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

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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
• Pruyn wrote long, detailed letters home
• These letters are held by the Albany Institute of History and Art
THE CHALLENGES OF RESEARCH
YORK, May 3, 1767.

My Dear Son,

When last I wrote to my annual

I awoke, one of the highest qualifications I was poor.

I could not, and the thought that I should

been some practice letter from my dear wife

laundry any annual. Though I relish many

am or their way, none have as yet am Tary;

forgot I have only had gone off Tary 7th I

hope that your wife all our dear ones are some

will write that when that is received you will

continue in that same order to be no more

written and this hot heavy June be we meet

again in health hence.

The Winch will leave Thursday. Meanwhile my taxes in mind,

Entrance with the intent of sending an
Dear Sir,

I am pleased to receive your Kindness and I am glad to hear that you enjoy good health. I am very pleased to hear that you are well and that you are in fine spirits.

I am enclosing a copy of a letter from Capt. Smith. As a copy has been sent to Government with a letter to the Secretary, it is of course to the Secretary only for our information. Capt. Smith has left the ship for the Sandwich Islands, but before his departure sent me a message that he expected to arrive in Japan from the Sandwich Islands if at all, from our Pacific Mail. It is my purpose to have the letter read by the first Pacific Mail which offers my best wishes.

I hope it will be agreeable for me to have a copy of arms, which is representative of our estate in Salt River in Japan. As the Louisa has been lost, I shall ask Captain Smith to send me a copy of the arms. If it does not cost too much, it will be a great pleasure to have a copy of the arms. I am, Sir, your obedient servant.

Yours truly,

[Signature]
I wish to meet Mr. Blair... and... with Mr. Secretary... the... against the... Court of... if you... with the... of any... after the... in the... that... for... but... that he... to... and... in order to... in... 3rd... that... had... that... as... clear... that... I have... that... but... with...
Dear Robert,

This is near and shining. Perhaps it may not come up to night. If it does, before there be time for me to return, it must take it's sustenance! Let me see you. If possible, I would like it.

Yours truly,

[Signature]
THE JOURNEY TO JAPAN
This afternoon an enter lure remain temporarily in the recess of one of the Lone Mountain Cemetery at 3½ of Bishop Hill performing the last 0200 rites.
I scarcely know what to say on how to carry on work as I face the death of my dear one who is sick and yet to be sorrowed by. Of all the dead day must be on the beauty of the Express Co.
My stay here is proving daily more
welcome. Issie looks lovely, nothing to do.

Much as I desire to see I shall lean with a heavy heart. Formerly, this will sweep me farther from you to the remembrance of your dear boy. I hope and pray this little paper may do much of
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 belated as I am when you hear that a second day at 3pm today brought me six hours to spare before the mail leaves under the handicap of having very little facilities as it is at 11pm of the 26th the depot buildings were totally destroyed by fire. It is said it has been accidental. It is torn originals in a smaller building adjoining the kitchen. You will remember that I have already informed you that all our partitions made of paper which were formerly to be secured - then when light was desired. You will not be surprised to learn the fire that on the 1st of this month was 25 minutes the start 20 feet of the building was on fire. I saved the books and papers - all damaged by the rain however - but fortunate clothes except about a change in whatever was in the yard all destroyed. The kitchen as the finish of all salt cellar and the officers cases. The last thing I gave up was the copies of your instructions. Just as Pinkie was coming in the building was all on fire. You will be surprised of course it was Possible to place it in the top of my trunk which was safe, though nearly empty, on it only a charge of linen clothing. The little you gave me is saved - a little sheet and a few chairs that must remain in the house.
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
Villkins and his Divah.

The Band of H. M.’s S. “Euryalus” 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

As the mail was closing the list of those who were about to leave for their homes, I was asked by the Consul to see the foreigner who had been wounded or killed about Grimaldi's Inn. Col. Weeks reached the spot in advance of the rest of the French party, which was sent out and then found the body of Lt. Cameron of the 70th Battalion of Dragoons, a most accomplished officer and friend of the family of Admiral Jones. His body was taken to the residence of Mr. Monti, and on my being asked, 'What should I do now?' Mr. Monti replied, 'You must write home and much more to your relations. You must also send a letter to Lord Byron, who will do so much to be of service to us.'
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