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Suva and the Fate of the Polynesia Company

Max Quanchi

In October 1870, the missionary Lorimor Fison visited Suva peninsula looking for a site for a church and wrote:

at present things are in a very unsettled state. The weather has been sadly against the newcomers for it has been raining since they came down, and during the last three weeks have had most dismal weather – not one fine day in 21. Settlers living in tents or in hastily built makeshift huts, men to be pitied but worst hardship falls on women and children.

The *Alhambra* had arrived from Melbourne a month previously, carrying the first shipload of Polynesia Company shareholders keen to begin a new life as planters on the Suva peninsula. Henry Armstrong, from the Upper Murray district in Victoria, had been the first shareholder to arrive, in May 1869, joined by his brother in early 1870. Henry had travelled out to Fiji on the *Springbok*, the first vessel to sail direct from Melbourne to Fiji with a group of intending settlers, in what was called the ‘Fiji Rush’. They were the only shareholders on the peninsula until the arrival of the *Alhambra* in September 1870.¹

¹ This chapter is a compilation of stories about Suva taken from my recent monograph (Max Quanchi, *This glorious company* (Suva: USP Press, 2020)), my MA thesis on Victoria–Fiji links (Max Quanchi, ‘This glorious company: The Polynesia Company in Melbourne and Fiji’ (master’s thesis, Monash University, 1977)) and several unpublished conference presentations. For further reference details, please see the Source Note at the end of the chapter.

The opportunity to establish cotton plantations on Suva peninsula had arisen because of events in Fiji on 4 July 1849 when the store of an American trader, JB Williams, was destroyed by fire on nearby Nukulau Island; caused, it was later said, by his own carelessness in setting off fireworks to celebrate US Independence Day. During the melee, Fijians dashed into the store and, as Fiji custom allowed, claimed the goods saved from the inferno. Williams declared that a local chief, Ratu Seru Cakobau, was responsible for his losses, claiming that Nukulau Island was within the nominal suzerainty of Cakobau's chiefly domain, centred on nearby Bau Island. Other Americans in Fiji then claimed compensation for incidents involving damage or theft and after a series of visits by American gunboats, Cakobau was deemed liable for US\$45,000 (around £6,500 in 1849) – an enormous figure and certainly one that Cakobau lacked the cash to pay. Eighteen years passed and each visiting US gunboat added more claims and adjusted the interest due. When USS *Tuscarora* arrived in 1867, Cakobau was courting European favour to support his claim to be the paramount chief of all of Fiji, the Tui Viti. Land under his direct control or over which he had a call due to alliances, marriages or wars, was all he had to pay off the debt. By 1867, he had paid between £1,368 and £1,435, with different figures cited in US consular reports.

Fiji's plantation prospects were being touted due to the collapse in cotton exports caused by the US Civil War (1861–1865). In the colony of Victoria, where there had been a decade of unbounded expansion driven by the wealth of the 1850s gold rushes, Fiji seemed to be an attractive investment opportunity as Cakobau was a likely protector, and cotton prospects were reported to be good. Although the British consul in Fiji lamented that lack of a civilised form of European-style government and a regular labour supply was holding back Fiji's growth,² these warnings were overlooked in Melbourne in a climate of unbridled press optimism and Fiji's alleged bountiful prospects. In 1870, the governor of Victoria reported to the Colonial Office in London that:

Your Lordship is well aware that for some time past the interest felt in the Australasian colonies in the development of the resources and in the civilization and security of the Fiji islands has been considerable and rapidly increasing.

2 Her Britannic Majesty's Council (hereafter HBMC) to Colonial Office, 30 June 1864, HBMC Records, Fiji; HBMC, 'Report on Trade and Navigation', 31 December 1868, HBMC Records, Fiji.

The governor was reporting on the excitement in Melbourne as the *Alhambra*, with the first boatload of Polynesia Company shareholders, headed for Suva peninsula.

Two years earlier, after the Polynesia Company promoters, WHO Brewer and JL Evans, returned to Melbourne with a controversial charter signed by Cakobau (allegedly gained under the influence of champagne), it had been a slow process to get the company incorporated, to obtain land title deeds from Cakobau, to have Suva peninsula surveyed and maps drawn up for the selection of blocks and to arrange the transfer of shares into land warrants for those shareholders in Melbourne wanting to settle on a block or to profit by on-selling shares to latecomers joining the Polynesia Company bandwagon. A Melbourne office had been established, a Fiji agent employed and, finally, after two years, the *Alhambra* chartered to carry the first party of eager settlers to Suva peninsula. The story of Suva, the city of today, begins when those aspiring settlers stepped ashore in September 1870. It was with a degree of wariness that they headed ashore after the *Alhambra* anchored in the sheltered anchorage, facing the darkened and forested, low ridges that ran down the core of the Suva peninsula. There were Fijian villages at Suva, near today's Thurston Gardens, and at Nasēsē, a kilometre down the coast.

Suva peninsula was undulating, heavily vegetated and cut with ravines, and Colonel Pratt of the Royal Engineers later noted in his preliminary survey of Suva's suitability as the seat of government, that it was far easier to row around the point than to try and traverse the peninsula west to east from Nabukalou Creek to Laucala Bay.

Adolph Brewster Joske, a young boy under the guardianship of GD McCartney, a company official, gave an account of this first day ashore in his book, *King of the Cannibal Isles*, in which he recalled that only a roughly drawn sketch map pinned to a post in a Ratu Ambrose's *bure* greeted the new arrivals.³ JS Butters, the company's Fiji agent, was in Levuka and did not visit until November. Those with company lands warrants pencilled their names in on blocks and set about clearing the ground, erecting a house, hiring local Fijians as labour and planning where crops would be planted. Settlers chose blocks laid out across the peninsula,

3 Adolphe Joske changed his name to AB Brewster after a family feud with his father, and published the book in 1937, under his new name. See AB Brewster, *King of the Cannibal Islands* (London: Robert Hales and Company, 1937), 74–81.

or along the Tamavua River, which also took advantage of a well-worn Fijian track running from the original Suva village near Naiqoro Creek to Tamavua village and further north to the Waimanu River.⁴

The Melbourne press reported favourably on the Polynesia Company's decision to dispatch a 'local committee' to Suva to watch over the allocation of blocks and to report back, confidentially, on the efforts of the Polynesia Company's agent in Fiji, JS Butters, a former lord mayor of Melbourne; the four on the committee were GD McCartney, William Henry O'Halloran Brewer, BR Henry and PJ Williams. After Williams moved over to Laucala Bay to establish a plantation and McCartney moved to Levuka after a few months, Brewer was left in authority, backed by his friend BR Henry.

The overall authority on allocation of blocks was retained in Melbourne, and this was the cause of confusion, anger and considerable underhanded behaviour in the coming months. David Sellars, a surveyor and company shareholder on the *Alhambra*, was temporarily hired by the company to carry out a survey but he immediately sent a complaint to the board in Melbourne claiming that the Local Committee, primarily Brewer, had monopolised the selection of blocks, so much that when ex-Richmond bootmaker John Henderson arrived in November 1870, the only company land he could select was an isolated, un-surveyed block inland along the Lami River to the west of the Suva peninsula. WH Surplice, from Ballarat, was then retained as the company's new surveyor.

The process seemed simple enough – settlers armed with company land warrants selected blocks according to the number of shares they held, either Surplice or the Local Committee registered their selection and then forwarded the list to Melbourne for approval. It seemed that with three levels of oversight – Butters, Surplice and the Local Committee – the taking up of blocks would proceed smoothly. However, the company began to allow shareholders in Melbourne to make selections, so unbeknown to each other, company shareholders in Melbourne and Suva were selecting the same block. This created a clear distinction between the bona fide settlers establishing plantations and claiming title by occupation, and speculators in Melbourne who claimed, sold and resold the same blocks

4 The contested claims for Suva blocks can be followed in the wonderfully fulsome files of the Land Claims Commission, National Archives of Fiji (henceforth referred to as LCC).

while remaining in Victoria. When the Land Claims Commission (LCC) came to judge the 92 applications for Suva blocks, they found it impossible to unravel the competing claims.

