

JAMES E. CARON

## Mark Twain Reports on Commerce with the Hawaiian Kingdom

I start to the Sandwich Islands day after tomorrow . . . to remain  
there for a month & ransack . . . the great cataracts & the  
volcanoes completely, & write twenty or thirty letters for the  
Sacramento Union. . . .

Letter to Jane Clemens and Pamela Moffet,  
5 March 1866

IN 1866, SAM CLEMENS visited the Kingdom of Hawai‘i, on assignment as a reporter for the *Sacramento Union*. Since September of 1862, Clemens had been writing professionally for several newspapers and literary periodicals, mostly under the pseudonym “Mark Twain,” work that had earned him fame and notoriety on the West Coast and the beginning of a reputation on the East Coast. From March to July, 1866, Clemens roamed about O‘ahu, Maui, and the Big Island of Hawai‘i, dispatching letters back to the *Union* that reported on his

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experience in the Islands. This essay will show the surprising extent to which Clemens as Mark Twain involved himself early in his career in commercial enterprise associated with the Islands.<sup>1</sup>

Interest in the Kingdom of Hawai'i had for some time prior to 1866 been strong on the West Coast. Agricultural imports from Hawai'i to California had been routine before the Civil War, and the war had meant an even better market for Hawai'i's growers. Trade in sea otter fur and horses had also created a link to California.<sup>2</sup> The "greatest and most powerful journal in the West,"<sup>3</sup> the *Sacramento Union*, had become particularly interested in commerce with the kingdom because of the inauguration of a regular steamship line between San Francisco and Honolulu. Though Clemens was unable to secure an assignment from his regular newspaper, the *Virginia City Territorial Enterprise*, to cover the initial voyage, a friend and well-known editor who also wrote for the *Union*, Charles Henry Webb, apparently wrangled him the assignment for the second voyage of the *Ajax*.<sup>4</sup> The *Union* owners must have seen the suggestion by Webb to hire Clemens to be a special correspondent on Hawai'i as a confluence of good fortune. After the favorable notices in the eastern press and the particular success of "Jim Smiley and His Jumping Frog" late in 1865, the Mark Twain pseudonym early in 1866 clearly had a sufficient audience to be a worthwhile investment. Moreover, the very existence of a regular steamship route between San Francisco and Honolulu meant that Hawai'i, and more specifically trade with Hawai'i, would be a topic of interest. Congress had already voted monies to establish a mail steamer service between the United States and China by way of Honolulu and Japan.<sup>5</sup> Those monies had encouraged more interest in Hawai'i from the business community in San Francisco than had already existed, spurring the California Steam Navigation Company to risk the inauguration of a regular steamship run to the Islands out of San Francisco. Hiring Clemens to write travel letters on Hawai'i signed with the popular Mark Twain pseudonym must have seemed to the *Union* editors like a double surety for attracting interested readers on a topic of great public concern.

Though the editors of the *Sacramento Union* undoubtedly expected a comic dimension to the letters Clemens contracted to write, an important aspect of the assignment was to report on the conditions of commerce in the Islands. This coverage was done earnestly. Of the

first seven letters Clemens sent back from the Kingdom of Hawai'i in a batch, three are either completely taken up by the subject of commerce, with nary a joke, or are dominated by it.<sup>6</sup> By scouting out the particulars of doing business with the Kingdom of Hawai'i, Clemens in his *Union* letters signed "Mark Twain" would provide advance notice to the business community about what to expect if it were to take advantage of the newly-established, regular steamship route between Honolulu and San Francisco. However, though he used his reporter's voice to discuss commerce, Clemens did more than simply give the facts; he also used his persona Mark Twain to make the argument for capitalists to invest in the Islands.<sup>7</sup>

Mark Twain begins the argument by underlining the importance of a regular *steamship* route. Powered only by sail, fast clipper ships had been hauling freight and passengers between California and the Kingdom of Hawai'i since 1855.<sup>8</sup> However, Mark Twain points out that "only steamers can extend and develop this [trade] and conduct it successfully."<sup>9</sup> It is simply a question of the most reliable and swiftest transit time. The passage for the *Ajax* is "a fraction over ten days, arriving a day after one of the fast clippers which left San Francisco a matter of three weeks before" (11), which means that the steamship is at least twice as fast, perhaps more in baffling winds. Only "idlers and pleasure seekers" can afford to take so long to reach Honolulu. "But business men and capitalists would run down here by the steamer when they knew the sea voyage could be ciphered down to days and hours before starting—and a short number of days at that" (21).<sup>10</sup>

Mark Twain is well aware that efficient and reliable transit must be the foundation for a more profitable commerce with the Islands. Moreover, so confident is he that the *Ajax* represented such efficiency and reliability that he argues a regular steamer route must be maintained, "even if it should lose money for two years" (12). Such losses would be minimal in the face of the custom duties that the Kingdom of Hawai'i must pay on its goods, mostly for sugar and molasses. Citing an 1864 report on custom duties by the secretary of the San Francisco Board of Brokers he found in the library of the Reverend Samuel Damon,<sup>11</sup> Clemens uses his Mark Twain persona to demonstrate that trade with the Kingdom of Hawai'i already is profitable to the United States. The argument thus far echoes what papers in San Francisco and Honolulu had said about the first voyage of the *Ajax*.

