

# “Lord Hood’s” Island of the Pitcairn story: *Where is it?*

By Dr. Donald Patrick Albert

## INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this investigation is to correct a geographic error introduced in Lucas’ *The Pitcairn Island Register Book* (hereafter Register Book) published in 1929 by the London-based Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge. The Register Book is an important secondary/primary source for scholars and enthusiasts interested in the early decades (1790-1854) of births, deaths, marriages and other significant happenings within this Anglo-Polynesian settlement on Pitcairn Island.

This rugged and remote island in the south-central Pacific, two-miles long and one-mile wide (*Figure 1*), is home to a remnant population of less than 50 descendants from the HMAV *Bounty* mutineers and their Polynesian companions who settled there in 1790.

The Register Book includes a Preface and Introduction by its editor, Sir Charles Lucas (1853-1931), and simply Register to indicate Buffett’s and later, from July 1839, pastor and patriarch George Nobbs’s entries. The volume finishes with three Appendices, a Bibliography, an Index, and three illustrations (a facsimile of John Adams’s prayer, page from list of shipping entries, and a chart to illustrate the story of Pitcairn Island). The chart depicts the islands and continental edges of the Pacific Ocean based on a map prepared for the Royal Geographical Society and used courtesy of the Society and of Sir Everard Im Thurn (1852-1932).

The geographic confusion arises from the Lucas (1929) summary of John Buffett’s return to Pitcairn Island after its entire population of 86 individuals relocated to Tahiti in 1831. Buffett (1791-1891), an Englishman, is considered Pitcairn’s first immigrant. He arrived on the English whaler *Cyrus* in 1823 and remained to serve as Pitcairn’s schoolmaster (Albert, 2022). In the following paragraph Lucas recounts Buffett’s return from Tahiti via “Lord Hood’s Island,” then to Pitcairn Island, during the months of April through June 1831.



**Figure 1**

**First day cover adorning entry to the Pitcairn Islands Research Station, the author’s Pitcairn/Bounty dissemination outlet offering free downloads of his publications. Source: Author’s Collection, <https://shsu-ir.tdl.org/handle/20.500.11875/3187>.**

*“The moral conditions of the place are said to have disagreed with the Pitcairners as much as its climate, and the result, as recorded in the Register, was that on the 24th of April, after barely a month’s sojourn at Tahiti, a number of them, headed by John Buffett, sailed off in a small schooner, but owing to adverse winds were landed on what is styled “Lord Hood’s Island.” This is one of the Marquesas group; its native name is or was Fatuhuku, but it was named Hood Island by Captain Cook, who discovered it in the Resolution in 1774 and called it Hood Island after a midshipman of that name on board his ship, who was the first to see it. This midshipman was afterwards Captain Alexander Hood, a distinguished officer of the sea-going Hood family, who was killed in action. In regard to this island he was confused with his more famous kinsman Lord Hood, though Lord Hood was rather older than Captain Cook himself. Hence the name given in the Register. (The mistake has been perpetuated in the Pacific Islands Pilot, Vol. III, 1920 ed.) Here they remained till the 21st of June, when they embarked on a French ship*

*and on the 27th of June reached Pitcairn again, finding that in their absence the pigs had run wild and destroyed the crops."*

*(Lucas, 1929, pp. 16-17).*

His description of "Lord Hood's Island" as located in The Marquesas Islands is an error. However, that Captain Cook named this gigantic rock Hood's Island after midshipman Alexander Hood of the *Resolution* in 1774 is correct (Cook, 1777). The "Lord" prefixed to "Hood's Island," Lucas attributed to confusion stemming from the midshipman's famous first cousins, Admiral Samuel Hood (1724-1816) and Admiral Alexander Hood (1726-1814) (Captain Cook Society, 2013).

While it is true that Fatu Huku (two words) is an indigenous name for this island in The Marquesas Islands, it is not the refuge Buffett sought safety from "adverse winds." According to the U.S. Board on Geographic Names, Fatu Huku is the approved name (N), while Hoods Island and Hood Island are variants (V). Fatu Huku lies at 9°25' S, 138°54' W and situated in The Marquesas Islands, French Polynesia (PYF) (*See Table 1*). This is not the island John Buffett is referring to in his Register entry (Lucas, 1929).

Fatu Huku is nowhere close to Pitcairn Island, and certainly not "on the way" from Tahiti to Pitcairn as chronicled by *Bounty* descendant and native historian Rosalind Amelia Young (1894). Buffett's path intersected with Lord Hood Island not Fatu Huku. Fatu Huku is even smaller than Pitcairn Island with an area of .50 square mile. It is essentially a huge rock rising 1,184 feet above sea level, as opposed to the low island or atoll in the Register and Buffett's "A narrative of 20 years' residence on Pitcairn's Island" (hereafter "Narrative") (Buffett, 1846; Lucas, 1929).