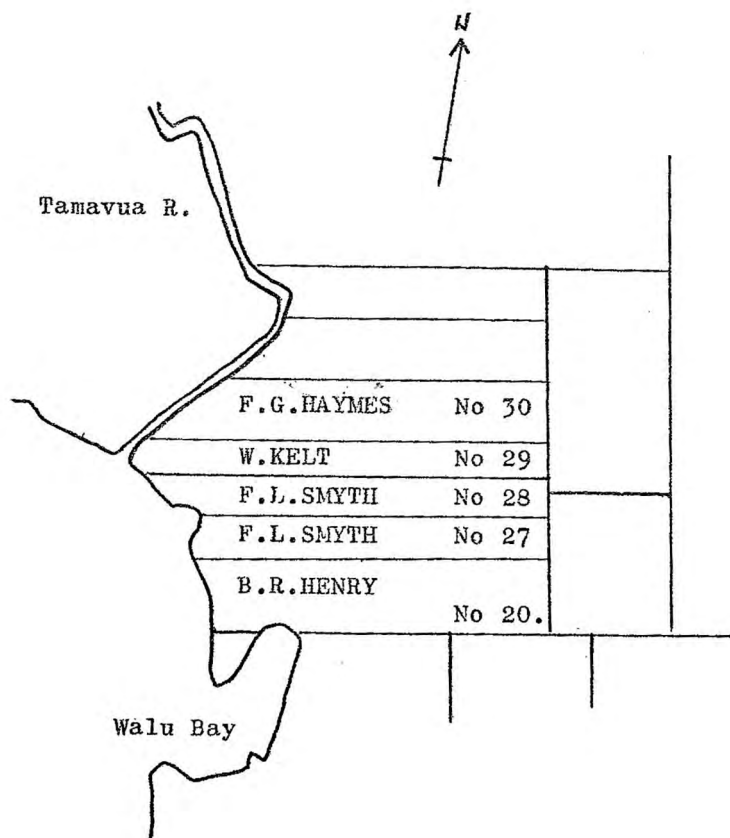
Plantation blocks had 400-metre frontages to either Suva Harbour in the west or Laucala Bay in the east. The blocks stretched inland from Suva Point to the Waimanu River, and west along the coast as far as Grove Point (Uduya Point) and Lami. WH Surplice added 14 more blocks to the original plan when he realised additional selections had been made further inland. The company then added 39 more numbered blocks and six unspecified blocks to the maps prepared by Surplice. In April 1874, under the instructions of the directors in Melbourne, several boundaries were changed, and more selections approved west of the Tamavua River and north of the township reserve, and some blocks were reduced in size and a new number allotted to the smaller portions.

Walter Eyre, a land claims commissioner appointed by the first British governor, Sir Arthur Gordon, attempted a block-by-block investigation but gave up due to conflicting claims and a lack of clear evidence of ownership, placing blame firstly on the Local Committee for not immediately sending selections and associated land warrants back to Melbourne, and secondly on the company itself for issuing land warrants for more blocks than it had surveyed.⁵

Eyre was critical of the indiscriminate issuing of conveyances of title to shareholders who never occupied the land or who claimed unspecified acreages in unspecified locations. He criticised the practice of the directors in Melbourne refusing to convey the amount selected, claiming it was over the entitlement allowed, and then issuing conveyances to other shareholders in Melbourne for the lands they had just sheared off an unsuspecting settler in Suva, or conveying them to 'different people in nearly all cases to themselves or their relatives'. Put bluntly, said Eyre, a single block in Suva was being claimed by several shareholders in Melbourne, and often by two or three subsequent purchasers, who thought or were tricked into believing they held land warrants and undisputed title. Eyre drew a hypothetical case demonstrating how one 200-acre block could be subdivided, renumbered, and resold and claimed by four claimants now totalling 500 acres. Eyre declared that:

5 Eyre's report on Suva's claims is contained in LCC: P115 ('Rehearing Suva blocks'). Much of this evidence was not produced until petitions against the LCC's initial decisions were heard in 1879–1881.

it is impossible to say if my surmises set out above are correct ... (but) from a perusal of the deeds it is apparent that great laxity has been shown in the management.



PLAN OF SELECTIONS AT SUVA

Based on plan of selections issued by the Polynesia Company, 4 Feb 1873. Fiji:LCC., R412., R428 and P293

(Drawn by author)

Figure 2.1: Sketch of contested blocks of land between Walu Bay and Tamavua River, 1873.

Source: Sketch by the author, 1970s. Held in private collection.

We can test Eyre's summary against the claims before the LCC by bona fide settlers, absentees and blatantly fraudulent claimants for blocks 20, 27, 28, 29 and 30 running along the shore from Walu Bay, north to the Tamavua River. In 1875, these blocks were claimed by BR Henry, TA Copeland, FL Smyth, W Kelt and FG Haymes.⁶ Copeland, an American, was a friend of BR Henry's and they made an agreement in Melbourne with Jacob Brache, a company shareholder, in which he loaned them a considerable sum in return for which they would go to Suva, select land and then purchase Brache's land warrants, after which all three would go into a coffee and sugar plantation partnership. Copeland and Henry sailed to Fiji in August 1870 but neither became planters. Gilbert McClymont, who had arrived in Suva in 1870 with Henry, told the LCC that Henry 'never took up land' and that Copeland was a land-jobber and worked as a manager at Brewer and Joske's store in Suva and later went to Levuka as a store clerk and set up his own business. Henry was a foreman at Brewer and Joske's cotton store and ginning sheds and engaged in land-jobbing. In 1874, Jacob Brache was able to convince the Board of Directors that the selections authorised in 1873 for blocks 20, 27, 28, 29 and 30 between Walu Bay and the Tamavua River were incorrect. The directors acquiesced and changed the boundaries and issued new conveyances. Meanwhile, Jacob Brache passed over the titles to his brother CA Brache, manager of the Murray and Ovens Vineyard Wine Cellars in Melbourne and secretary of the Murray and Ovens Vineyard Proprietors Association. When the matter went before the LCC, CA Brache's claim was rejected, noting that Jacob Brache had conveniently forgotten to mention the series of partnerships, renumbering and subsequent transfers of title. This example of just a small parcel of blocks at Suva peninsula demonstrates, as Eyre had succinctly noted, the haphazard and in some cases fraudulent role played by directors in Melbourne.

In 1875, both Copeland and Henry left Fiji in a hurry heading for the United States, Copeland just ahead of his creditors. WHO Brewer had just died. With consular and church approval, Henry, claiming gallant and Christian motives, stepped in and married Brewer's teenage daughter, Ada, in a hastily arranged Church of England ceremony. The girl, listed as Brewer's 16-year-old daughter on the shipping register, was later found not to be Brewer's daughter, but a teenager, Ada Lily Smith, his lover.

6 For claims see: LCC, Claims R412, R427, R428, R431, R449 and R1321; Applications 1320, 1434, 1497 and 1630; and Files P293 and P294.

