

The Clouston Letter of 1802



By Peter Clouston
And
Ted Mole

1. Introduction.

Joseph Storer Clouston (1870-1944) relates in his book 'The Family of Clouston' (Kirkwall Press, Orkney 1948) how the story of one Thomas Clouston was recovered in 1924 (Chapter 18).

"The sons of Robert and Margaret Isbister were three:- Thomas, born 1743; Joseph, born 1754; and Edward, born 1759. The story of how the trail of Thomas was recovered after being apparently completely lost, is a curious instance of what may sometimes happen in genealogy. In William Clouston's early pedigree he simply appears as a sea captain who had left Orkney and settled in Newburyport, Mass., U.S.A., and thereafter vanished into space. It was only some twenty years ago that a letter arrived at the Kirkwall Post Office addressed to "The Dean of St. Magnus Cathedral". There being no unpresbyterian optimates there, it was delivered to the late Archdeacon Craven, rector of St. Olaf's Church, as being the nearest approach to such a dignitary in the town, and he, seeing it was a Clouston inquiry, passed it on to me. And then it turned out to be from the late Frank Harvey Pettingell, resident in Los Angeles, an enthusiastic and indefatigable American genealogist, seeking information about his ancestor Captain Thomas Clouston born in Orkney in 1743, at one time captain in the young U.S.A. Navy in the revolutionary war, and hailing from Newburyport, Massachusetts. And so the lost trail was recovered.

More information followed, and from the various American Naval War Records we learn that Thomas first served in 1776 as a volunteer in the privateer *Raleigh*, and then in the privateer brig *Dalton*; one record even mentioning that his hair was light; a little detail of some interest, since almost all Cloustons, of these branches, are dark nowadays. He was captured by the British and for a space lay a prisoner of war in the Old Mill Prison at Plymouth (England), but being evidently a man of daring and enterprise, he not only escaped, but found his way back across the Atlantic, and in 1781 was appointed Captain of the privateer brig *Antelope*, commissioned by the State of New York and Massachusetts; one of the early units of what developed into the American Navy; and in her he captured a number of prizes. When the war was over he settled down in Newburyport as a lecturer on navigation, and when he died in 1795, so appreciative were



his pupils that they paid his memory the compliment of erecting a tombstone "Sacred to the memory of that valuable instructor Captain Thomas Clouston, who in the midst of great usefulness took his departure on Monday evening Aug. 10, 1795. Æt. 52".

This bygone instructor and ex-sea-rover had one gift which has reappeared now and then in other members of the family; that of drawing; especially ships, with - as was only to be expected, a vast wealth of precise detail. Another effort which has been preserved is a rendering of the Clouston arms, but in this case he was unfortunately misled by Guillim's blazon of the coat of the Norfolk family of Cliston - which, as we have seen, was actually an occasional corruption of Clouston. This he drew instead of his own, but - lest even the renowned Guillim might not know everything - he took the precaution of adding two Clouston stags as supporters, prancing as he had doubtless often seen one of them doing on the old tombstone in Stenness kirkyard.

In 1776 his father had settled their shares of his property upon his two younger sons, reserving his own life rent, but at that time Thomas was a hostile subject and he is only recorded as being seized in his own share in 1787, and also that same year in the Harray property of his uncle Governor Joseph Isbister as heir to him. These properties he sold; the first to his brother Edward."

The facts in the above have proved correct – Thomas painted a seascape which he called 'The sinking of the Hero' this picture is held by the Newburyport Museum and Art Gallery. The painting is also inscribed 'In memory of Jacob Knapp'. Jacob's elder brother Anthony was the 1st Lieutenant on the Dalton. Thomas is listed in the crew of the Dalton as Thomas Cluston as shown in Charles Herberts work '[Relic of the Revolution](#)'

In the late 1980's Brian Clouston of Durham revisited the story and wrote a piece for the Northumberland and Durham Family History Society. This again showed that the story was basically true, but there was no proof that the men were the same.

As Joseph Storer pointed out the story was one 'that sometimes happens in genealogy'. In 2001 I became aware that a letter was up for auction. The letter was addressed to Mrs Anna Clouston of Newburyport Massachusetts from an Edward Clouston. The letter was obtained for what it might contain, the source and recipient seemed obvious.

Dear Sister Rotterdam 16th June 1802

I wrote to you sometime ago by a Capt'n Merry but never heard from you since my brothers death. I now do myself the pleasure to enquire once more after you & your familys welfare and beg that you will write me by some ship bound for London and be very particular in letting me know how all my nephews and neices are and what businefs [business] Robt [Robert] and John is following & if Peggy and Nancy is married yet and what circumstances you are in & what trade is in Newbury Port at present. Direct your letters to Mr Edwd. Clouston, Merchant in Stromness Orkney North Britain to the care of Mr Alex [Unclear] Secretary to the Hon'ble Hudsons Company Nos 3-6 Fenchurch Street London.

