Robert H. Pruyn: An Albany Yankee in the Tycoon's Court

Susanna Fessler
University at Albany, State University of New York, sfessler@albany.edu

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ROBERT HEWSON PRUYN

An Albany Yankee in the Tycoon’s Court
ROBERT HEWSON PRUYN

- Lawyer, militia general, diplomat, and politician
- Served as speaker of the New York State Assembly twice (1850 & 1854)
- Adjutant General of New York 1855-1857
- Railroad Executive later in life
In 1861, RHP was co-owner, along with his brother in law, Charles B. Lansing, of the Albany Iron and Saw Works.

The Works were financially strapped, and Pruyn agreed to the Japanese position to pull him out of debt.
ROBERT HEWSON PRUYN

• He left Albany in late 1861, accompanied by two of his sons, Edward and Robert (“Bertie”)

• Left at home were his wife, Jane (Jennie) and his youngest son, Charlie

Bertie Pruyn
Photo by Felice Beato, 1863
Albany Institute of History and Art
ROBERT HEWSON PRUYN

- Pruyn wrote long, detailed letters home
- These letters are held by the Albany Institute of History and Art
THE CHALLENGES OF RESEARCH
Yodo, May 3, 1857

My dear son,

When writing from here my annual

I have one of the highest qualifications. I am, New

I shall here shortly see the chief that I should

than some precious letter from my dear wife

am at their very near home as yet arrived.

ought I have any bad news of you. If I

hope that you will all one dear ones am now

will and that when they is married you will

continue in that one ends all be no more

written and that God may bless you and send

again in health.

The Winter will have been such

Thursday. Meanwhile my time is much

enjoyed with the love of dancing and
dear sir,

people who I embrace with great honor.

But I continue well and I am happy to say that I have enjoyed good health, though it

presumes just our appearance as on my own.

help intended to have a card write today, to

good up such thoughts now.

I send you a copy of a letter I received

Captain Don't off, as a copy has been sent to government with

a letter to the gen. states, it is of course to be kept only for

my own use. Captain Don't off the left the Sandwich Islands

but before his departure sent me a message that

suggests to me to Japan from the shave of a tone

of your real men. It is my purpose to

be known by the firstPrepare ship which offers to

died.

I have it will be sufficient for me to have a
copy of arms, which is representative as my

interests in Japan. As the London has

one. I sent Charles and though blank for one of

a duplicate or to have one in person. For

it do not cost the much it will come

a help without of them. I suppose that

my cheerfully attend to this as the greatest

triumph or have able to get it. To be done

a family as own country which will stop

Brand. The has been my thanks.

called for me in his country or with really if of

Mrs. at least a family. I don't

now.
Dear Robert,

This is near and startling. Perhaps it may not come up to night. If it does, before there be time for me, it must take its substitution. Let me see you. If possible, I shall might.

 Truly yours,

[Signature]
THE JOURNEY TO JAPAN
This afternoon an enter-lori's remain temporarily on the reservoir tank of the Lone Mountain Cemetery at 3½ of Bishop.

While performing the last of their duties.
I scarcely know what to say or how to say it. My mouth is parched and my throat is choked up and yet I must say by 8 o'clock all this. I am sure must be in the hands of the Express Co.
My stay here is proving very monotonous. Lizzie looks hardly. Nothing to do.
Much as I desire to give you a
loan with a heavy heart. Favourable terms, with
benevolence from you, the remunerative power
of a single boy. I hope and I pray that I may
remain with you a little longer in the enjoyment of
your kindness.
The four Western legations established in Japan in 1859–60 were all located in temples in Edo.
Gate way to United States Legation Yedo
Temple of Semphufugee (perfect happiness)
Showing roofs & flag staff U. S. Legation
Yedo
Larger Building Temple Semphufugee
Portion of the principal Temple Tycoons
Cemetery Yedo
Avenue in the Tycoon’s Cemetery (Shiba) Yedo
Street in Yedo showing a platform
With trees, flowers, and paper ornaments on for a Festival or omatsuri
A yakunin