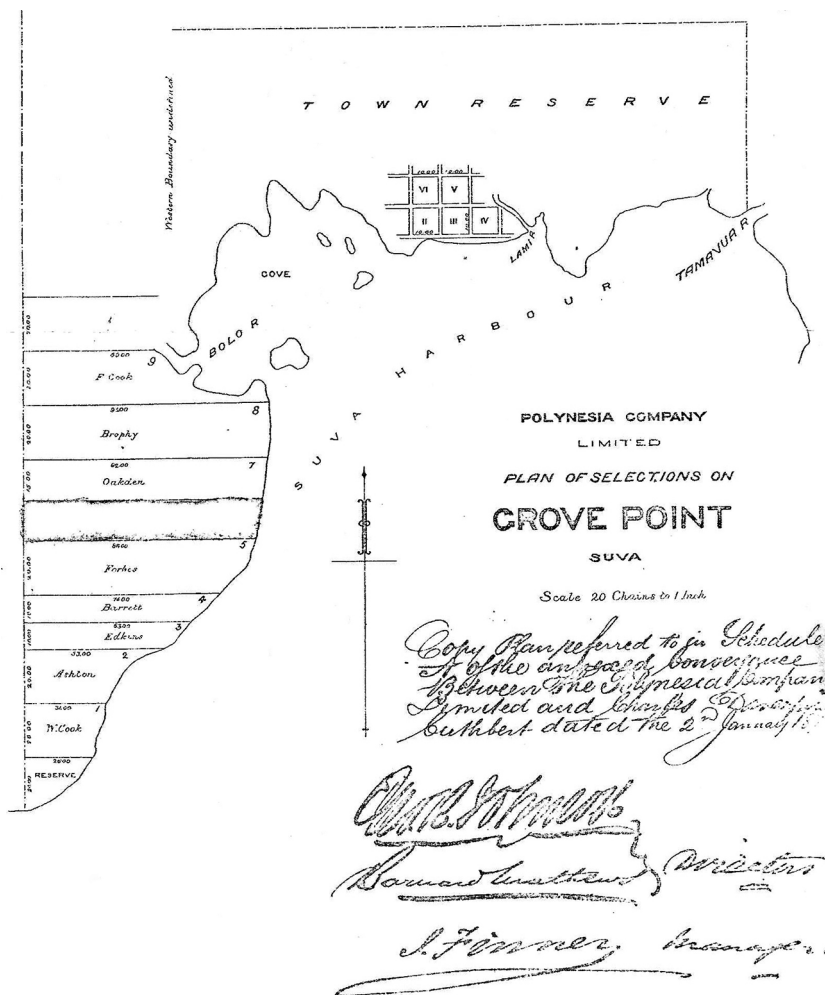


Figure 2.2: Polynesia Company plan of selections at Grove Point, 1871.

Source: LCC: Claim R427.

In Melbourne, the sale of land warrants for blocks in Suva was profitable. The price asked for actual blocks, and often for ones that did not exist, were extraordinarily high as land in Fiji ranged from 1 to 10 shillings an acre, well below the going price in Melbourne of £1 an acre. These sales also highlight the speculative atmosphere of Melbourne and the willingness to buy land in the Pacific in the hope of making a quick sale to an unsuspecting investor or intending planter.⁷

⁷ The trail of warrants and sales can be followed in evidence tended to the LCC.

WB Sellers, a Suva settler originally from Warrnambool in Victoria, had written to the company from Suva criticising Brewer for picking all the best land and this became a public spat when Seller's letter was published in the *Age* in Melbourne. Paul Joske, a Melbourne wine and spirit merchant who arrived in Suva to join his teenage son, called the selection process an outright swindle and, later, Charles Cuthbert presented several maps and lists of contested selections when he was giving evidence at the LCC.⁸ The Armstrong brothers also gave evidence that they attempted to select blocks on Polynesia Company land but had to make unspecified selections outside the company's boundaries because there was insufficient acreage for them to take up land that their land warrants entitled them. Cuthbert estimated there had been 26 selections made for Suva blocks prior to December 1870, covering 7,750 acres of the 27,000 acres conveyed by Cakobau to the company. Many were by proxy and did not involve actual occupation or expenditure on establishing a plantation.

An Inefficient Happy-Go-Lucky Crowd

The settlement of Suva peninsula was part of the Fiji Rush or as John Young called the settlers, an 'evanescent ascendancy'.⁹ The youngster, Adolph Joske, described the settlers on the *Alhambra* whom he travelled down to Fiji with as:

mostly men of small capital who were leaving openly for their new homes with their wives, children, goods and chattels ... taken all round we were an inefficient, happy-go-lucky crowd with inadequate capital who had not sat down and counted properly the cost of the venture but had been caught up with the glamour of the islands and like the immortal Mr Micawber always trusted that something would turn up which would lead us to fortune.

⁸ LCC R1321, see also R1322/P292.

⁹ JMR Young, 'Evanescent ascendancy: The planter community in Fiji', in *Pacific Island portraits*, ed. James Wightman Davidson and Deryck Scarr (Canberra: ANU Press, 1970); see also JMR Young, 'Australia's Pacific frontier', *Australian Historical Studies* 12, no. 47 (1966): 373–88, doi.org/10.1080/10314616608595336; L Cleland et al., 'From the archives', *The Journal of Pacific History* 1, no. 1 (1966): 183–203, doi.org/10.1080/00223346608572089; JMR Young, ed., *Australia's Pacific frontier: Economic and cultural expansion into the Pacific 1795–1885* (Melbourne: Cassell Australia, 1967); JMR Young, *Adventurous spirits: Australian migrant society in pre-cession Fiji* (St Lucia: University of Queensland Press, 1984).

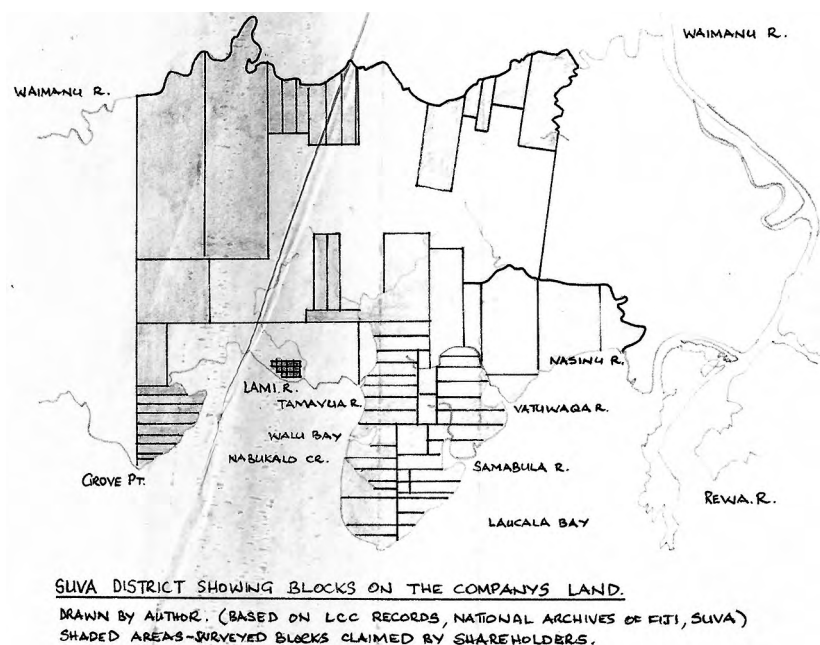


Figure 2.3: Sketch of blocks claimed by the Polynesia Company on Suva peninsula and the hinterland, c.1870s.

Source: Sketch by the author, 1970s. Contained in private collection.

Henry Britton, an *Age* journalist, mistakenly called the passengers ex-gold seekers frustrated in their hopes of easy fortunes of the Australian goldfields. The *Fiji Times* thought they were 'Hawkesbury farmers, squatters, Victorian wine growers, diggers, New Zealand flax dressers and merchants looking for less competition and higher profits'. Litton Forbes, who visited Fiji during the rush, referred to the settlers as 'with scarcely an exception, men of respectability'.¹⁰

The 122 passengers on the *Alhambra* demonstrate this diversity of background. In the fore cabin were 10 married men with their wives, 38 single men and one boy, all designated as 'labourers'. In salon class, there were 52 adult men and women and 11 children; six men were accompanied by their wives and children, and four women were travelling out to join their husbands.

10 Brewster, *King of the Cannibal Islands*, 72, 74; Henry Britton, *Fiji in 1870: Being the letters of 'The Argus' special correspondent ...* (Melbourne: Samuel Mullen, 1870), 6; *Fiji Times* 7 May 1970; Litton Forbes, *Two years in Fiji* (London: Longmans, Green, 1875), 277.