As trade is very dull in Orkney I have taken a voyage to Rotterdam in hope of making something. I cannot help regretting the steps my brother and your husband took in selling the two fine farms in this country as land is of such a high value in this country at present it would have been of a great service to his family at present, I remain

Dear Sister

yours sincerely

Edwd. Clouston

2. The Recipient.

The details contained within the letter appear to remove all doubt about the identity of the writer and the recipient. The writer is identifiable as one Edward Clouston, merchant of Stromness, Orkney. The letter was written in Rotterdam on 16th June 1802 and asks the recipient to reply to a care of address with the Honourable Hudson's Company in Fenchurch Street, London.

The recipient is identifiable as Anna Clouston, sister of the writer and a resident of Newburyport. The reference to his brother's death suggests that Anna is in fact Edward's sister-in-law rather than sister, this is reinforced by the reference to "my brother and your husband" in the final paragraph. Anna is also presumably the mother of Robert, John, Peggy and Nancy all of whom are old enough to be married or in business and would therefore have been born probably before 1885.

This information seems like more than enough to identify precisely who the writer and the recipient were. J. Storer Clouston's *Family of Clouston* (FOC) shows three Edwards alive in 1802, Edward Clouston of

Kingshouse (1787-1866), Edward Clouston of Smoogro (1790 - 1870) and from the generation before, Edward Clouston of the Nisthouse branch of the family (1759 - 1810). Edward of Kingshouse and Edward of Smoogro would have been only fifteen and twelve years old respectively in 1802, both surely too young to have written this letter.

So, if we look at the last mentioned Edward Clouston, known as Governor Clouston, what do we have. This Edward is the youngest son of Robert Clouston of Nisthouse (1709 - 1782) and his wife Margaret Isbister. Robert and Margaret had two daughters, Marion (bn 1747) and Margaret (bn 1756) and three sons: Thomas (bn 1743), Joseph (1754 - 1814/15) and Edward (bn 1759). Edward was in fact the second son of that name, his elder brother having been born in 1746 and presumably died before 1759.

With regard to Thomas, the eldest brother, Storer Clouston narrates the story of how his trail was rescued from obscurity to reveal a Captain in the infant U.S. Navy who died in Newburyport, Massachusetts in 1795. More of this later but we have here two significant facts, in his letter Edward indicates that he has not heard from Anna since the death of his brother and we now know that Thomas died in Newburyport 1795. Storer Clouston's

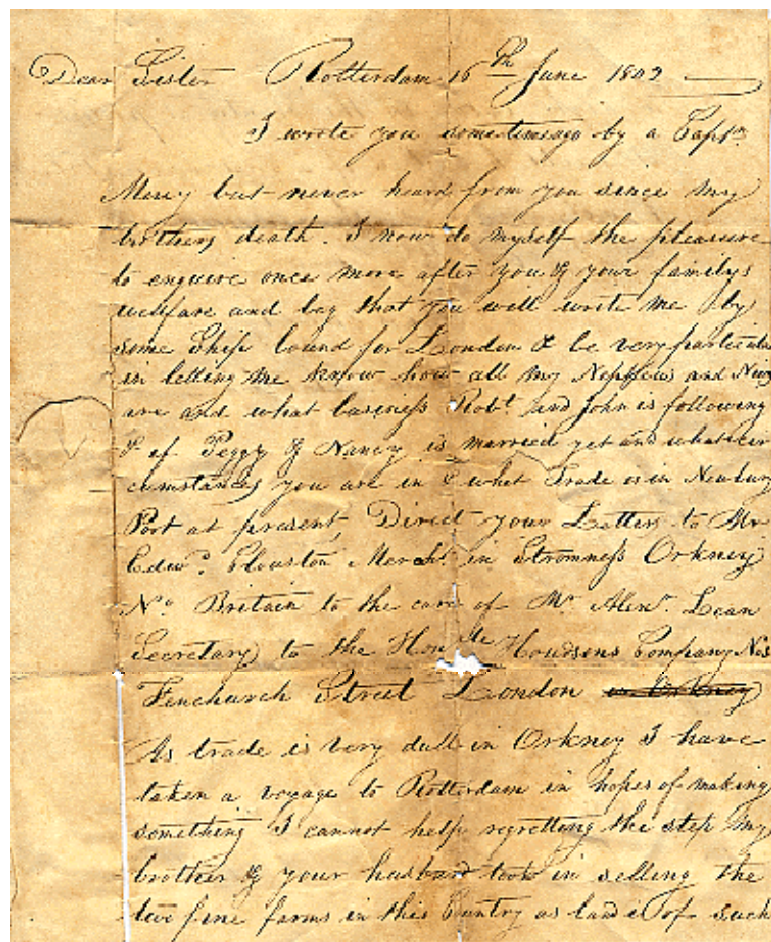
date of 1795, taken from Thomas's tombstone in Newburyport is corroborated by Brian Clouston in his article *A Captain of the American Revolution*, in which he quotes the whole inscription verbatim, having visited the cemetery in the 1970s. [source: Brian Clouston]