Lucas misinterpreted the entry for Fatu Huku listed in the *Pacific Islands Pilot*, Vol. III, (1920) as the Lord Hoods Island of Buffett's Register entries. Doing so introduced an error that has caused some confusion among historians. While unable to locate Vol. III, the previous volume (II) links Fatu Huku AND Hood Island (lat. 9° 26' S and long. 138° 55' W) and Marutea (South or Sud) AND Lord Hood Island (lat. 21° 31' S., long. 135° 38'), the former in The Marquesas, and the latter in The Gambier Islands (*Pacific Islands Pilot*, 1920, p. 145, p. 185). Buffett's return voyage from Lord Hood Island to

Pitcairn lasted three days and not the seven days (perhaps includes part days) mentioned in Lucas' Introduction (Buffett, 1846, p. 35).

That the Register Book's Index further cross references the following entries provide credence that Lucas was somewhat confused concerning these islands' names (see entries below, Lucas, 1929):

*Fatuhuku. See Hood Island*

*Hood Island (Lord Hood's Island), 17, 36, 144.*

While the first Index entry is correct, the second entry, linking Hood Island with Lord Hood's Island, is incorrect for Fatuhuku (Table 1). The extent the chart included with the Register Book was adapted to illustrate the story of Pitcairn Island is unknown to the author, but it clearly reads Hood I. not Lord Hood's Island. Even with access to valid geographic information in the *Pacific Islands Pilot*, a correctly labeled "Hood I." on the Register Book's chart, and Buffett's use of Lord Hood's in his Register entries and later Narrative (Buffett, 1946, p. 35), Lucas made a mistake — just like most of us have done, including this author.

Lucas probably did not have access to *Travels to the Islands of the Pacific Ocean* by the multi-talented (adventurer, merchant, diplomat, reporter, artist) Jacques Antoine Moerenhout (1796-1879). Moerenhout records the physical geography (latitude and longitude, elevation, dimensions, fresh water, vegetation, etc.) of the Lord Hood Island of Buffett's sojourns. Though first published in 1837 in French, and only translated to English in 1983, Moerenhout's writings would have provided a valuable account from one who had actually visited Lord Hood Island. Sir Charles's mistake is a reminder for all of us to check and re-check our facts, and to contextualize facts with other accounts. No doubt, the similarity in these toponyms, Hood versus Lord Hood, one can understand how these placenames might be jumbled.

## BUFFETT'S ENTRIES AND THE REAL LORD HOOD'S ISLAND

While Buffett's entries from the Register use Lord Hood's Island, he doesn't link this island with Fatu Huku or the Marquesas (see Register entries for April 24, June 3, June 21, 1831). While Fatu Huku's geographic coordinates are 9° 25' S, 138° 54' W, those for Buffett's Lord Hood's Island are 21° 30' S, 135° 34' W (Table 1). The distance between

Lucas's and Buffett's respective islands are over 12° latitude apart, a significant error for sure.

In the Register, Buffett's "Lord Hood's Island" is known also as South Marutea (Sud) (Table 1). This is a low island, an atoll 12 miles long and five miles wide enclosing an irregularly shaped lagoon of 42 square miles. It is in the northeast sector of Gambier Islands of French Polynesia. Lucas's "Lord Hood's Island" is a high island 19 miles north of Hiva 'Oa in the southeast quadrant of The Marquesas Islands also of French Polynesia. Using the same place-name, Buffett is referencing an atoll 400+ miles northwest of Pitcairn Island, while Lucas lists a high island, essentially a huge rock, 1,200+ miles north of Pitcairn.

Captain Edward Edwards of the HMS *Pandora* was dispatched in 1790 to arrest the mutineers of the HMS *Bounty*. Ironically, he passed about 300 miles from Pitcairn Island after passing Ducie. It was Captain Edwards who named the atoll Lord Hood which he recorded to be at 21° 31' 00" S, 135° 32' 30" W on March 17, 1791 (Hamilton, 1793); these coordinates are close to the modern readings (Table 1). While Edwards doesn't elaborate on naming the atoll, presumably he was referring to Lord Samuel Hood, 1st Viscount Hood, Admiral in the British Royal Navy (1724-1816). Captain Edwards recounts that this "Island, about five or six miles long, with a great many trees on it, but was not inhabited: this was called Lord Hood's Island" (Edwards and Hamilton, 1915, p. 24).