However, the regular Honolulu correspondent for the *San Francisco Evening Bulletin* wrote a letter dated January 3, 1866, raising a troubling point even before the *Ajax's* first voyage by saying that her 2000 ton freight capacity was too large for current demand.<sup>12</sup> A relevant editorial in the *Bulletin* had also appeared the day before the first *Ajax* voyage; it quoted the *Pacific Commercial Advertiser's* endorsement of the enterprise, but noted that the new steamship route is “an experiment, and whether it shall be permanent will depend upon the amount of patronage it receives.”<sup>13</sup> H. D. Dunn, a newspaperman from San Francisco and one of the passengers on the first *Ajax* trip, reported that Honolulu merchants liked the idea of a regular steamship route, but were “cautious” about giving a “heartly encouragement” to the enterprise until there have been two or three trips.<sup>14</sup> In the midst of this debate in Honolulu, Mark Twain nevertheless encourages the capitalists involved in the San Francisco Merchants' Exchange to overcome their brand of caution and use the *Ajax* or invest in the California Steam Navigation Company and thus make sure the route is maintained (13).

Though Mark Twain exhorts investors not to neglect the opportunity that the *Ajax* represents, the issue of adequate business patronage raised in the pages of the *Bulletin* was only part of the financial equation. Maintaining a regular steamship line would also necessarily involve a government subsidy, given that Congress had already voted subsidy monies for the San Francisco-to-Honolulu route as part of the larger steamship route to China. Mark Twain argues that a government subsidy at least for the San Francisco-to-Honolulu steamship route makes sense in the long run, even during initial years of loss, because the already profitable custom duties will naturally increase as trade with the Kingdom of Hawai'i increases. The question, then, becomes a simple one. Should such a subsidy remain part of the monies given to the China Mail Company for its routes or should part of it be given to the owners of the *Ajax*? Mark Twain carefully works through all the reasons why it should be the latter (even if the China Mail Company subcontracts with the California Steam Navigation Company), including the size of the two companies' ships relative to the harbor at Honolulu, the time lost if the China Mail Company uses its larger ships and has to divert them from a shorter northern route to China, the fact that the China operation will not begin for a year,

and the fact that the California Steam Navigation Company is already operating. In parts of the first three letters to the *Union*, Mark Twain coalesces pre-existing arguments for the route and elaborates others for a government subsidy and/or for private investment to support it as well as for a California company to run it. Whatever the California business community at large felt about his early letters to the *Union*, the *Ajax* owners had to be pleased.<sup>15</sup>

Mark Twain is clearly well-versed in the discussion about the steamship routes, using arguments already made by the Pacific Mail Steamship Company to allow it to drop the San Francisco-to-Honolulu route of its contract with Congress in favor of the California Steam Navigation Company receipt of a subsidy. In fact, Congress did allow Pacific Mail to drop the Honolulu leg of the proposed China route before it inaugurated operations in January of 1867. California Steam tried to obtain a subsidy from the Hawaiian government in the interim but failed.<sup>16</sup> Perhaps Kamehameha V's government was ambivalent, for the *Sacramento Union* had reported that the "Pacific Mail Company have made arrangements of a satisfactory nature with the Hawaiian government with regard to the establishment of steam lines and the accommodation of steamers."<sup>17</sup>

Unfortunately, the California Steam Navigation Company had suspended the *Ajax* run after the second trip, even before hearing the bad news about its subsidy, because their losses were large and because those losses were a topic of conversation in Honolulu as the *Ajax* docked the second time.<sup>18</sup> The *Bulletin's* Honolulu correspondent had been correct to say that the *Ajax* was too large for the Hawai'i trade, but the losses were also partly due to bad luck. Unusually bad weather had prevented the shipping of goods from other islands so that the *Ajax* only had "small freight" from its first trip.<sup>19</sup> It did not help that the only interisland steamer, *Kilauea*, had been grounded on a reef during a storm, but the *Bulletin's* correspondent also made another telling point about the steamline: the enterprise's success depended upon consistent shipments from the other islands to O'ahu, something that was not possible, even if the *Kilauea* had not been put out of commission, because interisland shipping had not been properly developed yet.<sup>20</sup>

Once Mark Twain has made the argument in letters two and three for the steamship route as a sound investment for business and gov-

ernment alike, he turns his reporter's attention in letter five to the cost of living in Honolulu. As in letter two, Mark Twain conveys some very specific facts leavened with comic phrasing. He begins with lodgings, and has particularly good words for the American Hotel, which had only commenced operation on March 1<sup>st</sup>, according to an ad in Honolulu's *The Friend*.<sup>21</sup> One of the partners of the new hotel was Mrs. E. A. McDonald, who had been a passenger on the *Ajax*, and Mark Twain, without naming her, wishes her good luck in her new enterprise. The other partner was Mr. Kirchhoff, who had placed an ad in the *Hawaiian Gazette* announcing his purchase of the house on Beretania Street, which formerly housed the British Consul.<sup>22</sup> However, Sam Clemens' room, rented during his first stay in Honolulu from mid-March to mid-April, is elsewhere, "in a cottage in the center of the town," which boasts a large, grassy yard complete with tamarind, mango, and algaroba (mesquite or *kiaave*) trees (35–36). This room was probably part of a boarding house located at Fort Street and Chaplain Lane, next to Reverend Damon's residence.<sup>23</sup> According to Frear, however, the place in which Clemens stayed his first night in Honolulu was owned by James H. Black, a newspaperman Clemens knew in California who now published the *Hawaiian Gazette*. Clemens visited the *Gazette* offices on March 20<sup>th</sup> or 21<sup>st</sup>, where he notes native printers.<sup>24</sup> Sometime during the next week of the 26<sup>th</sup>, he and Black take a horseback ride out to the village of Wai'anae.<sup>25</sup> In the first letter to the *Union*, Mark Twain says that he had stayed on board the *Ajax* talking while everyone else secured lodgings, and so had to sleep on shipboard the first night. Probably the stay at Black's house was a stop-gap measure until Clemens secured the "cottage in the center of town."