A betto
LEAVING EDO

- On May 24, 1863, the U.S. Legation was burned to the ground
- Pruyn suspected arson, but could not prove it.
Wed, May 26, 1863

You will not expect a long letter from one so hurried, and when you learn that an angel from heaven to earth with only a few hours to spare before the mail leaves, under the disadvantage of having very little facilities as at 2 o'clock in the morning of the 26th the Esplanade buildings were totally destroyed by fire. It is said to have been accidental. The corn originated in a small building adjoining the kitchen. You will remember that I have already informed you that all our partitions made of paper which were primary were to be opened, then when light was desired. You will not be surprised to learn that on the second story of 15 minutes the whole of the 2nd floor of the store was in flames. I saved the Books, papers—all burned by the rain烘房—but some of the clothing except about the charges in the wash were all destroyed. The dishes in the washroom of the salt cellar is now the worst damaged. I lost the last thing I gave up was the copy of your and brother's report. But Brother was carrying Fadden the building is all in the fire and you will be surprised to see it, still. Fortunately for us placed it in the top of a trunk which was safe, though nearly empty, now on it only a charge of linen full of paper. The little you gave me is burned—a little rock & the guard chain that must be in 3.
Japanese officials opened Yokohama to Western merchants in 1859. Western diplomats were at first reluctant to relocate their legations from nearby Kanagawa on the official (Tōkaidō) highway but eventually did so.
Yokohama became the major site of American diplomatic activity in 1863 when anti-Western Japanese burned down the legation building in Edo.
Expatriates in Yokohama maintained active social lives, including lectures, sermons, parties, amateur theatricals and even a regatta.
Amateur Theatricals.
United Service Club
YOKOHAMA.

WEDNESDAY,
The 6th day of January, 1864.
ON WHICH OCCASION WILL BE PERFORMED
Bowl'd Out,
Ethiopian Serenader's,
And
Vilkins and his Divah.

The Band of H. M.'s S. "Eurgulus" will, by permission, attend.

Printed at the "Japan Commercial News" Office,
GRAND YOKOHAMA INTERNATIONAL REGATTA

TO BE HELD (WEATHER PERMITTING)

ON OCTOBER 1st. AND 2nd. 1863
FIRST DAY.
ROWING.

No 1.—LAUNCH RACE.—Distance Two miles: Entrance $2. For all Launches not exceeding 42 feet in length.
First Prize $50,
Second Prize $30

No 2.—ADMIRALS’ BARGES. Dist. Two Miles. Prize $40
Entrance $2.

No 3.—PINNACE and BARGE RACE.—Distance One mile: Entrance $2.
Boats not to exceed 34 Feet in length
Admirals’ Barges excluded.
First Prize $40
• Americans established diplomatic relations in 1854
• Other foreign countries—France, Britain, and Holland—soon followed suit.
• Japan suffered from civil unrest between the Shogunate and the Imperial System
• Pruyn and other foreigners in Japan were in constant danger

At the small hour during the late of the day, a man was seen running along the road leading to the Canal, that is, towards the place where the Colombo and Kandy trains meet. As soon as the man was seen, Col. Fisher rode towards him on horseback and ordered him to stop. The man refused and continued to ride ahead. Col. Fisher then ordered his men to arrest the man, who was eventually caught and taken to the police station.

Later in the evening, we received news that the body of Lt. Cameron of the 1st Battalion of the 24th Regiment, which was returning from the front, had been found near the river. The man who was riding ahead had been a member of the family of Admiral Jones. The body of the man was taken to the residence of the Admiral, where it was identified as his son, who had returned from the front just a few days ago. His family was in mourning when I visited them.

Yours sincerely,
[Signature]
PRUYN’S LEGACY

- Pruyn left Japan in the spring of 1865, returning to Albany via Europe
- He never returned to East Asia
- He prided himself on bringing knowledge of Japan to Albany