The previous vessels sailing to Fiji had much the same mix of passengers. In May 1869, the *Springbok*, via Sydney, carried 18 passengers, including two women going out to join husbands, six married men, 10 single men all under 30 years of age, and one governess. This group included SG Watson, the Polynesia Company's largest shareholder, 50 years of age, a wealthy pastoralist from the Upper Murray; Henry Armstrong, a 23-year-old also from the Upper Murray; and Frederick Cook, the company's manager who was going out to investigate the delays in obtaining titles to all 200,000 acres granted by Cakobau. In April 1870, the *Springbok* again made passage for Fiji, carrying 23 adults and one child. Eighteen men were single, five were married and included Dr Thomas McGrath and Dr James Roche, both from Castlemaine; Dr Thomas Serrell from Fitzroy; John Bloomfield, a building contractor for Ascot Vale; and Alfred D'este, an ex-French military officer. All were shareholders in the company. The other passengers listed their occupations as 'farmer' or more ambitiously as 'Planter'. When the *Kohinoor* sailed for Fiji in June 1870 the passengers included the indefatigable JS Butters, former lord mayor of Melbourne, and now the company's new agent in Fiji. These were not vessels chartered by the company, but 25 per cent of the men on board were shareholders. On the *Alhambra*, 30 per cent of the male passengers were shareholders.¹¹ The Polynesia Company had chartered the *Alhambra* and the *Albion* but was otherwise not involved in shipping despite press reports of promised shipping lines and new steamer routes.¹²

These shipping figures were a dramatic increase on just a few years earlier when ships carried only two or three passengers bound for Fiji, with Victorians having to travel to Sydney to start the voyage. The Fiji Rush also included hopeful planters from Auckland and Otago.

It was a muddy and disorganised arrival when shareholders landed on the shore near the mouth of Nabukalou Creek and then moved out to their selected blocks. At the head of Laucala Bay, Thomas B Matthews took up 400 acres running south from the Nasinu River to the shoreline. Matthews had purchased 100 shares in the initial float and migrated out to Levuka on the *Kohinoor* in 1870. He immediately hired local Fijians to

11 On the *Alhambra*, 31 of the 100 male passengers were Polynesia Company shareholders. Joske (AB Brewster) refers to 'about 40' being shareholders (Brewster, *King of the Cannibal Islands*, 72). A few other shareholders had sailed to Fiji earlier in the year.

12 John Young and Ruth Moses both mistakenly claim the company had a 'remunerative sideline' running ships to Fiji. See Ruth Moses, 'The Polynesia Company Limited of Melbourne and Fiji 1868–1883: A social history', (BA (Hons) thesis, University of Adelaide, 1971), 34, 60.

clear 60 acres and planted cotton. In 1871, he returned to Victoria and married the daughter of Charles Cuthbert, a fellow settler, but when the 25 acres of sugar had to be left to rot when Brewer and Joske's sugar mill broke down, he turned to growing bananas and finally cattle and goat grazing. His proudest achievement was a road, 6 metres wide, 2 kilometres long, with planted trees along both sides. The planned mansion at the end of the avenue never eventuated. He had selected the adjoining block as a proxy for this brother and an unspecified selection east of the Lami River for a Melbourne friend, George Ticknell. He also selected a 40-acre block for himself at Lami and four half-acre Lami town blocks. By 1873, Matthews had expended £1,500 and was forced to mortgage his land to WK Thompson, the managing director of James McEwan and Company of Melbourne, who was then engaged in several pursuits in Suva. In May 1875, Matthews was unable to meet his payments and the mortgage passed wholly to Thompson. Mathews remained on the land on a lease for £84 per annum and attempted to lease what he considered better land along the Waimanu River. Finally in 1880, Matthews moved away to the Lower Rewa River district and took over the Waimanu Hotel and a cane growing block on the richer river plains.¹³ Under the settler-led Cakobau Government, Mathews served as warden for Rewa and under the Crown Colony Government as customs and health officer for the port of Suva.

South of Matthews's block, between the Vatuwaqa and Samabula rivers, was the selection of Pierce J Williams. He had been active in the formation of the company and had travelled down on the *Alhambra* with Brewer, McCartney and Henry as part of the company's Local Committee. He had married in Warrnambool and had purchased 150 acres in Polynesia Company land warrants from the member of the Legislative Assembly for Warrnambool, William Plummer. Williams was a dour, resolute clerk of only moderate means when he left Richmond, where he was then living, and headed to Suva to make a success out of cotton planting. He hired 12 men from Tokelau, eight Fijians on long-term contracts and 400 others on casual rates and immediately cleared 100 acres and planted 80 acres in cotton. The company land warrants had cost £375 and both Cuthbert and the Armstrong brothers estimated before the LCC that at last £400 had been spent on improvements and £600 on labour. A year later his wife, Sophie, recalled how 'bright and prosperous the plantation was

13 Matthew's story can be followed in the LCC files; see R428, R434 and P1250. See also correspondence in LCC: Miscellaneous Papers and in FIJI: CSO Correspondence 1877–1878, both in Fiji Archives.

then looking'. His neighbours to the south, Fred and Henry Armstrong, testified to his efforts, stating before the LCC that 'he was one who went in heavily for planting witness the rapidity with which he had such a large quantity of cotton planted'.

Williams had dug wells and erected a timber frame house and labourer's quarters. The cotton matured splendidly. Sadly, exactly a year after arriving, Williams died, probably of dysentery, and Sophie could only manage to harvest a few bags of cotton. Williams was buried in the soil he had tilled.

Sophie was forced to admit she knew little of her husband's business matters as 'unfortunately he did not communicate much of his affairs to me'. Sophie's intention was to keep going but as she recalled later, 'all the men ran away the night he died, if they stayed with Mr Surplice as manager we could have survived'. To add to her wretched state, she was confronted the next day by several Fijians who had on occasion worked on the plantation. They demanded money and when Sophie refused, they returned several times, menaced her and threatened to burn down the house. When news of this confrontation reached the settlement at Nabukalou Creek on the other side of the peninsula, a public meeting was called, and rescue mission arranged. A boat was rowed around Suva Point and brought Sophie and her children back to safety. She recalled how she had been saved 'only by the kindness of Mathews, Ryan and others and a meeting of the Suva people who fetched us away'. Cuthbert wrote to the company's agent in Levuka, CR Forwood, that the Toka Toka and Samabula people were responsible for the outrage, and that:

all the yams and potatoes planted have been stolen and knives, calico and other trade forcibly removed from the house ... knives and clubs were held over Mrs W and the servant women who were at home.¹⁴

Sophie Williams stayed with the Cuthberts at Walu Bay for three months, then after her brother sent money for a passage Sophie and her two young girls, Annie and Eliza, returned to Victoria. Surplice briefly lived on the block, on one occasion uprooting crops planted by local Fijians,

14 Cuthbert to Forwood, 12 Dec 1972, Fiji Archives, File T/20. A meeting of the association on 3 February 1972 resolved that one or all of the villages should be removed, especially Suva, in order to enhance the prospects of the company's occupation.

and Matthews kept the house in good repair. Eight years later, destitute, a widow with a sick child and her own health failing, she wrote to Cuthbert from Warrnambool:

I feel an attraction to Suva. My husband is buried there, and I was befriended when really needed. I am sure you will think this a most melancholy letter ... believe me I cannot endure the thought of losing that land.

In 1881, Sophie received a Crown Grant for 750 acres at Vatuwaqa. After she died in Richmond in 1884, the block was subdivided and sold at auction.

To the south of PJ Williams's block was the large selection of Percy Oakden. A director of the Polynesia Company, Oakden had been instrumental in July 1870 in launching the offshoot Ballarat scheme, the Fiji Planting and Trading Company, to which he had sold all his Polynesia Company landholdings for £500. Although the *Ballarat Star* declared capital was being called up and 'large returns are anticipated', it went into liquidation in 1874 and Percy Oakden purchased its holdings outright for £1,100. Charles Cuthbert, the plantation manager for the first and second versions of the Fiji Planting and Trading Company, had selected two blocks adjoining Oakden's western boundary and together they formed an impressive holding stretching right across the peninsula. Cuthbert had travelled down on the *Alhambra* but when he erected a tent on the shore at Walu Bay he was confronted by Caroline Fitzgibbon, who argued vigorously and successfully to the Local Committee that she had selected the block. She quickly sold it to WHO Brewer and Cuthbert was forced to move to a block further along the coast that he had leased for the Fiji Planting and Trading Company. Cuthbert built a Fiji-style *bure* for £7 and later replaced it with a wooden frame house. A large workshop was built on the Walu Bay block of the Fiji Planting and Trading Company, where many of the small cutters that plied the harbour were later built. Cuthbert weathered the lean years and became a respected 'old hand', a commissioner of peace under the Cakobau Government and secretary of the Planter's Association, and he later sat in the post-annexation Legislative Council. Cuthbert built a fine house at Walu Bay, and despite the long walk uphill, it was a popular meeting place for the Suva community. Aerial survey maps in 1945 showed the long hedge Cuthbert had planted along the road to his house.