After discussing lodgings, Mark Twain moves to the good and bad points of having Hawaiians do one's laundry with their rock-pounding method, and then reports on what he has learned about food in Honolulu. He boosts Mr. Loller's restaurant for good meals at all hours.<sup>26</sup> Next, the cost of water, fruit, cigars, wines, and liquors deserves mention. The water is cheap, plentiful, and excellent, while the fruit is cheap and plentiful but not always excellent. Mark Twain loves the oranges while being indifferent to the bananas, but the tamarinds are so sour that "they sharpened my teeth up like a razor" (38). The prospects for tobacco are worse. The prevailing cigars are "trifling, insipid" Manilas, ten for twenty-five cents. "After you smoke

about thirty-five dollars worth of them in the forenoon you feel nothing but a desperate yearning to go out somewhere and take a smoke" (39). In contrast, he praises the local tobacco, which he had from a Hawaiian, and wonders why "some enterprising citizen" does not use it to make cigars.

In his first batch of seven letters to the *Union*, Clemens emphatically used his Mark Twain alter ego to promote commerce between California and the Kingdom of Hawai'i. He depicted amenities and the cost of living in Honolulu as well as demonstrating how money can be made if a steamship line became permanent, basic information for those wishing to do business in the Islands. For the remainder of the letters, his attention will be more on the scenery, the politics, and the people of the Islands—the background to conducting business rather than business itself. However, Clemens did concentrate his advance scouting for the California capitalists in two more letters, one each on the Islands' principal industries, whaling and sugar.

Clemens introduces the subject of whaling with a comic scene that occurs at the beginning of the ninth letter in the series. Always interested in slang and jargon, especially as they reflect the technicalities of particular occupations, Clemens creates a scene in which Mark Twain meets the fictional wife of a fictional whaling captain. "Mrs. Captain Jollopson" spouts a monologue full of sailors' slang and jargon as she tells about being accidently knocked down on a public street by a drunk "shipkeeper" during a shopping trip. The incongruity of a woman speaking like a sailor as she describes ordinary events of the day creates a memorably funny scene. Getting dressed and going shopping becomes, "I hove on a dress and cleared for the market." When her husband complains about not having enough money, she answers, "he says it's on account of toggery for me, which is a likely yarn, when I can't even buy a set of new halliards for my bonnet but he growls." And when she describes the drunk who bumped into her, she says, ". . . here comes a shipkeeper round the corner three sheets in the wind and his deadlights stove in, and I see by the way he was bulling that if he didn't sheer off and shorten sail he'd foul my larboard stuns'l-boom, which I had my [shopping] basket on" (78). Mark Twain devotes the rest of the letter to explaining all the slang and jargon uttered by Mrs. Captain Jollopson. He ends his comic presentation of the slang used by whalers with a focus on their verbal etiquette

before fighting, which he contrasts with the slang used by miners in the same situation. To the *Sacramento Union* readers familiar with the Mark Twain persona current in California and the Nevada Territory, the tactics of the letter are vintage comic “reporting” by Sam Clemens: he dispenses much information, but surrounds it with comic scenes that enliven the facts. Mark Twain ends the letter by apologizing for not being in a “sufficiently serious mood” to discuss the whaling trade, “a subject of overwhelming gravity” (86), and promises to do so in his next letter. Mark Twain’s phrasing about gravity may be read as an extravagant flourish to set against the levity of the ninth letter, but it also reflects the status that whaling used to have in the Islands and, to a certain extent, still had in 1866. In 1844, one prominent American thought that without the whaling fleet and all the money it poured into the economy, the Islands would return to “primitive insignificance”<sup>27</sup>

True to his word, the next letter not only concentrates on the whaling trade, but it also bears little or no trace of comic intent, the first of three completely earnest letters in the series. Mark Twain works to convince the members of the San Francisco business community that they should make an effort to divert the patronage of the whaling fleet away from Honolulu and to themselves. Though he concedes that the whaling trade is far from what it used to be in its palmy days “some fifteen years gone by” (89), he has compiled statistics to demonstrate that the money to be made outfitting the whaling fleet and attending to all of its material and financial needs remains considerable and therefore worth pursuing. The key point he makes amid numbers detailing gallons of oil and pounds of bone shipped is that last year there were only 67 ships outfitted at Honolulu and this year there are 96: the trade is increasing. San Francisco would thus do well to steal the custom, and after some comparison of the two cities that shows the advantages of San Francisco over Honolulu, Mark Twain makes two suggestions about how to accomplish the theft. One involves curtailing lawsuits and the other treating the whaling captains as men of large importance, as they do in Honolulu. However, because the lawsuits to be curtailed are those filed by sailors against captains, the two suggestions are one in the same: act as though the whaling captains can do no wrong.

The letter on the commercial effects of whaling in the Hawaiian



Islands presents a curious effort on the part of Sam Clemens, for the industry had been in decline for nearly ten years before he wrote it. Though still important to the Kingdom of Hawai'i as a source of income in 1866, whaling already was being slowly replaced by agriculture, especially sugar, as the kingdom's primary source of revenue. Commercial agriculture in Hawai'i had received its first real impetus during the gold rush years of the late 1840s and early 1850s, when demand from California had stimulated production. The remainder of the 1850s saw the beginning of the shift in the Islands' economy away from whaling. The "palmy days" of whaling had been from 1843 until 1860, but the decline for whaling as an industry had begun during the 1850s when the catches were diminishing.<sup>28</sup> Ralph Kuykendall says that 373,450 barrels of oil were shipped in 1852, a figure that became 63,000 barrels by 1860. Even before the Civil War cut the size of the fleet in half,<sup>29</sup> the local press doubted the viability of the whaling industry. In 1857, the *Pacific Commercial Advertiser* carried an editorial entitled "Whaling Fleet is Declining,"<sup>30</sup> and in the summer of 1860 the Honolulu correspondent of the *San Francisco Evening Bulletin* detailed the decline in catches and concluded that "the time is gone by for making fortunes in ship-chandlery."<sup>31</sup> The effects of this decline were in some measure masked by the high prices that oil and whalebone commanded throughout the 1850s. Nevertheless, the most far-sighted men in the kingdom had been those who had invested in agriculture throughout the 1850s, especially in the production of sugar. The practice of overhunting whales not only resulted in declines in catches but also longer—and therefore more costly—voyages. Finally, the development of petroleum during the early 1860s meant that the high prices seen throughout the 1850s could not be sustained because a better and cheaper product was competing in the market.