Since Lord Hood Island appears during two voyages involving John Buffett, it is imperative that readers understand the geographic position and name of the island in question. The first journey occurred on returning from Pitcairn's failed relocation to Tahiti in 1831. Owing to adverse winds the 30-foot schooner dropped passengers off on "Lord Hood's Island" on April 24, 1831, with the vessel returning to Tahiti (Lucas, 1929). So fortunately, in the first instance (1831), John Buffett was offered passage home by the *Bourdeaux*, a French brig, the length of the trip according to Lucas encompassed the dates from June 21-27, 1831. The sail, according to Buffett, lasted three days (Buffett, 1846, p. 35). The duration of the sail is another clue that "Lord Hood's Island" in The Marquesas listed by Lucas was not the same island that plays into Buffett's wanderings.

The second instance occurs several years later (1834) after Joshua Hill, the "dictator" of Pitcairn, expelled John Buffett, John Evans, and George Nobbs from Pitcairn Island. The three "outsiders" departed on the *Tuscan*, a London whaler on route to Tahiti. These men sailed off with plans to return for their families at the soonest opportunity. Eventually, Buffett and family returned on the *Olivia* from Tahiti via Lord Hood Island to Pitcairn on September 16, 1834.

## CURRENT-DAY NAMING CONVENTIONS

The Geographic Names Server of the National Geospatial Intelligence Agency was searched to ascertain current-day naming conventions for these two islands (Table 1). There are eight names for each island; approved and variant names are linked to a Unique Feature Identifier (UFI). Lucas's Fatuhuku is linked with UFI 1310160 and Buffett's Lord Hood's Island to UFI 1310508. Starting with 1310160, the approved name is Fatu Huku with Hood Island and Hoods Island listed as variants. The other names associated include one in French, Ile Fatu Huku, and four others of local origin. Notice there is no "Lord" prefix attached to the two Hood variants.

UFI 1310580 has two approved names, Marutea and Atoll Marutea. Two of the variant names include "South" to generate South Marutea and South Marutea Island. Perhaps this is to avoid confusion with another atoll, a majority submerged reef, named Marutea (Marutea Nord or Taunga tauranga-e-havana, French Polynesia) farther north and west (17° 07' S, 143° 11' W). Interestingly, UFI 1310580 includes the variants Hood and Lord Hood Island. Other data can be extracted from a Geographic Names Server including, the designation code, country code, latitude and longitude. This provides contextual information such a feature type: for example, Marutea is an atoll and Fatu Huku is an island, while both are in French Polynesia (PYF); the geographic coordinates show these to be separated by more than 12 degrees latitude and 3 degrees longitude.

## DISCUSSION

Two life journeys involving Buffett's "Lord Hood's Island" or its variants: "Lord Hood's thrice," and "Lord Hoods twice," and "Lord-Hoods once," for a total of six entries in the Register Book. The

“s” variant is located in the Introduction, Shipping Lists (Appendix), and the Index, while the “s” and “-...s” variants are in Buffett’s Register entries from 1831.

The place name “Hood” also appears in connection with said island four times, including twice in the Introduction and twice in the Index. These “errors” with or without “s” or “s ” are common issues encountered while extracting from historic archives. Even early references to Pitcairn Island no less appear as Pitcairn’s Island (see Buffett’s 1846); variate and evolving spellings are inevitable. This lack of consistency is understandable, when entries are authored and edited by multiple individuals and across time. Buffett’s island references are linked with Atoll Marutea and Marutea, and their variants South Marutea (Marutea Sud), Lord Hood Island (notice no “s” or hyphen), Hood, and three names of native origin.

While both Buffett’s Lord Hoods Island and Lucas’s Lord Hood’s Island are in current-day French Polynesia, the former is situated in the Gambier Islands, and the latter is in The Marquesas Islands. The Geographic Names Server has demonstrated its value in clarifying placename confusion. It enabled me to confidently pinpoint the preignitions of our protagonist traveling within the dimensions of space and time.

This short piece corrects confusion introduced in Lucas’s Introduction to the *Pitcairn Island Register*

*Book*. Being aware of this geographic error will allow Pitcairn Island enthusiasts to better follow the story of John Buffett’s pelagic preignitions. More articles from the author are available over the Internet (free) searching the author dissemination platform “Pitcairn Islands Research Station,” or its URL: <https://shsu-ir.tdl.org/handle/20.500.11875/3187>. (Figure 1).

## FUTURE JOHN BUFFETT STAMP(S) REQUIRED

Buffett had a propensity to record important events, and after his death a ledger book he had repurposed as a diary provides a glimpse of Pitcairners’ lives after relocating to Norfolk Island in 1856 (Figure 2). That John Buffett was an important early Pitcairner is not debatable. The new providers of Pitcairn stamps (Tower Mint) should consider issuing stamps commemorating significant people, places and events from Buffett’s lifetime (*i.e.*, John Buffett, Lord Hood Island, Bourdeaux, Joshua Hill). Buffett’s contributions as a schoolmaster, preacher, song leader, woodworker, diarists, and according to Rosalind Young, a person with a genial and cheerful demeanor, made him a valuable member of early