In 1872, following several incidents between Europeans and Fijians, Cuthbert wrote on behalf of the Suva settlers to CR Forwood, now the Polynesia Company's Fiji agent, asking for help. Forwood spoke to JB Thurston, the most influential member of the Cakobau Government Executive and well versed in local matters, but the government was in disarray by this time and relations between the Polynesia Company and the government were strained. Forwood appealed to Thurston on personal grounds, writing:

I shall feel it a personal favour if some action be taken at once taken to set the natives right with the settlers at Suva, even outside our question with the Polynesia Company.

Behind Cuthbert's block at Walu Bay, Charles and Louisa Edkins established a plantation. Charles had arrived alone on the *Alhambra*. After his wife, children and brother arrived he purchased 228 acres from Brewer and put 20 acres under cotton. Edkins then tried maize, sugarcane and vegetables but within two years was bankrupt. In 1872, he gave up planting and took jobs as a store clerk and overseer before leaving Fiji in 1875. Later he wrote to TB Mathews, who was keeping his house in good repair, that once his capital was healthier, he would like to make a second try. He did not return to Fiji.

On Suva Point, the Armstrong brothers managed to survive the failure of cotton. Henry Armstrong had selected land on the peninsula when he arrived and when his brother Fred joined him in a partnership, the company's Local Committee approved this block and a further 100-acre extension by allocating land originally set aside as a 'Native Reserve'. As cotton prices fell the Armstrongs uprooted their cotton and, on Brewer's advice, planted sugarcane. In 1873, Brewer had just formed a partnership with Paul Joske and, in addition to a store and several other commercial ventures, they imported a small sugarcane crushing mill.¹⁵ After crushing an experimental crop of 7 acres, the Armstrong brothers netted £65 profit, a good return. After the success of the first crushing, Brewer and Joske imported a full-scale crushing mill and they contracted the Armstrong brothers for an additional 35 acres of cane and the Armstrongs hired 25 imported labourers. Other settlers at Suva quickly switched to cane.

¹⁵ Brewer and Joske's sugar enterprise is briefly told in PS Allen, *Cyclopedia of Fiji* (Sydney: McCarron, Stewart & Co., 1907), 168–69.

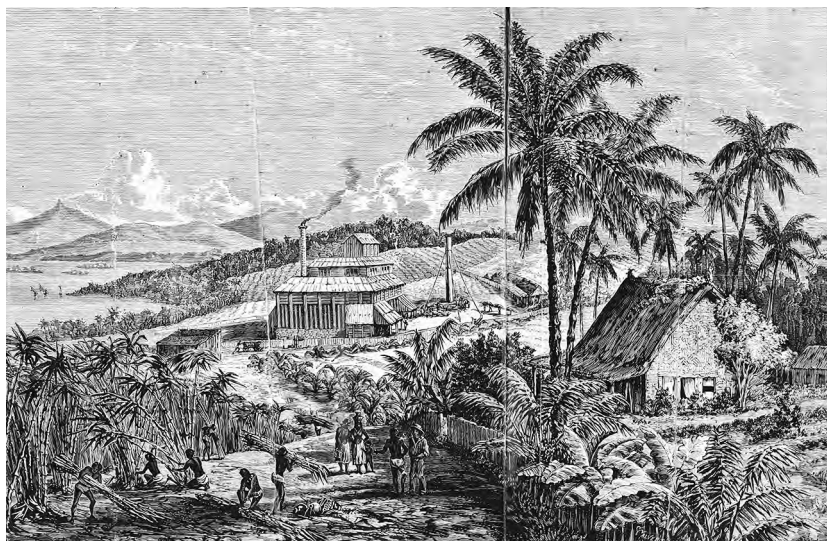


Figure 2.4: Brewer and Joske's Sugar Mill, Suva, 1875.

Source: ANU Open Research Library, openresearch-repository.anu.edu.au/handle/1885/49155.

The *Fiji Argus* later recalled:

upon the successful results of Brewer and Joske's offer everyone relied, long before annexation, for the return of the good times King Cotton had so ruthlessly and inexorably banished. As the ships of the firm landed the massive machinery, great promise was made for the future.¹⁶

The machinery had comprised the sole cargo for two voyages of the brig *Nil Desperandum* and the extent of the venture was such that Brewer and Joske had 175 acres of their own land under cane and a further 30 acres set aside for food crops for their 165 Fijian labourers. Unfortunately, the mill broke down after three months of successful operation and could not be repaired. Several hundred acres of cane across the Suva peninsula were left to rot, uncut and Suva settlers faced yet another setback. The Armstrong brothers were able to supply 14 acres of cane but lost 20 acres when it could not be processed. They then sued Brewer and Joske for breach of contract and were awarded £210 in damages, but this was well below the £1,000 they testified they had invested. After the failure

16 *Fiji Argus*, 8 August 1875; *The Argus* (Melbourne) 22 April 1875. In 1998 and 2006, a plea for compensation was lodged by the Suvavou people for the loss of their lands.

of their cane experiment, they moved away briefly and took jobs with the Cakobau Government or as overseers with more successful planters. Henry and his wife later returned to their Suva Point block and grazed cattle. The brothers had also selected an unspecified 750-acre block in the hinterland but as they admitted to the LCC, they did not have funds to 'run one place let alone two'. In 1945, a few hedges and fence lines remained at Suva Point as evidence of their planting adventures.

Paul Joske was a central character in Suva's early development. He travelled out from Melbourne and joined his son, Adolphe, in 1871 and selected several blocks on the peninsula. He then joined WHO Brewer in a partnership involving a store, hotel, various small vessels, several plantations and, later, a sugar crushing mill. Brewer, due to his role on the Local Committee, had been able to dominate the selection of blocks and, after joining up with Joske, they claimed a large share of the company's lands, and made a profit leasing and selling land to late arrivals and newcomers like Edkins. Brewer profitably wearing two coats, for himself and for the company, held title to 1,196 acres not including his half-share in 'Charlie and Bob's'. Joske held a further 746 acres in his own name and the other half of 'Charlie and Bob's'. This large block from Nabukalou to Nasēsē was originally purchased from local chiefs by RS 'Bob' Swanston and Charles Pickering, divided into two then three parts, and eventually passed to Brewer and Joske, then to Renwick and Thompson and then to McEwans and finally to WK Thompson. Part of this block was set aside as a 'Native Reserve'. Joske and Brewer's Nabukalou blocks were the first to be extensively cultivated with cotton and later cane. When the block was later mortgaged to McEwan's it came with 'all the ginning equipment ... free and bonded stores, hotel and other buildings thereon'. It was this area around the hotel, store and cane mill that a small township began to grow and where the little community gathered to discuss the weather, crops, labour and prices. The partnership was dissolved upon the death of Brewer in February 1874 and most of the lands they had claimed passed to McEwan's and then to WK Thompson.



Figure 2.5: Company map of selections at Suva peninsula, 4 February 1873. Signed by Frederick Cook and GD McCartney, directors, and Joshua Finner, manager.

Source: Reproduced courtesy of National Archives of Fiji.

Joske had also selected the block adjoining Davies and McClymont along the Tamavua River. It was here that the most impressive attempt was made to return a profit. Joske eventually obtained all three adjoining blocks in his own name and that of his son Adolphe and daughter Victoria. He treated the three blocks as one entity. No expense was spared, and the two southern blocks were cleared. As Joske was wealthy, he could meet the outlay less well-funded settlers could afford. He employed a series of European managers and overseers and, although he reckoned on losing £1,000 on the cane, he later made a profit by grazing cattle. He claimed to have spent £1,200 on Victoria's block and £400 on Adolphe's block. Joske later lamented that the dividends promised when hopes were high for cotton, then cane, never eventuated and his three blocks were valued at about a tenth of their value when he purchased them. In 1875, he received only £1,000 for the three blocks when they were sold to Thompson and Renwick. Joske had spent £800 building a fine house on his Tamavua

block. It was Suva's most impressive residence and was used by Governor Gordon, a friend of the Joskes, during his visits to Suva prior to the switch of the capital from Levuka to Suva.

