

William Gordon Farquhar Archive

On 7 November 1861, nineteen year old William Gordon Farquhar accompanied by his brother, Arthur, boarded the three-masted schooner *Natal*, bound for Port Natal. Late that evening, Farquhar recounted his day's experience by writing a short entry in a small, brown-covered journal. This was the first entry of many that Farquhar entered over the next ten years in this and a subsequent journal. Both journals remained in the Farquhar family until donated to James Cook University by Farquhar's grandson, Bill Farquhar, in November 1985 "for safekeeping" in the university's archives. Both journals have since been held under climate-controlled conditions in JCU Special Collections. Transcribed copies are available in the library's main collection.

While Farquhar's journal entries span the period from 7 November 1861 to 18 January 1872, there are several gaps during which no entries were made for extended periods. Farquhar's first journal entry is followed by several more until 30 November 1861 after which they are not resumed for almost another five years on 4 October 1866, by which time he is resident in Queensland. There are a few more entries over a period of several weeks until 19 November 1866, then a lapse of almost two years before the next entry on 1 September 1868. From this date, Farquhar's entries become more frequent at intervals until ceasing on 18 January 1872.

DIARY ENTRIES: 7 November 1861 – 30 November 1861

During this time-span Farquhar records his somewhat perilous ship journey up the Thames, having departed at Wapping Basin, and out into the open ocean. The *Natal* made slow progress as the weather repeatedly retarded the schooner's attempts to get "under weigh". The frustration of being "obliged to draw up on account of a fog" paled in comparison to the hurricane force gale endured when the Captain dismissed a warning from the Pilot to anchor for the night. Though the night of 9 November began calmly and there was not a breath of wind when Farquhar went to bed at 9pm, by morning those on board were woken by the pitching of the ship "in the middle of the Pilot's predicted hurricane." The violent weather continued for three days until, at around 9pm on 12 November, there was a change in the weather which allowed the crew to set the sails and get under weigh. Having reached Dungeness by 8.15 the next morning, the ship was again at the mercy of bad weather for several more days. Seasickness and the danger of being injured by unsecured goods and luggage as the ship was tossed about forced Farquhar and many other passengers to seek refuge on shore at the Star Hotel, Sea View. Having re-boarded and set sail again, by 19 November the ship was in the Bay

of Biscay then off Cape Finisterre the next day and, shortly before Farquhar's entries for this period cease, within sight of Madeira by 27 November. Farquhar's entries show that during this time he and other passengers spent their time on board holding improvised church services on Sundays, enlivening the tedium of ship's provisions of "salt junk and biscuits" with private stocks, observing porpoises and whales, talking, reading, and playing chess.

DIARY ENTRIES: 4 October 1866 - 19 November 1866

"Left Boomerang to-day for good and all" pronounced Farquhar upon resuming his journal entries. Residing by this time in Maryborough, Queensland, Farquhar is still accompanied by his brother Arthur, who "seems still determined to drink himself to death," and both are in the process of moving to a new location. Farquhar records that along the way he enjoys the hospitality of several friends and rural neighbours, among them being Irwin, Corfield, Broom, Uhr, Palmer, Rankin, Rennie, Hickson and Hughes.

The challenges of establishing a successful agricultural enterprise in Queensland proved exasperating at times for Farquhar, who firmly resolved to leave Queensland for "it is about the last place in the world." "The town is very dull," he found and wrote, "I wish things were settled to let me out of it." He was also "much surprised at the number of hard up swells" employed with relief parties working on the roads. Farquhar despaired at the uncertainty of the seasons, the "ruinous" taxes imposed on imports, and the thousands of stock "dying in back country for want of grass and water." Being "fairly frightened to invest capital in Queensland in any way," he determined to go to Canada. On 12 November, though he "went to bed early - sick and tired of doing nothing," Farquhar had that day visited a farm his friend Mr Palmer was offering for sale. Palmer was asking £400 for the farm which was four miles out of town on the Gayndah road and consisted of 150 or 160 acres, forty of which were cleared and bearing crops, and with a "small but comfortable home and barn." Arthur did not think he could stand the climate, but Farquhar was interested enough to consider the purchase. At this time the journal entries cease once again.