Even though the Pennsylvania oilfields had been exploited since 1859, Sam Clemens could not have been expected to recognize that whale oil as a lubricant for the machinery of United States industry would be replaced by petroleum. Nevertheless, the shift away from whaling had been well-recognized in the Islands since at least 1860, despite the surge in numbers of ships being outfitted from 1865 to 1866 that Clemens as Mark Twain cites as the prime evidence for the increasing value of the whaling industry. In a long view, the Mark

Twain persona was effectively suggesting that the San Francisco business community invest in a moribund industry already technologically outdated. As a serious reporter rather than a comic yarnspinner, how could Sam Clemens have been so wrong about whaling?

The answer lies in the suggestion that the way to lure the whaling fleet to San Francisco was to treat the whaling captain as a being who could do no wrong, for that was exactly what Clemens had been doing even before he arrived in Honolulu. Using whaling captains as his prime source of information on the current state of the industry, Sam Clemens the reporter was undoubtedly guilty of being too close to his sources. No fewer than three whaling captains had been his sailing companions on the *Ajax*: James Smith, aged 55; A. W. Fish, aged 40; and W.H. Phillips, aged 35. Clemens had put fictitious versions of them into his first Mark Twain letter, as Captains Cuttle, Fitch, and Phelps, who were in possession of 19 gallons of whiskey for the voyage. Clemens also presents Mark Twain playing cards (badly) with Phelps as his partner in the second letter. Phillips (Phelps) appears in yet another comic scene, this time under his own name, in the sixth letter. The captain gives Mark Twain a ride home from visiting the prison in his buggy when the reporter discovers that he is late for his horseback ride to Diamond Head crater, an event to be described later in the letter and in the subsequent letter. Mark Twain makes fun of Phillips by having him whip his horse to its utmost speed, which turns out to be over three miles an hour, saying, by way of ambiguous compliment to an absurdly proud Phillips, that he “had never seen lightning go like that horse.” Mark Twain also suggests that the horse is old enough to be a relic when the whip of Phillips “started so much dust out of the horse’s hide that during the last half of the journey we rode through an impenetrable fog” (45).

A comment in the second letter about obtaining information on the nature of the route between San Francisco and Honolulu from “old ship captains” suggests how Clemens had been gathering information from Smith, Fish, and Phelps on the voyage out (12). Entries in Clemens’ notebooks for the trip to Hawai‘i also indicate that he had become more than a little familiar with them all.<sup>32</sup> However, the inclusion of Phillips in a comic scene that makes fun of him and his horse and that uses his own name surely signals that Clemens thought of Phillips in particular as a friend, someone he could tease. A note-

book entry suggests that Clemens had indeed become friends with Phillips, who at 35, was closest in age. The entry indicates that Clemens had special access to Captain Phillips's house. Describing his house to Clemens,

Capt. Phillips said: "This is my end of the house & that is Asa's<sup>33</sup>—the door's always open—the demijohns are behind the door—come in when you feel like it—take a drink, take a smoke—wash your feet in the water pitcher if you want to—wipe 'em on the bedclothes—break the furniture—spit on the table-cloth—throw the things out doors—make yourself comfortable—make yrself [sic] at home." (Clemens, *Notebooks* 195)

This extravagant way of one bachelor extending hospitality to another would obviously appeal to Clemens, who had a widespread reputation in Nevada and California as one of "the boys." Possibly, the two of them together sampled the nightlife in Honolulu. Possibly, Clemens slept there at times. In any case, it seems very likely that the way Clemens as Mark Twain argues the case for the importance of whaling and whaling captains in the second, more serious letter on the dying industry stemmed from his personal relationships with whaling captains, especially W. H. Phillips.

Though San Francisco in a measurable way after 1866 did become more of a base for the whaling fleet than before, as Mark Twain reports, the analysis of the future of the whaling industry was heavily influenced by an empathy for the whaling captains on board the *Ajax* and possibly for others he met on shore.<sup>34</sup> Clemens suggests that he met many whalers on shore in a comic scene at the end of the fifth letter, when a man faints with surprise upon learning that Mark Twain is neither a whaler, a government official, nor a preacher (41–43). One way to measure the influence the whalers had on what Clemens wrote is to examine the figures Mark Twain gives in the tenth letter about barrels of oil and bone shipped. The historian Ralph Kuykendall, quoting an 1878 history of the American whaling industry, gives the figures of 373,450 barrels of oil in 1852. Mark Twain says the take was over ten times more: 4,000,000 barrels. For 1860, Kuykendall has 63,000 barrels.<sup>35</sup> Mark Twain for 1863 has a figure again larger by a factor of ten: 732,031. One has to assume that these hugely inflated numbers came from the wishful thinking of the whaling captains rather than a carefully compiled report. In contrast, the figures for sugar that Mark

Twain uses in the 23<sup>rd</sup> letter match Kuykendall's exactly because both employ figures from customs' house reports.