Augustus Bartch, a shareholder, had to lease land on the peninsula after he arrived quite late in May 1872, despite having land warrants from the company for 50 acres. As all the available blocks had been selected, he leased a 40-acre block at the back of Nabukalou Creek from Brewer for £10 per annum. He cultivated this block and lived there for five years but by the time he harvested his first crop of cotton, the price had dropped and he received only £13.3.6 in payment. On Brewer's advice he switched to sugarcane, but the 36 acres he had ready to cut had to be left to rot in the field when the mill broke down. The maize he tried next also failed, as the underlying soapstone was too porous and would not retain moisture. He wrote to Governor Gordon in 1880 that:

having expended all my money on cotton and sugar and having a large family depending on me for sustenance, I rented fifty acres of ground from Mr Joske near Laucala Bay in September 1875, for £12 per year.

Bartsch continued to live and run poultry on his new lease, grow maize and graze cattle. He repeatedly approached Brewer and Joske with efforts to purchase the block he was leasing and after 1876 made determined efforts at the LCC to obtain a Crown Grant based on long occupation. After receiving a 5-acre Crown Grant at Nabukalou from the LCC, he sold it and purchased 100 acres from the estate of the deceased PJ Williams.

Behind Nabukalou Creek, two late arrivals, Aime Augustus Huon and his 15-year-old son, Charles Augustus, purchased 80 acres from Brewer for £2 an acre in 1872. The father formed a partnership with WB Evans, but lacking capital, Evans mortgaged his half of a 32-acre block to Houn, and with this £400 he built a *bure* and planted 16 acres of cane. Huon cleared his half of the block but did not plant. The father also purchased a 1-acre block from WH Surplice, and this later became the centre of a long, acrimonious dispute between Surplice, Joske and Huon. Early in 1875 the father disappeared, and it was later revealed he had sailed to San Francisco leaving no details of when he might return. When Evans decided to return to Melbourne, he sold his half in the block to Aime Huon's son, Charles. Shortly after, Ellen Joske, Paul Joske's wife, obtained the title by redeeming a store debt of Charles Huon and making him a gift of £10.

Paul Joske knew of his wife's land deals but paid little attention, admitting later 'Mrs Joske has a fortune of her own which she spends herself'. Governor Gordon, in an unusually lengthy, 17-page memorandum on this disputed block, noted that from Mrs Joske's point of view it was a shrewd deal. For a store debt at her own store and £10, she gained 40 acres of prime land worth £2,000 to £3,000 when the government shifted the capital to Suva. Huon senior, when he unexpectedly returned to Suva, denied that his son had the right to dispose of the block in his absence. After a long deliberation the LCC decided in the father's favour and he received a Crown Grant for the block.¹⁷ The version of events published in *The Cyclopaedia of Fiji* in 1907 was that the Houns, father and son, had 'acquired considerable landed property in the vicinity of Suva' but had been forced to relinquish it due to failure of their plantation enterprises.¹⁸

Lami was claimed by the company to be the depot for westward expansion, and a grid of streets and a 500-acre reserve was marked on a map prepared for the company. The surveyor, DB Sellars, allocated names to Queen, King, Victoria, Marama, High and Beach streets on the west bank of the Lami River. This was the Fijian *Tikina* lands of the Veisari, Vusi Maoloa and Waibolo people. This map circulated in Melbourne in early 1871 but was misleading, as company shareholders were still clustered around Nabukalou Creek or along the peninsula and immediate hinterland. The directors in Melbourne tried to instil renewed enthusiasm in the company's prospects by holding a ballot for 391 half-acre Lami blocks. The company's Articles of Association allowed one town block for every 10 shares. SG Watson, the company's biggest shareholder, took 36 town blocks at Lami, most of the directors in Melbourne took 12 blocks each and WHO Brewer, heading the Local Committee in Suva, took 24. In a second ballot, more land warrants for Lami were issued. Hoping to stimulate public interest, the company offered a free choice of blocks to the first 20 businesses to occupy and start operating. The company reserved the right to every alternative block. No one took up the offer. It escaped notice at the time that there were only 100 blocks, not 391, delineated on Sellar's map.

17 Huon stayed on in Fiji. Huon Street in Suva is named after the father, Aime.

18 Allen, *Cyclopaedia of Fiji*, 201–2.

2. SUVA AND THE FATE OF THE POLYNESIA COMPANY

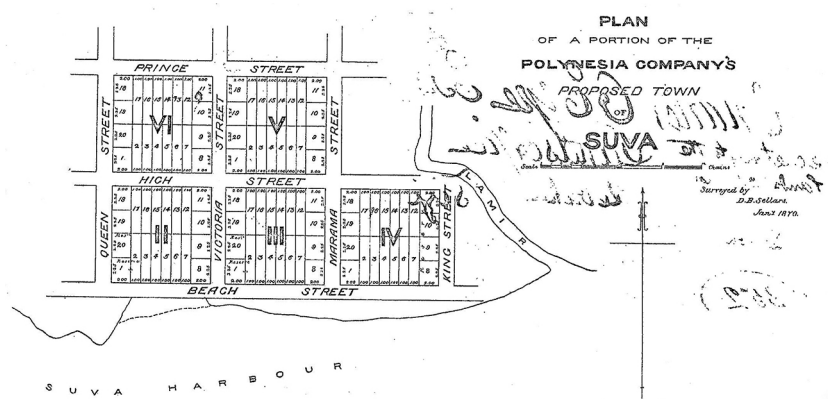


Figure 2.6: Plan for a township; surveyed by DB Sellars, January 1870. The plan was misnamed. It was the plan for Lami Town, west of Suva.

Source: Reproduced courtesy of National Archives of Fiji.

Lami was an illustration of the promotional tactics, speculative posturing and perhaps criminal misrepresentation typical of companies being promoted in Melbourne at the time. The proposed Lami town was separated from Nabukalou Creek by two rivers and no roads or bridges were planned, and the area was low-lying and swampy. The harbourfront was tidal mudflats and unsuited for deep-draught vessels, or even small cutters, and there was no mention of a long deep-water jetty being constructed. In a move to boost support, the company purchased four small islets or islands just offshore in anticipation of Lami becoming a 'bustling harbor'. These four small islets had been astutely purchased from the iTaukei titleholders prior to the company's arrival by William Marshall Moore, the son of a Wesleyan Missionary, in October 1869 for £2, and then sold on to the Polynesia Company four months later for £25.

Two attempts were made to settle in the Lami area. John Henderson, who arrived too late to select a block on the peninsula, had to settle for a 100-acre block at Lami with river frontage that ran 2 kilometres inland from the coast. This selection was approved by Brewer and the Local Committee and the selection was recorded in Melbourne. In December, he moved on to the block with his wife and children. In a testimony to the Cakobau Government's Royal Commission into Quieting Titles, he gave an account of his troubles:

Soon afterwards certain tribes belonging to the tribe, as your petitioner believes of which Chief Ambrose is the local leader, drove your petitioner and family off the land, beating his servants with clubs, threatening your petitioner's life and plundering his goods so that he was obliged to remove his family into the township of Suva.

Henderson returned several times to the block but could not convince the Lami people of his right to occupy. He offered his opinion to the Royal Commission that 'it will only lead to bloodshed and to the ruin of individuals for the said Company to permit further settlement on this block'. He stayed in Suva and operated a boat hire business until he left Fiji in September 1873.

