

AUSTRALIAN JOINT COPYING PROJECT

SIR JOHN THURSTON

Diaries and papers, 1854-1926

Reel M691

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**National Library of Australia
State Library of New South Wales**

Filmed: 1967

BIOGRAPHICAL NOTE

Sir John Bates Thurston (1836-1897) was born in London and spent his early years in London and Jersey. His father died in 1847 and in 1849 he was apprenticed to Liverpool shipowners and went to sea. He made voyages to India and Australia and in 1853-54 spent a short time on the Victorian goldfields. He was subsequently a mate on a Sydney schooner trading in the Pacific Islands. In 1865 a botanical voyage to Rotuma ended in shipwreck and on arriving in Fiji Thurston found work as a clerk with the British consul. Within a short time he took over as the consul and soon became involved in disputes between the Indigenous Fijians and the growing number of European cotton planters. In 1872 he joined the government of Ratu Seru Cakobau as chief secretary. He played a central role in the negotiations that led to the Cakobau Government making an offer of cession to Britain, on condition that Fijian land ownership was protected.

Fiji became a British Crown colony in 1874 and in 1875 Sir Arthur Gordon arrived to take up the position of governor. From 1877 onwards Thurston was Colonial Secretary of Fiji and Assistant High Commissioner for the Western Pacific. He was knighted in 1887, having acted as governor in the previous two years. In 1888 Thurston was appointed Governor of Fiji and High Commissioner for the Western Pacific and he remained in those positions until his death in 1897. He was the longest-serving governor in the history of the colony.

Reference: Deryck Scarr. *The majesty of colour: a life of Sir John Bates Thurston*, 2 vols. (Canberra, Australian National University Press, 1973, 1980).

The Thurston Papers filmed by the Australian Joint Copying Project were acquired by the National Library of Australia and are held at MS 1914.

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1 Biographical papers

Notes on the life of J.B. Thurston. (ms, 14pp)

Book containing genealogical notes on the Thurston Family by Eliza Morton, sister of Thurston, written in 1926, with additional notes on J.B. Thurston's life by his daughter Alys Thurston.

'Sir John Thurston in Fiji'. (ms, 5pp)

Genealogical table showing descendants of Robert Turstain, half-brother of Rollo, 1st Duke of Normandy, compiled by Alys Thurston.

Note: Obituaries and other articles about Thurston are listed, but were not filmed. They are among the original papers now held in the National Library of Australia.

2 Diary of a voyage from Sydney to Mauritius, 1863

Diary kept by Thurston on a voyage on the *Kestrel* from Sydney to Perth and Mauritius, 3 February – 17 May 1863. The entries are intermittent,

In the same volume is an account entitled 'Ramble in Rotuma'. (15pp)

3 Diary of a voyage from Sydney to England, 1854-55

Diary kept by Thurston on a voyage on the *Arabia* from Sydney to England, via New Zealand, Cape Horn and Bahia, Brazil, 20 September 1854 – 5 March 1855. The volume is a mixture of shipboard diary and notebook, recording conversations, historical accounts, anthropological notes and other reflections.

In the same volume are notes on Rotuma Island, the government of Rotuma, Benai Littoral, and the 'respect entertained by most natives for the posts of their houses'.

4 Commonplace book

The book contains short diaries, essays, poems and extracts from publications. They include:

Pages 3-16: The coconut tree.

- Pages 17-23: The midnight encounter: a legend of New South Wales. (poem)
- Page 26-29: Diffusion of animal creation.
- Pages 39-40: Notes from Rev. John Williams's narrative.
- Pages 41-42: Remarks on Polynesian pronouns etc.
- Pages 48-56: How I spent Christmas.
- Pages 57-75: The wreck and plundering of the brig *Star of Eve* at the island of Rotumah, South Seas, 13-18 March 1865.
- Pages 78-82: Extract from Richard C. Trench on the language of savage tribes.
- Pages 86-118: Archbishop Richard Whateley. On the origin of civilisation.
- Pages 119-[28]: Diary of a passage from Rotuma to Fiji on the brig *John Wesley*, 14 June – 1 August 1865.

5 Diary of the cession of Fiji to Britain, 1874

A Letts diary (three days per page) for 1874, with detailed entries for January-April and occasional entries for April-July. The entries in the first four months record the negotiations and deliberations of Thurston and the Cakobau Government, the Fijian chiefs, and the British commissioners, Commodore J.G. Goodenough and E.L. Layard, concerning the annexation of Fiji by Britain. Cakobau made a final offer on 21 March, which the British accepted. The discussions ended in unconditional cession on 30 September 1874.

6 Diary of a cruise to the Solomon Islands, 1894

Diary kept by Thurston on a cruise on HMS *Ringdove* from Fiji to the Solomon Islands, 8 September – 8 November 1894.

The southern Solomon Islands had come under the jurisdiction of the Western Pacific High Commission in 1893 and Thurston undertook the cruise in his capacity as High Commissioner. He visited many islands including Guadalcanal, Savo Island, New Georgia, Russell Islands, Santa Cruz Islands and Tikopia. The diary, which is quite detailed, records his meetings with chiefs and other Islanders, traders and missionaries and also Cecil Wilson, the Anglican Bishop of Melanesia. Thurston wrote about conversations, such as an account of the murder of Bishop John Patteson in 1871, disputes and litigation, and his observations of villages, houses, churches, boats and crops. He also made notes on his reading, including G.L.D. de Rienzi's *Océanie* (1836-37), Hernan Gallego's account of the voyage of Mendana in 1567-68, and Peter Dillon's *Narrative and successful results of a voyage in the South Seas* (1829).

At the end of the diary are notes of an inquiry by Thurston into the actions of Peter Edmund Pratt, a French trader based at Simbo Island, who was accused of shooting an Islander.