Though compelling evidence exists that Clemens was biased in Mark Twain's reporting on the recent health of the whaling industry and on its commercial prospects in the Hawaiian Islands, his letter on the sugar industry does a much better job of conveying the details of the actual situation, especially on Maui. Nevertheless, the picture painted by Mark Twain again distorts reality, this time by leaving out or not emphasizing certain economic facts. The resulting portrait of the Hawaiian sugar industry in 1866 is too sanguine in the short term, though accurate enough for the long term in its optimism.

Sugar had been grown all over the Islands for decades prior to Clemens's visit, but in 1840 there was only one real plantation, Koloa on the island of Kaua'i, to accompany several small mills. By 1846 there were 11 mills in the Islands, which the next year exported a total of 300 tons.<sup>36</sup> The gold rush in California boomed the production of sugar, along with the entire agricultural sector in the Hawaiian economy. A mechanical innovation about that time also aided the efforts of sugar growers. In October of 1851 the first demonstration of a centrifugal machine for separating sugar from molasses occurred on Maui. Instead of taking weeks, the machine needed only minutes to accomplish the separation, even producing a superior grade.<sup>37</sup> Two other factors contributed to the creation of the sugar industry Clemens investigated in 1866: large-scale irrigation projects; and the slow decline of the whaling industry in the 1850s, which freed investment capital. By 1854, sugar was clearly the most promising cash crop in the Islands, and the Honolulu correspondent to the *San Francisco Evening Bulletin* thought sugar was "now in the full tide of success" and counted a dozen plantations.<sup>38</sup>

However, the single most important factor in establishing sugar as the pre-eminent cash crop for commercial agriculture in the Kingdom of Hawai'i was the Civil War. "Southern sugar disappeared from the market in the northern states of the Union, and prices climbed so high that planters in the islands could make good profits even after paying heavy tariffs at American ports of entry."<sup>39</sup> Before the war, Hawai'i exported 1.4 million tons of sugar from its 12 plantations; after the war, exports were 15.3 million tons from 32 plantations.<sup>40</sup> The *Hawaiian Gazette* editorial for June 17, 1865 called sugar the new

mainstay of the island economy. Firms such as Charles Brewer and Company during the war years were changing their primary business interest from outfitting whaling ships to investing in sugar plantations and acting as planters' agents. By 1866, Charles Brewer and Company held the controlling interest in Wailuku Sugar Company, which was comprised of the Wailuku, Waikapu, and Lewers (formerly Waihee) plantations. These three plantations, along with James Makee's famous Ulupalakua Plantation on the slopes of the volcano Haleakalā, were the plantations Clemens spent most of his time on Maui investigating. The Lewers Plantation Mark Twain holds up as best in "cost, extent, completeness, and efficiency" (265).

Clemens devoted five weeks to his visit on Maui, from approximately April 16<sup>th</sup> to May 22<sup>nd</sup>. Three weeks were apparently spent in the village or plantation of Wailuku. Sherman Peck, a senior partner in Charles Brewer and Company, was the owner of Wailuku Plantation. Clemens refers to the Pecks as "Honolulu friends of mine" in a letter to his mother and sister written from the plantation, which suggests that he had met Sherman Peck during his initial stay in Honolulu.<sup>41</sup> The same letter talks about recent or impending visits to the other nearby plantations in the Wailuku Sugar Company: Waikapū, two miles away; and Lewers or Waihe'e, five miles away. Though Clemens employs customs' house reports so that Mark Twain can give an overall picture of the health of the sugar industry, the particulars are obviously gleaned from his long stay in Wailuku, which allowed him easy access to the Waikapu and Lewers operations as well.

Clemens designs the letter on sugar to provide a glowing report on the industry. He accomplishes this effect in two specific ways. One, his Mark Twain persona simply quotes the customs' house figures that document the phenomenal increase in production since the Civil War began. Two, Mark Twain elaborates a comparison with Louisiana's sugar industry that demonstrates the superiority of Hawai'i's. Mark Twain uses the comparison throughout the first half of the letter, starting with the statement that there are "precious few acres of unmanured ground in Louisiana—none at all perhaps—which will yield 2,500 pound of sugar; there is not an unmanured acre under cultivation in the Sandwich Islands which yields less" (257). The sheer fertility of the soil trumps all other possible competition, though the frost-free climate year-round also makes harvesting and milling in Hawai'i

simpler. Even though a sugar planter in Hawai'i has to endure multiple broker's fees as well as high tariffs, Mark Twain has the figures—from “the official account books of the superintendent”—to show that specific plantations have paid for themselves in three years or yielded profits of \$20,000 and \$50,000 in a year (269, 262–63). The calculations of bills and expenses to make the case, undoubtedly from the plantations of the Wailuku Sugar Company, are little short of glorious in their net effect.

Not content with such an amazing bottom line, Mark Twain provides a description of the Lewers Plantation as a model of its kind. Because the newspaper heading in the letter for the description of the Lewers Plantation is entitled “Specimen of a Hawaiian Mill,” holding up the plantation as the model in the Islands effectively gilds the lily because what was meant as the exemplary instance becomes a norm.<sup>42</sup> Thus the Lewers operation can boast the recent completion of a four-mile irrigation ditch that runs the length of the plantation, which will not only protect the 530 acres in production from drought but will bring into use 210 more acres. Mark Twain immediately calculates the additional income of \$120,000 for those still-as-yet unplanted new acres. Similarly, detailing the sugar-making process on the Lewers Plantation not only provides a reader with a clear description of each step in transforming cane into barrels of sugar; it also implies an industry technologically advanced in every step. Because the Lewers operation stands as *the* model for the Islands' plantations, the machinery used is superior to all other plantations: notably a “vacuum pan”—a very costly contrivance which is little used in the islands” (267); and a machine for packing the sugar efficiently and swiftly into barrels, “the only machine for packing I have heard of in the islands” (268). However, if one misses the statement about the Lewers Plantation as a model, one can easily read that section of the letter as making the case that such technology represents a norm in the Islands.