The Land Claims Commission

When the LCC began investigating European claims in the Suva area in 1878, there were 50 blocks claimed by company shareholders but only 16 of these blocks were occupied by bona fide settlers. For two months the commissioners waded through thick piles of documents submitted by claimants in Fiji and Melbourne and took oral evidence from Fijians and Europeans. Many claims were lodged without nominating an attorney and as they were unrepresented, the commissioners relied solely on the claimant's documentation and opposing depositions, submitted in support of or against a claim. In March 1878, the LCC forwarded its recommendations to the executive-in-council. All claims at Grove Point were rejected on grounds of no occupation. Along the Lami River, Bartsch's claim was disallowed on grounds of adverse Fijian occupation. The claims of Thomas and McGrath in the hinterland already had been granted during investigations in the Lower Rewa district. All other claims for unspecified tracts in the hinterland along the Waibolo, Lami and Tamavua rivers were rejected. The commissioners noted, for example, that a claim had been lodged in the name of Frederick Cook's wife, Alice Cook, for land 'somewhere along the Waimanu'. These claims were summarily dismissed. Individuals such as absentee landlords and Melbourne speculators who never went to Fiji and who claimed land on Suva peninsula using land warrants issued by the Polynesia Company were dismissed under a blanket disavowal of claims based on the company's 1868 charter with Cakobau. On the peninsula, Davies and Edkins, who had since returned to Victoria, and Sophie Williams, the widow of PJ Williams, were allowed Crown

Grants due to prior occupation and expenditure. Cuthbert, Matthews, McClymont, the Joskes and the Armstrong brothers were successful because of their current occupation.

There were inconsistencies in the LCC's deliberations, and complaints were voiced about rejections, the reduction of acreages and bias towards the interests of 'natives' over British subjects. In the case of Sophie Williams, the commission granted her 10 more acres than she had applied for, with no explanation given for the increase, despite her only being in occupation for one year and having cleared only 100 acres of the 700-acre block. The most glaring example of inconsistency in the LCC deliberations concerned Edward Charlwood, a Melbourne bookseller, printer and stationer, a late entry into the Polynesia Company scheme and a speculator who never visited Fiji. He had sent Richard Eaton out to Fiji as his agent. Charlwood had purchased for £5 in Melbourne a dubious title deed for two Suva blocks from the insolvent and disgraced GD McCartney, totalling 160 acres at Nabukalou. These town blocks were now plum in the centre of the planned Suva township site. The Polynesia Company had wrongly granted land warrants and titles for land that was originally known as 'Charlie and Bob's' and the LCC's finding was that Charlwood's purchase was 'as pure a speculation as could be conceived' and that he must have known McCartney had no right to offer it for sale. This block had been subdivided in anticipation of the move of the capital to Suva and several individuals 'squatted' there during the debates over the rightful owners. It was not until 1882, in the second last case considered, that the LCC finally judged Charlwood's claim to be invalid, but then four years later, Charlwood petitioned for reconsideration. In a strange and unexplained reversal, in lieu of his original claim for a 160-acre block, Charlwood was awarded 25 town allotments, now worth several thousand pounds after the shift of the capital to Suva. Charlwood was the most undeserving claimant associated with the Polynesia Company. In an ironic twist, his Crown Grants were all taken up by the Bank of New Zealand in lieu of unpaid mortgages.

The fate of the Polynesia Company is starkly illustrated in the case of the four small islets deep in Suva Harbour. The company had legally purchased these four islets in 1869, anticipating that they would increase the value of the proposed Grove Point blocks and planned Lami town, but did not claim them before the LCC and this was an error as they would certainly have been successful claimants and could have made a small

profit from their sale. Instead the four islets were included in a broad claim for 200,000 acres under the 1868 charter signed by Cakobau, and therefore attracted a blanket rejection by the LCC.

Suva, as a township, gradually took shape. In February 1870, the Polynesia Company's manager, Joshua Finner, had declared in Melbourne that Suva would become the 'great central entrepot of all Polynesia' and announced that the laying out of streets and town sites had commenced. This was not true, and the *Fiji Times*, following the company's progress through reports in the colonial press, questioned the tardiness in dispatching settlers to Fiji, but did note that a preliminary survey had been completed. At this stage the company's directors were focusing entirely on large plantation blocks, not creating a town where none existed. But they knew that talk of a town being developed would attract new investors for the second release of shares, so they directed surveyors to set aside a broad area for a town on the shores of Suva Harbour.

The directors lamented, in a letter to the company's agent, JS Butters, still in Levuka, that:

it is unfortunate that we have not got our town established. You will not overlook the fact that the reserve for the same extends from the Tamavua to the Waibolo, Would natives acclaim settlement there now? It is very desirable that the township should be balloted for at an early date.

That query was the end of the company's involvement in town-building. Fijian *bure* and then later permanent timber frame houses were randomly erected on the small blocks around Nabukalou Creek near Brewer and Joske's ill-fated sugar mill and the mill employed a manager, five overseers, three engineers, four carpenters and two bricklayers, adding significantly to the non-planter European population.

By the early 1870s, Brewer was addressing his letters 'Suva City east', and in the late 1870s, Henderson referred to a 'Suva township' in his testimony to the Land Claims Commission. When Governor Gordon arrived as the new colony's first governor in 1875, the term Suva was in common usage, but rather than being used for the whole peninsula and hinterland it was now being used only to refer to the small settlement along Nabukalou Creek. It was this cluster that became the embryonic town and then city

of Suva.¹⁹ By 1880, Suva was declared a 'port of entry' and the Royal Engineers began building a track from Suva to the Waimanu River, and schemes were underway to reclaim parts of the foreshore.

So Multifarious Are the Designs

The settlers on the peninsula were lauded as proof of the company's success but the press in Melbourne and Suva were sceptical once the initial excitement of the *Alhambra's* departure had worn off. In Melbourne in August 1870, the *Age* announced:

The Alhambra carries with her divines, doctors, lawyers, legislators, speculators and settlers. The fact that Victoria while yet a colony itself, is undertaking colonization proves the indomitable perseverance of our race, the enterprise and industry of the British people.²⁰

This was a grand gesture typical of a colony itself only 30 years after its founding, but the press was also alert to rumblings of disquiet. Two weeks later another editorial warned:

so multifarious are the designs of the Polynesia Company and intrinsically small are its means of carrying them into effect that we fear some dire catastrophe will happen before long.²¹

The danger alluded to was not falling cotton prices or tropical cyclones. The *Age* told readers that relationships between Fijians and Europeans in Fiji were on a knife's edge. This was an exaggeration and sensationalist reporting, as the period known as the Fiji Rush had been marked not by widespread violence but by Fijian accommodation, tolerance and restraint. In early 1872, Cuthbert wrote to CR Forwood, now the company's agent, on behalf of the Suva Planters Association, complaining that Suva 'natives' would not work, were preventing other Fijians from working and that settlers without imported labour were in dire straits. A meeting of the association in February 1872 resolved that one or all the villages on the

19 For Suva see RA Derrick, 'The removal of the capital to Suva', *Transactions and Proceedings of the Fiji Society of Science and Industry* (1953): 203–9; Henry Scott, 'The development of Suva', *Transactions and Proceedings of Fiji Society of Science and Industry* 2, no. 1 (1940): 15–20; McHugh, 'Recollections of early Suva', *Fiji Society of Science and Industry* (19 July 1943): 210–14. The almanac published in 1907, *Cyclopedia of Fiji*, contains details of early settlers, traders and colonial officials.

20 *The Age* (Melbourne), 24 August 1870.

21 *The Age* (Melbourne), 1 September 1870.

peninsula should be removed to enhance the prospects of the company. Later, the Suva people were indeed moved out and resettled at Suvavou ('New Suva') near Lami.²²

Generally, the situation was tense, but peaceful. In May 1871, Melbourne *Punch* turned to verse to parody the company's affairs:

We judge of men according to facts
And everyone will I'm sure agree
That business runs in a demented groove
Around the Isles of Fiji.²³

Early in 1871 a serious cyclone at Suva caused extensive damage, but a Suva Planters Association had been formed and the Cakobau Government in Levuka had empowered Cuthbert, Brewer and Matthews with minor judicial powers over the community. By 1874, the cotton and sugar plantation impetus at Suva had passed and the remaining settlers had diversified into grazing, poultry and vegetable growing or had moved into commercial roles or boat-building or found jobs as plantation managers. When Colonel Pratt arrived on an official survey tour looking for future sites for a capital it sparked a wordy debate over the relative virtues of Levuka and Suva and sites on the west coast of Viti Levu. He noted that the small township at Nabukalou was servicing settlers further along the coast at Navua and Nadroga, and along the lower Rewa River, but the most significant event had been the takeover of Brewer and Joske's extensive holdings and operations by the Melbourne firm of James McEwan and Company and subsequently by William Kerr Thompson and Samuel Renwick. Brewer and Joske's store then became known as Thompson and Renwick, in the style of naming stores after their owners. Thompson and Renwick are remembered today in the names of two Suva streets.