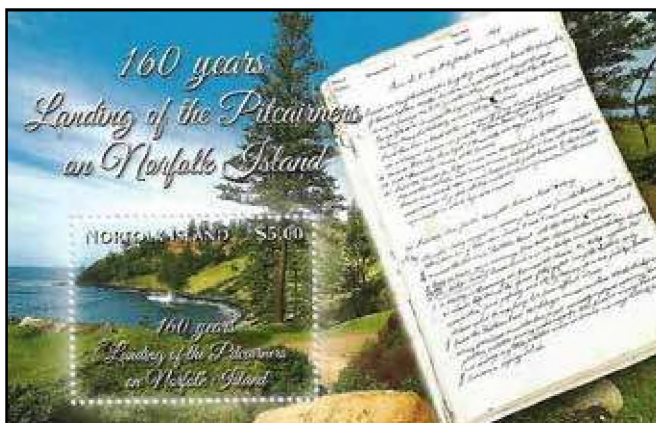


Figure 2

**Last stamp issue (June 7, 2016) from Norfolk Island Post, “160 Years Landing of the Pitcairners on Norfolk Island.” John Buffett’s ledger book with diary entries shown in the selva of this souvenir sheet. Source: Norfolk Island Post, <http://www.stamps.gov.nf/fdc2016.htm>.**



Figure 3

**First day cover titled “Women of the Bounty” commemorates the 12 Polynesian women and an infant girl who settled on Pitcairn Island in 1790.**

**Source: Author’s Collection, <https://shsu-ir.tdl.org/handle/20.500.11875/3188>.**

Pitcairn community.

There are about 30 stamps that depict *Bounty* mutineers (Fletcher Christian, John Adams), the original Polynesian women (12 women and an infant girl -- see Figure 3), and early, famous, or otherwise prominent Pitcairners (Thursday October Christian, Rosalind Amelia Young, George Nobbs, Parkin Christian and at least seven more).



So, while one might develop a topic-based collection of Pitcairn-issued stamps highlighting personalities from Pitcairn's past, the absence of one or more stamps commemorating John Buffett's contributions would be an oversight. While the Norfolk Post commemorates Buffett's diary ledger in a stamp's selva (Figure 2), and John Buffett II (1826-1906) – a Chief Magistrate for Norfolk Island for four years from 1867 and two years from 1881 – with a pre-stamped cover, Pitcairn has failed to honor John Buffett Sr. in the same manner.

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LORD HOODS/LORD-HOODS ISLAND (BUFFETT)						
ufi	nt	full_name	desig_cd	cc_ft	lat_dms	long_dms
1310580	N	Marutea	ATOL	PYF	-21:30:00	-135:34:00
1310580	N	Atoll Marutea	ATOL	PYF	-21:30:00	-135:34:00
1310580	V	Hood	ATOL	PYF	-21:30:00	-135:34:00
1310580	V	Lord Hood Island	ATOL	PYF	-21:30:00	-135:34:00
1310580	V	Marutea	ATOL	PYF	-21:30:00	-135:34:00
1310580	V	Marutea	ATOL	PYF	-21:30:00	-135:34:00
1310580	V	South Marutea Island	ATOL	PYF	-21:30:00	-135:34:00
1310580	V	South Marutea	ATOL	PYF	-21:30:00	-135:34:00
LORD HOODS/FATUHUKU ISLAND (LUCAS)						
ufi	nt	full_name	desig_cd	cc_ft	lat_dms	long_dms
1310160	N	Fatu Huku	ISL	PYF	-9:25:00	-138:54:00
1310160	V	Hoods Island	ISL	PYF	-9:25:00	-138:54:00
1310160	V	Ile Fatu Huku	ISL	PYF	-9:25:00	-138:54:00
1310160	V	Feto Hougo	ISL	PYF	-9:25:00	-138:54:00
1310160	V	Fatu Huku	ISL	PYF	-9:25:00	-138:54:00
1310160	V	Hood Island	ISL	PYF	-9:25:00	-138:54:00
1310160	V	Fatou-houkou	ISL	PYF	-9:25:00	-138:54:00
1310160	V	Fetu-huku	ISL	PYF	-9:25:00	-138:54:00

Table 1

*Approved (N) and variant (V) placenames for Buffett's and Lucas islands. Extracted December 15, 2022, from Geographic Names Server, National Geospatial-Intelligence Agency. Key: ufi = Unique Feature Identifier, nt = Name Type Code (N=Approved or V=Variant), full\_name = Full Name (Indigenous, English, French), desig\_cd = (ISL=Island or ATOL=Atoll), cc\_ft = Country Code (PYF=French Polynesia), lat\_dms = latitude (degrees, minutes, seconds, no sign north, - sign south), long\_dms = longitude (degrees, minutes, seconds, no sign east, - sign west).*

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