As Clemens did throughout his entire adult life when enthused about a business or a commercial product, his Mark Twain persona effectively uses numbers in the letter on sugar in Hawai'i as an incantation to spellbind the reader into accepting a vision of inevitable wealth that will increase inexorably. Moreover, Mark Twain packages even very simple descriptions in a way to excite San Francisco investors. The irony of this glowing report is that it can be honestly made—

unlike the numbers used to report on the whaling trade—yet grossly overstate the current strength of the sugar industry. This feat can be accomplished by pointing to the numbers from the customs' house reports while not pointing out that the phenomenal growth they document is due to the circumstance of the Civil War.

In fact, the industry in the summer of 1866 when Clemens actually toured the island of Maui was already experiencing the beginning of a major depression in prices. Some of the drop happened due to competition among refiners who were also buying Manila sugar. However, the end of the Civil War the year before had exacerbated the situation: demand dropped and strong Hawaiian plantation production guaranteed a glut of product in the market. Mark Twain acknowledges some price drop when he calculates profits for the plantations, but in fact the situation was much grimmer than his brief notice indicated (262). By the time the *Sacramento Union* published the letter at the end of September, the Islands were in a serious economic depression that would last most of 1867. The sugar industry had in fact expanded too fast because of Civil War prices, an inference that could be made even from the customs' house reports, and many plantations along with their creditors were overextended. On October 8, less than two weeks after the glowing report on "sugardom" had been published in the *Union* over the name of Mark Twain, a major San Francisco firm, Charles Brooks and Company, declared bankruptcy because of its sugar investments. Brooks and Company had been an important creditor for a big Honolulu firm—Walker, Allen, and Company—which not only acted as agent and financier for a number of sugar planters in Hawai'i, but also had become the interisland transport for sugar, having purchased the steamer *Kilauea* in May of 1866, after its grounding earlier in the year. The \$10,000 price tag for the steamer no doubt added to the company's debt. In any case, Walker and Allen would declare bankruptcy in January of 1867, entangling eight sugar plantations in the proceedings.<sup>43</sup>

The last section of the letter on sugar begins with the topic of labor. By 1866, it had long been apparent that the Native Hawaiian population had been alarmingly decimated through diseases introduced by westerners.<sup>44</sup> In the context of the letter's discussion of sugar, this fact translates into a labor shortage. The Hawaiian government had permitted contract laborers from China as early as 1852 to mitigate this

shortage, and several thousand had been imported by the middle of the 1860s, which meant that the Kingdom of Hawai‘i Clemens visited had more Chinese than Americans and Europeans combined.<sup>45</sup> His Mark Twain persona supports wholeheartedly the use of “coolies,” suggesting the tactic both for the island sugar industry and for industries in California too.

The most interesting aspect of the last section of the letter, however, follows this capitalist endorsement of contract labor, for it provides a context about what motivated Clemens to be so optimistic in the letter on sugar in Hawai‘i. To be sure, he based some of his enthusiasm on his admiration of what he had seen—as well as his admiration for the planters he had met. However, the endorsement of contract labor leads to a notable display of Manifest Destiny rhetoric, indicating the true spirit of the letter and revealing a purpose quite ready to attend only to those facts best suited to it. It is important to remember that Clemens wrote the letter on sugar after he had been back in San Francisco and circulating there for over a month. Making an impression on his audience of California businessmen by invoking an ideology of Manifest Destiny would seem to have overridden any caution about current investment in Hawaiian sugar. Possibly, the elevated style of the Manifest Destiny rhetoric gained some force from the word-painting, guidebook rhetoric that would be displayed shortly in his first platform lecture. The letter on sugar was published September 26, 1866 and the lecture on the “Sandwich Islands” had already been scheduled for the next week, on October 2.<sup>46</sup> Clemens clearly wrote the letter on sugar in the midst of his preparation for the lecture. Notably, Clemens employed the same sentiments in very similar language about the grand destiny of California as a farewell at the close of his last Mark Twain lecture before he left San Francisco for New York City. The paragraph on California in the speech echoes some of the ideas and language in three of the last four paragraphs in the letter: the China mail routes will link California to China, both times mentioning the “Amoor” river; in both instances the railroad is “creeping” across the continent; in both the letter and speech the same number of people, 450,000,000, are said to be ready to “pay tribute” to California or “lay its contributions at her feet”; in the letter, California will be crowned, while in the speech she shall be the “Crown Princess of the new dispensation.”



Insofar as business prospects in Hawai'i were concerned, Sam Clemens the capitalist booster had trumped Mark Twain the newspaper reporter. This conclusion surprises, given the Bohemian stance Clemens had been cultivating in San Francisco for some time prior to the trip to the Islands.<sup>47</sup> Moreover, current and future commerce in Hawai'i and California had triggered an unusual display of imperialist rhetoric, even though he was consistently against the United States annexing the Hawaiian Islands.<sup>48</sup> In the final analysis, however, his becoming carried away with visions of commercial success should not surprise, for Sam Clemens later in life often engaged in schemes to make large sums of money, the most notorious being his disastrous funding of the Paige typesetter. In portions of his 1866 Mark Twain letters on the Kingdom of Hawai'i, Clemens first revealed his business acumen.<sup>49</sup>