William Kerr Thompson did not purchase shares in the Polynesia Company, probably because he already planned to migrate to Suva and pursue his own investments. Michael Cannon, in *Land Boom and Bust*, wrongly suggests Thompson had invested heavily in a Fiji trading company, and that when its sugar plantations failed he lost £5,000.²⁴ This may have

22 K Vuataki, *Softly Fiji* (Bloomington: West Bow Press, 2013); Ken Chambers, 'Ratu Epeli Kanakana versus A-G for Fiji (the Suvavou case): Blending equitable relief with judicial review', *Journal of South Pacific Law* 12, no. 1 (2008): 111–19.

23 *Punch* (Melbourne), 4 May 1871.

24 For Thompson, see Michael Cannon, *Land boom and bust* (Melbourne: Heritage Publications, 1972), 112–18.

been from confusion over Thompson's many holdings through purchase and mortgages of blocks originally listed by the Polynesia Company, or his takeover of Brewer and Joske's stores and other businesses in Suva initially in partnership with Renwick.

Thompson approached the first governor of Fiji, Sir Arthur Gordon, with an offer of two-thirds to one-third partition of the Suva lands he held. When he later entertained JB Thurston at 'Kamesburg', his mansion in Brighton in Melbourne, they arranged the allocation of town lots between the Crown Colony and Thompson. This deal is wrongly reported in most histories as a sale by the Polynesia Company to the Crown Colony Government. The Polynesia Company attempted to have the auction cancelled on the grounds that its own unsettled land claims needed to be settled first by the Crown Colony Government. The new company agent, GA Woods, protested in Levuka in August 1877 about the new capital being set up on 'Company lands', but the company admitted it had no claim over land being proposed for the new capital, and Governor Gordon reported this admission to the Colonial Office. The Colonial Government already held a 300-acre block that had been set aside by the Polynesia Company as a reserve and the government had acquired a further 600 acres north of Walu Bay after the Land Claims Commission dismissed spurious claims to land. On the first Suva town plan drawn up by Crown Colony Government Surveyor John Berry, Thompson held 177 town blocks and 61 acres at the back of the area now known as the Domain.

In 1880, Thompson travelled to Suva for the first public auction of town blocks. The journalist Henry Britton travelled with Thompson and wrote a report, 'The Suva Land Quest' for the Melbourne *Argus*, which was subsequently published as a small pamphlet with the same title. Correspondence from the Victorian and Fiji governments was still being addressed to John McEwan and Company although by this time WK Thompson had taken over McEwan's extensive Suva interests and holdings. Britton declared:

it was a curious and historic scene this sale. The table and chairs of the auctioneer and clerks were placed under the shade of a fine umbrageous tree (pronounced 'eevee') in front of the hotel. The bidders were under the verandah. Black men, Fijians, Solomon Islanders and Coolies were all about, wondering and gabbing.

A young friend of Thompson, Vernon Lee Walker, reported over-enthusiastically that ‘the whole of Suva belongs to Mr Thompson’ and that Thompson had made a ‘killing’ (sic) selling blocks privately after the public auction of blocks had concluded. The auction was reported in the Levuka press to have been a failure because Levuka merchants had boycotted it, hoping to prevent the capital moving from Levuka to Suva. Later, Thompson donated land at Suva for the Anglican and Presbyterian churches and in 1887 was active in support of a Suva-based proposal for a Victorian annexation movement led by TH Pritchard.²⁵

Of the shareholders who had migrated on the *Alhambra* only 13 remained beyond Cession. The remainder returned to Victoria. Some company men became local identities and played significant roles in the emerging settler society. Butters, the ‘lion’ of Levuka society, was as popular in Levuka as he had been in Melbourne and Paul Joske was Suva’s most prominent citizen, patron and friend of the governor. Surplice, Forwood, Glenn, McCartney, Bardwell and Brewer served in the Cakobau Government and after Cession, Cuthbert, Mathews, D’Este, Paul Joske and his son, Adolphe, took positions with the Crown Colony Government. The company played only a minor role in the politics of pre-Cession Levuka, being listed in deputations, tacitly supporting a call for British annexation, denying it was involved in the US annexation movement, and, as late as 1882, GA Woods was listing himself as ‘Attorney for the Polynesia Company’ and signing petitions of the Land Claimants Protection Society in Levuka. The connections with Melbourne faded as Fiji became a Crown colony and Suva became capital. The so-called ‘Fiji Rush’ was mostly ignored in the almanac of European achievement published in 1907 as *The Cyclopaedia of Fiji*. A suburb called Toorak, a few street names (Amy, Huon, Marks, Renwick and Thompson), and Joske’s Thumb, a prominent volcanic neck on the Namosi skyline, are the only reminders of the Polynesia Company days.

By the end of the century, Suva had become the major Pacific entrepot and port city that the Polynesia Company had predicted, but that was not due to funds, plans or involvement by the company. On the shield of the city of Suva, a planter is prominent, and this is appropriate given the first European settlers had been hopeful Polynesia Company shareholders

25 Thompson’s 40-room, two-storey Italianate mansion in Brighton, built in 1874, later became ‘ANZAC House’, caring for incapacitated World War I veterans. Weston Bate, *A history of Brighton* (Carlton: Melbourne University Press, 1983).

on the *Alhambra*. The Polynesia Company's speculative banner as the new East India Company and a trading and commercial giant was a ruse perhaps, but at least the *Alhambra* settlers did give birth to a new port town and, indeed, a hub in the South Pacific. The rugged peninsula that the young Adolphe Joske had noted and the missionary Fison described as being in an 'unsettled state' did eventually, for other reasons, become a bustling, national capital and the centre of a regional network for trade, communications, commerce, finance and education.

Source Note

The first brief historical account of the Polynesia Company appeared in *The Cyclopaedia of Fiji*, a settler-dominated almanac in 1907. A brief narrative of events was provided in 1937 by AB Brewster in *King of the Cannibal Islands*. The version of events in the *Cyclopaedia* and in Brewster was expanded in 1946 by RA Derrick in *The history of Fiji* and this remained the standard account until Deryck Scarr's *I, the very bayonet*, a 1973 biography of JB Thurston which offered a view of the affair seen through the career and ambitions of the former British consul, planter and member of the failed settler-led, pre-annexation Cakobau Government.²⁶ An extensive record of correspondence between the company, the Victorian Government and the Colonial Office in London, and correspondence with the pre-1874 and post-1874 governments of Fiji, is fortunately preserved in two lengthy documents; a *Remonstrance* from the company to the secretary of state for colonies in London, published by the company in 1877, and an equally long *Refutation* by JB Thurston, by this time colonial secretary for the newly proclaimed colony in Fiji, published in Levuka in 1878.²⁷ The verbose, pithy, scathing and very detailed argument in these two documents includes letters back and forth; press releases; official correspondence; arguments for compensation; and opinions on the role of Cakobau, the validity of the company's charter

26 RA Derrick, *A history of Fiji: Volume one* (Suva: Printing and Stationery Department, 1946); Deryck Scarr, *The majesty of colour: A life of Sir John Bates Thurston*, vol. 1: *I, the very bayonet* (Canberra: ANU Press, 1973).

27 CJ Perry, *Copy of a dispatch to the Right Honorable Earl of Carnarvon, Secretary of State for Colonies from the Polynesia Company, being a remonstrance against the unlawful withholding of the Company's lands at Fiji by his Excellency the Governor, Sir Arthur Hamilton Gordon* (Melbourne: Polynesia Company, 1877); JB Thurston in Frank Spence and Central Archives of Fiji and the Western Pacific High Commission, *The claims and remonstrance of the Polynesia Company of Melbourne, examined and refuted*. Microform, National Library of Australia (Levuka: 1878).

signed with Cakobau in Levuka in 1868 and the bona fides of claimants to Polynesia Company land in Fiji. For full citations of the relevant Suva LCC files, see my MA thesis and monograph (copies held in the University of the South Pacific Library's Pacific Collection, item number HF 491.P6 Q83 1977).

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