DIARY ENTRIES: 1 September 1868 - 18 January 1872

Farquhar obviously decided to persevere in Queensland and seemed reconciled to the vagaries of its weather for by the time entries resume in slightly less than two years, he is resident at a farm at Alford. Though it is unclear whether this is the farm Palmer offered, Farquhar had bought land, seemingly in association with his friend Sandy, which they were farming with the assistance of "Islanders." He was also in the process of negotiating with locals, "Archie and Davie," to build a house upon his land for £10. Busily occupied in planting corn on newly-cleared land, planting cane, ploughing, selling hay, searching for his missing bulls, Jumper and Maggie, sailing and socialising with neighbours, Farquhar found himself in need of more farm labourers. He enquired of a Captain Tredwin how he might obtain more labour, and Tredwin informed Farquhar that he could provide him with three Pacific Island labourers within a week. When Sandy went to town to see Tredwin, however, he was informed they would have to pay the labourers their first year's wages in advance. On that account, Farquhar and Sandy resolved not to get them.

In December 1868, having enjoyed a visit from Mr Stewart from the Burnett during which they “sang Scotch songs over a bottle of whisky until nearly midnight,” it was not long before “all hands black and white” were busy working on neighbour Bennett’s cane farm before finishing and coming across to Farquhar’s where they ploughed and burnt off cane trash. Farquhar’s crop was not a good one and whereas he and Sandy had anticipated earning about £100, the most they could expect was about £20. Farquhar was quite dispirited, particularly as his neighbours, Rankin and Haselback, produced very fine crops. It being New Year’s Eve, however, as 1868 waned and 1869 dawned Farquhar and friends “went over to Hickson’s and pulled the old woman and the whole of them out of there (*sic*) beds to sing Auld Lang Sine (*sic*.” With celebrations behind them, Farquhar and Sandy were soon disappointed once again when their corn crop suffered blight. They were gratified, however, to be able to salvage some of their crop when there was none elsewhere in the district to be had, and thus receive a pleasing price for it. Sandy and the Pacific Island labourers worked frantically over several days to pull, pack and thrash the corn for market and then planted a new crop.

Resuming his journal in October 1870 after a lapse of twenty-one months, Farquhar gives a detailed account of a proposal by James Duncan that he and his partners had decided to act upon. Duncan had proposed that they should “charter a schooner and send her down to the South Sea Islands to try and obtain labourers for ourselves and the other farmers on the river.” Duncan insisted that to procure the men Farquhar or another party, Mr Dunn, should also go as supercargo. Encountering quite a deal of difficulty and frustrating events, Farquhar and his co-venturers set about securing a ship, captain and crew, financial partner and supplies so that they could set forth to the islands in search of men to bring back as farm labourers. The ensuing journal entries offer a rich account of Farquhar's two ship journeys to the South Sea Islands (November 1870 on *City of Melbourne* and November 1871 on *Petrel*) including the difficulties posed by weather, their encounters among the islands with French colonials, other ships and their crews and the peoples native to the many islands they visited, such as the Solomons, New Caledonia, Tanna, Sandwich (now Hawaii), Tonga, Epi, Eromanga, and many others. Farquhar also describes his difficulty in obtaining men willing to come and work in Queensland. The reasons men would not take up Farquhar’s offer varied, but some had already been to Queensland as labourers and did not wish to return, some simply did not wish to leave their islands for a distant unknown land, some had heard bad reports, while some at first agreed and even came on board, before changing their minds. In some instances, negotiations with chiefs revealed that, as many of their able-bodied men were already working away in Queensland as labourers, it was not possible to spare any more. Some men, however, had been to Queensland, returned home and were happy to return for another stint. Yet other young men were eager to taste adventure and earn a wage. Thus it was that Farquhar and his partners were eventually able to procure enough labourers to return to Queensland and continue farming their lands.

Archive Location: 63L

Detailed Listing:

FD/1 Original diaries dating from 7 November 1861 to 17 January 1872.