## NOTES

- <sup>1</sup> A more complete examination of Sam Clemens's letters from Hawai'i and of his early career can be found in James E. Caron, *Mark Twain, Unsanctified Newspaper Reporter* (Columbia: U of Missouri P, 2008).
- <sup>2</sup> Edward D. Beechert, *Honolulu: The Crossroads of the Pacific* (Columbia: U of South Carolina P, 1991) 46.
- <sup>3</sup> G. Ezra Dane, "Introduction." *Letters from the Sandwich Islands, Written for the "Sacramento Union" by Mark Twain* (Palo Alto, CA: Stanford U P, 1938) viii.
- <sup>4</sup> The evidence for Webb as the probable link to the *Sacramento Union* can be found in a 1900 letter from Webb to Edmund Clarence Stedman. See Samuel L. Clemens, *Mark Twain's Letters, Volume 1 (1853-1866)*. Eds. Edgar M. Branch, Michael B. Frank. Kenneth M. Sanderson. (Berkeley: U of California P, 1988) 333-34, note 1.
- <sup>5</sup> Ralph S. Kuykendall, *Twenty Critical Years, 1854-1874*. Vol. 2, *The Hawaiian Kingdom*. (Honolulu: U of Hawai'i P, 1953) 169ff.
- <sup>6</sup> Clemens would eventually produce twenty-five letters for the *Union*, published in both its daily and weekly editions. For a list of both printings, see Walter Francis Frear, *Mark Twain and Hawaii* (Chicago: Lakeside Press, 1947) 256.
- <sup>7</sup> In *Mark Twain, Unsanctified Newspaper Reporter*; I trace the elaborate presentation by Sam Clemens of his Mark Twain persona, which includes a respectable reporter's voice but is more often associated with a comic, "unsanctified" voice that spins yarns rather than shows a concern for facts. The respectable reporter's voice is clearly closer to the historical man and is used by Clemens for much of the portion of the *Sacramento Union* letters discussed here. While "Mark Twain" will normally designate the persona created in the letters, at times "Sam

Clemens” is more appropriate to indicate biographical event rather than literary creation.

- <sup>8</sup> Kuykendall, *Critical Years* 17.
- <sup>9</sup> Samuel L. Clemens, *Mark Twain's Letters from Hawaii*. Ed. A. Grove Day. (1966. Honolulu: U of Hawaii P, 1975) 11. Subsequent quotes from the letters will be from this edition and page numbers will hereafter appear in the text. I have also consulted copies of the original printings in the *Sacramento Union*.
- <sup>10</sup> A notebook entry indicates that some of Clemens’s calculations about the sea voyages were provided by the whalers he met on board the *Ajax*. See Samuel L. Clemens, *Mark Twain's Notebooks and Journals, Volume 1 (1855–1873)*. Eds. Frederick Anderson, Michael B. Frank, and Kenneth M. Anderson (Berkeley: U of California P, 1975) 183.
- <sup>11</sup> Damon was the chaplain for the Bethel Mission for Sailors. Clemens visited him and browsed his library, the largest in the kingdom, during the first week in the Islands. See Clemens, *Notebooks* 199, 200, 202, 215.
- <sup>12</sup> *San Francisco Bulletin*, [“Letter from Honolulu”]. Jan. 29, 1866, 1.
- <sup>13</sup> *San Francisco Bulletin*, [“Editorial: *Ajax* Steamship”]. Jan. 12, 1866, 3.
- <sup>14</sup> H. D. Dunn, [“Honolulu Correspondence”]. *San Francisco Bulletin* Feb. 16, 1866, 3.
- <sup>15</sup> I could not determine that Clemens knew the *Ajax* owners personally. However, he obviously had letters of introduction to the owners of the Wailuku Sugar Company plantations on Maui, which he visited extensively. The Wailuku Sugar Company was owned by Charles Brewer and Company, the Hawai’i agents for the owners of the *Ajax*, California Steam Navigation. Though Clemens refers to the “China Mail Company,” the name of the business contracted to run the China mail route was the Pacific Mail Steamship Company.
- <sup>16</sup> Kuykendall, *Critical Years* 169–70.
- <sup>17</sup> *Sacramento Union*, [“Pacific Mail Company”]. Oct. 26, 1866, 3.
- <sup>18</sup> *San Francisco Bulletin*, [“Letter from Honolulu”]. Apr. 13, 1866, 3.
- <sup>19</sup> *San Francisco Bulletin*, [“Letter from Honolulu”]. Feb. 23, 1866, 5.
- <sup>20</sup> *Bulletin*, Apr. 13.
- <sup>21</sup> *The Friend*, [“American Hotel Opens”]. Mar. 1, 1866, 17. Cf. Frear, *Mark Twain and Hawaii* 20.
- <sup>22</sup> *Hawaiian Gazette*, “American House.” Feb. 10, 1866, 3. Frear (*Mark Twain and Hawaii* 21–22) asserts that Clemens stayed at the hotel after his return from the Big Island, Hawai’i.
- <sup>23</sup> Frear, *Mark Twain and Hawaii* 20, note 5; Clemens, *Notebooks* 200, note 39.
- <sup>24</sup> Clemens, *Notebooks* 208.
- <sup>25</sup> Clemens, *Notebooks* 1975, 225, 230.
- <sup>26</sup> The diner was part of the “Eureka Hotel and Restaurant.” Though the name is spelled “Laller” in the original *Union* letter, in one of his Hawaiian notebooks, Clemens spells the name as “Loller,” which also appears in an advertisement for the restaurant in the *Hawaiian Gazette*, May 19, 1866, 3. Frear places Loller’s restaurant on Nu‘uanu street (*Mark Twain and Hawaii* 20, note 5), though the

ad says Hotel street (cf. Clemens, *Notebooks* 226, note 113). Because the streets intersect, the restaurant must have been on a corner.

