine day. Kept house in the middle of the day.

October 27. Fine morn. Pain so severe I could not sleep.

October 28. Fine morn. Pain in head severe I had to walk the room all the latter part of the night.

October 29. Pleasant, warm day.

October 30. Fine morn.

October 31. Fine morn.

November 2. . . . I felt a little better. . . .

November 7. Fine morning. Getting better slowly. . . .

November 10. . . . quite unwell. . . .

November 12. . . . more unwell today. Pain in my head, owing I presume to the falling weather. . . .

November 13. . . . Fine afternoon, I felt better. . . .  
 November 14. Fine morn, down til 11 a.m. head pained, so I went home. . . .  
 November 16. . . . got home  $\frac{1}{2}$  to 9 some ways felt better, not so much headache.  
 November 18. . . . This day I am sixty nine years old. . . .  
 November 25. . . . very tired at night. . . .  
 November 27. Beautiful morn. At 10 was very ill, went to bed, where I kept all day,  
 got tea, went to bed again with my head very painful, til 11 o'clock. . . .  
 November 28. . . . staid home all day. . . .

The attack then appears to have subsided, for Reynolds resumed his business activities and engaged in litigation over land titles, with no reference to any physical or mental difficulties.

But seven months later, on June 24, 1852, Reynolds wrote: "Fine morn. Very warm day, was taken ill with my old complaint, pain over my eyes and side of my head, laid on the counter all the forenoon, bathed my head in warm water as soon as I got home, gave me relief. . . ." This spell of his "old complaint" continued until July 8.

On July 3, Reynolds noted: ". . . very sick today. Out of my head, tho't I was not at home." And on July 4, he wrote: "Sunday. Beautiful day. Judge Lee & wife called in. I tho't it Monday all the forenoon. At dinner I found my mistake."

For the following year, Reynolds' health was apparently good, but on May 7, 1854, he began writing his will, and on July 3, 1854, he recorded the onset of another attack, which lasted about two weeks.

On July 22, 1854, Reynolds sailed to California, to look into business possibilities, and upon his return to Honolulu in September, he began preparing to liquidate his assets.

After attending the funeral of Kamehameha III on January 10, 1855, Reynolds reported feeling very tired, and on January 20, after rounding up cattle at Nawiliwili, he wrote that he was "very feeble." His entry for January 21 reads only: "Feeble. Seemed lost several people called in."

On February 19, he wrote of "loitering about with heavy pain in my head, making arrangements to get money for my [sugar] syrup," and in the following months, Reynolds several times sought the help of friends in handling his business affairs.

Reynolds was clearly aware of his deteriorating condition, and the journal entries during the first four months of 1855 reflect a sense of urgency, as he struggled, apparently while suffering excruciating pain, to conserve as much of his property as possible for his heirs, the closest of whom were:

Susan Kukunaneki Jackson Reynolds, his wife.  
 William Pitt Reynolds, born February 13, 1827, son.  
 Matilda Reynolds, born October 8, 1830, daughter.  
 Evaline Reynolds, born December 25, 1831, daughter.  
 John Rice Reynolds, born November 21, 1833, son.  
 Harriet Reynolds, born August 27, 1835, daughter.  
 Edward Jackson Reynolds, born August 28, 1838, son.

Susan Reynolds was the mother of all of Reynolds' children, except William Pitt Reynolds, whose mother was a half-Hawaiian woman, Winship Harbottle. For all that has been written and spoken of the profligacy and licentiousness of the early non-missionary white residents of Hawaii, Reynolds' journal entry for May 5, 1829 would appear to constitute an adequate reply, for him at least:

. . . At 11 a.m. Winship the female who had lived with me since Sept. 1825 departed this life after four months lingering illness. Her active simplicity and kindness had drawn from all with whom she was acquainted their friendship and esteem. How much more than from me, who had every opportunity of knowing and experiencing her attention and disposition. Her behavior since my acquaintance has gained my esteem which will ever be remembered with feelings of the tenderest respect.

After the death of Winship, Reynolds was married to Susan Jackson, also half-Hawaiian, by no less a respectable personage than Hiram Bingham, head of the American Protestant Mission and fellow New Englander.

But Reynolds held no illusions about the probable fate that lay in store for persons of mixed blood in that age, particularly for those who lacked the advantages of a good education. He sent all of the children home to New England, to the great distress of his wife. But parting with the young children was probably equally painful to him.