- <sup>27</sup> Gavin Daws, *Shoal of Time: A History of the Hawaiian Islands* (1968. Rpt. Honolulu: U of Hawai'i P, 1974) 170.
- <sup>28</sup> Ralph S. Kuykendall, *Foundation and Transformation, 1778-1854*. Vol. 1, *The Hawaiian Kingdom* (Honolulu: U of Hawai'i P, 1938) 306.
- <sup>29</sup> Kuykendall, *Critical Years* 138; cf. Daws, *Shoal of Time* 171.
- <sup>30</sup> Beechert, *Crossroads* 68.
- <sup>31</sup> Kuykendall, *Critical Years* 137.
- <sup>32</sup> Examples from the two notebooks kept by Clemens include: from notebook #5: meets the whalers, notes Fish and Phillips as victims of the Confederate raider *Shenandoah*, they talk about weather on the Pacific ocean (113); whalers said to prefer Hawaiian sailors (115); from notebook #6: Captain "Cuttle" and his servant boy rolling with the ship (181); met Fish and Phillips first: former's ship was burned, the latter's "bonded," apparently referring to capture by the *Shenandoah* (182); details about route to China that had to come from a captain (183); sailor slang (186); Captain "Cuttle" and his boy again about the bad weather (188-89); eight demi-johns of whiskey, card game with comic dialogue, the large size of a whaler's drink, Smith is "secesh," i.e. a Confederate sympathizer (191); doctor attends Phillips (193); Phillips invites Clemens to his house (195); eighteen gallons of whiskey drunk by the whalers (196).
- <sup>33</sup> Phillip's roommate was probably Asa Nudd, the wholesale/import liquor agent. See Clemens, *Notebooks* 197, note 31.
- <sup>34</sup> *Letters from Hawaii* 95; cf. Beechert, *Crossroads* 68.
- <sup>35</sup> Kuykendall, *Critical Years* 135.
- <sup>36</sup> Kuykendall, *Foundation* 314-16.
- <sup>37</sup> Kuykendall, *Foundation* 326.
- <sup>38</sup> Kuykendall, *Critical Years* 137.
- <sup>39</sup> Daws, *Shoal of Time* 174-75.
- <sup>40</sup> Kuykendall, *Critical Years* 141.
- <sup>41</sup> Clemens, *Letters* 339-37.
- <sup>42</sup> All the headings in the letters were added by the *Sacramento Union* editors.
- <sup>43</sup> Kuykendall, *Critical Years* 146-48; Daws, *Shoal of Time* 175-76.
- <sup>44</sup> Lieutenant James King, who took over Cook's expedition when he was killed in 1779, estimated the population of the Islands to be between 400,000 and 500,000. Robert C. Schmitt estimates 200,000 to 250,000 in "New Estimates of the Pre-Censal Population of Hawai'i. *The Journal of the Polynesian Society*, (1971) 80: 237-43. David Stannard makes the case for a much larger population before contact: 800,000 to 1,000,000 in his book, *Before the Horror: The Population of Hawai'i on the Eve of Western Contact*. (Honolulu: Social Science Research Institute, U of Hawai'i P, 1989). Missionaries in 1832 estimated the Hawaiian population to be about 130,000.
- <sup>45</sup> Daws, *Shoal of Time* 180-81.
- <sup>46</sup> *San Francisco Alta California*, "Mark Twain's Farewell." Dec. 15, 1866, 2.

<sup>47</sup> Caron, *Unsanctified* 163–280.

<sup>48</sup> James E. Caron, “‘The Blessings of Civilization’: Mark Twain’s Anti-Imperialism and the Annexation of the Hawaiian Islands.” *Mark Twain Annual* (2008): 51–63.

<sup>49</sup> See Peter Krass, *Ignorance, Confidence and Filthy-Rich Friends: The Business Adventures of Mark Twain, Chronic Speculator and Entrepreneur* (Hoboken, N.J.: John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 2007), and Charles H. Gold, *Hatching Ruin, or, Mark Twain’s Road to Bankruptcy* (Columbia: U of Missouri P, 2003) for recent views. For that business acumen revealed in letters written by Sam Clemens, see Samuel Charles Webster, Ed. *Mark Twain, Business Man* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1946). In *Mark Twain: God’s Fool* (1973. New York: Harper and Row, 1975), Hamlin Hill characterizes Clemens’s money schemes as “an almost blinding lust for fortune” (80).

The Hawaiian episode in Mark Twain's life was one of those spots that seemed to him always filled with sunlight. From beginning to end it had been a long luminous dream; in the next letter, written on the homeward-bound ship, becalmed under a cloudless sky, we realize the fitting end of the experience. With the glasses we can see what we take to be men and women on her decks. I am well acquainted with nearly all her passengers, and being so close seems right sociable. Monday 7<sup>th</sup> I had just gone to bed a little after midnight when the 2d mate came and roused up the captain and said "The Comet has come round and is standing away on the other tack." -Mark Twain So Samuel Langhorne Clemens made his excuse for late copy to the Sacramento Union. Letters from Hawaii provides a fascinating look at 19th century Hawaii -- the people, royalty, customs, culture, neighborhoods, infrastructure, commerce, government, volcanos, valleys, beaches, sea -- as well as a sprinkling of Mark Twain's inimitable humor. History buffs and Hawaiiana buffs will find Twain's first-hand, boots-on-the-ground observations of 19th century Hawaii uniquely satisfying. I found almost every dispatch riveting. One that comes to mind now as I write this mini review is Mark Twain's account of his visit to the active volcano, Kilauea, on the Big Island, wh