On October 4, 1830, after putting his three-year-old son on board ship, he wrote:

. . . William Pitt Reynolds went in Trident under the care of Capt. Howland. Poor boy, you launch out into the world at an early period, without any friends to aid, advise or protect you. And still more that you were born of a female of the Sandwich Islands, which will always be a mark against you. Such is the ingratitude of the World. I send you to America that you may learn enough to be a good and useful member of Society, and make a living in the world. In doing this I do my duty to you—do your duty to yourself.

Then followed the departures of Matilda, Evaline, John and Harriet, at about the age of three. But when Reynolds tried to send his youngest child, Edward, to America, Susan successfully forestalled him for six years. Finally, on January 8, 1848, when Edward was nine, Reynolds wrote in his journal:

Fine morn. Mary at anchor at sunrise. At 4.30, Capt. Carter & his son Joseph came into the store. I asked him to go on board Toulon and go outside, so that I could get Edward, my son, on board to go to America, which I did. I sent Mr. Punchard's man Tim to get his bed, trunk and a mat tied up in a piece of brown cotton. Tim got the trunk & mat, but not the BED, pillo & Tappas!!! There was a blanket in his trunk. All got into the boat before I did. I stood on the Round House with him. I could hardly say, I so affected, "Edward, you are going to America, to see Matilda & your sisters and brothers." He began crying. I got off the the [sic] Round House, how I don'tknow, over the side into the boat and came ashore with Mr. Punchard, just 12 o'clock. EDWARD in Toulon going, with a good breeze to westward. . . . As I came down from dinner, Hannah & Susan met me right by E. C. Webster's store. They began saying, I was a a [sic] liar, deceiver &c for asking Edward to come up to breakfast and take off on board ship to send him to America. Said they would go to the Fort, to see if I was greater than the Chiefs. . . .

That Reynolds was mentally competent in the early part of 1855, is evident in all the journal entries through April 25.

On that date, he wrote:

Fine morn. Fine morn & fine day. I was posting books. Wrote a Warranty Deed for John Maxey for the corner of my store lot. Trying to make up Fayerweather girls' board & schooling bills, could not remember when Mrs. Bingham left. Townsend came from the wreck.

Subsequent entries are for the most part unintelligible, and as summer approached, Reynolds' physical discomfort seems to have increased and his ability to communicate deteriorated. Still, to the end of the journal, he was apparently aware of the significance of events occurring around him, despite the difficulty he obviously had not only in framing his thoughts coherently but also in the physical act of writing.

Some of the late entries, such as that for July 27, seem almost poetic:

We touch the verge, of the lamplighter. It is strong ungovernable was very ungovernable, all the things belong to him. They go to urge me. Now I think you hare heir—the young, all the elite. I take no notice, but let come what will treat it well. Wells it works very well it does alike while it does grow. We have not a right to touch it, but we must let it go to the [boys? heirs?].

On August 22, 1855 he referred to “fine corn laws, that class of laws” that he had apparently long tried to have promulgated, and on August 27, he observed, “Nothing is more abusive than American assistance.”

The final entry, though incomplete, again seems to show concern for the disposition of his property, “Nothing is your aunt's compel.”

In the following year, Reynolds went home to Massachusetts, and on July 17, 1857, died at his family home at West Boxford. He had provided for his wife and all his children in his will, which was submitted for probate at Honolulu on October 3, 1857, but little remained for distribution after satisfying creditors' claims against his once considerable estate.

Susan Reynolds' petition to be appointed guardian of Harriet and Edward Reynolds, then in Massachusetts, on January 16, 1856, had been denied by the Supreme Court of Hawaii, which subsequently appointed Reynolds' sister, Rebecca, as the children's guardian.

Susan was remarried to Kahananui, and died August 27, 1881, at the age of 66.

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What was the “old complaint” that tortured Reynolds for the last six years of his life?

The entry for January 5, 1851 offers a clue: “. . . I was very unwell, griping & relax, tho't I had been eating or drinking something, *found cook had drawn water with a white lead keg, water tasted it very strongly. . .*”

Compare the symptoms described by Reynolds with the following:

*Lead poisoning, symptoms and signs* : loss of appetite; constipation; abdominal discomfort; weakness; fatigue; headache; pallor. In severe cases, abdominal cramps, paralysis of exterior muscles and disfunction of the brain, due to neural degeneration and cerebral edema, apparently due to presence of lead in the brain.

Also, insomnia; nausea; vomiting (particularly in the morning); tremors; sometimes delirium or mania; colic.