What else do we know about Thomas which is germane to establishing the identity of the writer and recipient of the letter? The LDS Familysearch website (<http://www.familysearch.com>) contains a number of pointers to Thomas Clouston of Newburyport and though subject to final confirmation they are again consistent with information given in the letter. The Ancestral File pedigree from FamilySearch shows that Thomas Clouston of Newburyport married Anna Coats, daughter of John Coats and Anne Titcombe. This would be consistent with Anna being the recipient of the letter.

Thomas and Anna are shown as having five children: Margaret (bn 1774), Anna (bn 1779), Thomas (bn 1781), Robert (bn 1782,) and John Coats (bn 1784). In his letter Edward refers to Robert, John, Peggy and Nancy. Peggy is a diminutive for Margaret while Nancy would be Anna. Edward asks specifically whether the girls are married yet and in fact Margaret had married John Haskell in 1799 while Anna was to marry James Campbell in 1804. [The christening of Margaret, Anna, Thomas, Robert and John Coats have been confirmed via the Esex County Vital Records]

The information given by Storer Clouston regarding the rediscovery of Thomas together with the LDS information on Thomas's family would seem to confirm that the letter is indeed from Edward Clouston son of Robert of Nisthouse to his sister-in-law Anna Clouston of Newburyport, Massachusetts.



Having demonstrated that the provenance of the letter beyond reasonable doubt it seemed appropriate to seek confirmation by checking out the land transactions referred to in the letter. Edward indicated that Thomas had sold two farms and bemoans the fact that had they been retained in the family they would have been valuable due to the prevailing high price of land. An enquiry to the Orkney Archive quickly confirmed that Thomas had indeed sold two 'farms' on Orkney, having been given them by his father in 1776. Entry number 133 for 15 February 1787 from *Abridgements to the Particular Register of Sasine (Reg, Sas.)* records Thomas's initial possession of the land:

Thomas Clouston Shipmaster, Newberry, New England, Seised, February 8 1787,-In tenements in the north end of the shoreside,

STROMNESS; 2 penny 1 ½ fathing udal land in the town of Overburgh, with the outbreck quoys of land called Tweth Shipow, par. Harray;- On Disp. By ROBERT CLOUSTON, carpenter and sailor Stromness his father (reserving his liferent), 17 June 1776. (Reg. Sas. 15 February 1787, 133)

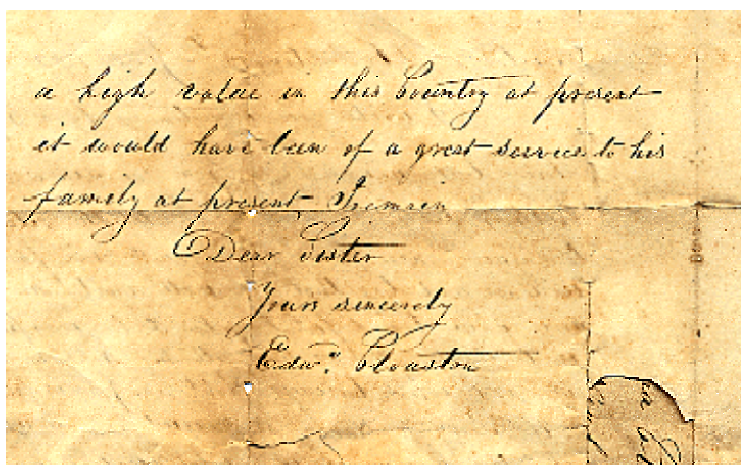
This is the transaction referred to by Storer Clouston (FOC p120) and there is no doubt that about the identity of this Thomas Clouston. Next to this entry we find in entry 134 of the same date:

Samuel Isbister, Tailor, Stromness, Seised, February 8th 1787,- in 1 ¾ fathing land under the House of Hybreck in Isbister in the town of GREMISTON and 1 farthing land under the House of Windiwass beneath the dyke in Gremiston par. Harray; on Disp. By Thomas Clouston , son of Robert Clouston Stromness Carpenter Stromness February 7 1787. (Reg. Sas. 15 February 1787, 134)

This entry would appear to be the property which Storer Clouston says Thomas inherited from his uncle Joseph Isbister, (FOC p120) who had died in 1770 in Quebec. [Confirmation from the sassines expected]

Subsequently in 1791, entry 266 for 22 October 1790, records the sale by Thomas of part of the property left him by his father:

James Spence, Merchant, Stromness, Seised, October 19 1790,- In 2 penny 1 ½ farthing udal land in OVERBURGH with the outbreck quoy of land called Tweth, par. Harray;- on Disp. By Thomas Clouston, Shipmaster, Newberry Port in New England August 14 1790. (Reg. Sas. 22 October 1790, 266)



Not only do we have records of land sales matching Edward's complaint but we have indisputable proof that Thomas the shipmaster of Newbury, Massachusetts is the son of Robert Clouston, carpenter and sailor of Stromness and that the letter is therefore from Edward Clouston, son of Robert and Margaret and younger brother of Thomas of Newburyport, to his sister-in-law, Anna.

3. The Writer.

We have already established that the writer of the letter was Edward Clouston baptised 8th June 1759 in the Parish Church at Stromness. His parents are named as Robert Clouston and Margaret Isbister, his father's brother Edward is also named as his godfather.

There is no further documentation until he joins the Hudson Bay Company in 1779. We can assume that he received an education but there are no records to support this or describe how it was achieved.

The next written documents are those held in the archives of the Hudson Bay Company [HBC]. Confirmation that these records relate to the writer of the letter is confirmed by an entry '*nephew of Joseph Isbister in command of the Prince of Wales's Fort in 1748*'. Joseph is known to be Margaret Isbister's brother.

Edward joined the HBC in 1779 and proceeded to Hudson Bay where he was first employed as Servant to Edward Jarvis, 'Chief' at Moose Factory. This seems to have been propitious, as Jarvis seems to have taken to Edward and appears with regularity promoting and supporting Edward's career. In 1782 when Jarvis assumed charge of Albany, Edward went with him but at the end of that year Edward's contract ended and he returned to Moose Factory.

On the 21st May 1783 the Governor and Committee [G&C] in London wrote to Jarvis at Albany "*Edward Clouston, Mr Jarvis's late servant is to contract for 3 years at £15 per annum with the usual bounties as a writer and to accompany Mr. Turnor to Abitibi from Moose River..*" [HBC Arch. A.5/2 fo.95]. This was supported by a note to Thomas (at Moose) "*Phillip Turnor to establish Abitibi. G Maugenest to go with him. George Donald is to accompany Mr Turnor as his assistant, and Edward Clouston from Albany as Writer, the other 6 persons...*" [HBC Arch A.6/13 fo.73].

There was a problem though, Edward seems to have been hurt because in a note from Jarvis to Thomas in March 1784 he writes that '*Edward Clouston is very lame*' followed on the 9th of April by "*Edward Clouston being incapable of travelling from a swollen & lame leg has obliged me to defer sending him 'till now*". On the 14th June Thomas to Turnor "*Edward Clouston to be Writer at Abitibi*" Edward must have finally arrived because in the autumn of 1784 Turnor wrote to Thomas that Edward would stay with him and later that "*... I have thought it prudent to send down Edward Clouston as he may be ready to take charge of the goods next spring, his merits I need not mention....*". [HBC Arch B.135 fo. 16].

Jarvis was already planning the next stage of Edward's career because on the 4th May 1785 the G&C in London wrote to Albany "*... we have directed Edward Clouston to be sent to you from Moose to be employed at Martin's Fall as Mr. Jarvis proposed...*", [HBC Arch A.6/13 fo. 121d] and a note to Thomas at Moose "*... Edward Clouston is to be sent to Albany, where Mr. Jarvis has orders concerning him...*" [HBC Arch A.6/13 fo. 125d]. Before Edward returned to Jarvis though, from July 19th to October 19th 1785 he was left in Charge of Frederick House while Turnor was on a trip to Moose. Edward left Frederick House on the 22nd October 1785, 3 days after Turnor returned. His arrival at Albany is recorded a week before Christmas.

Before leaving Frederick House Edward, in September, had requested that his stay be extended for 3 years and that request was forwarded to London by Thomas - who seems to have joined the Edward supporters - "*Edward Clouston requests to stay 3 years longer and hopes your honours will advance his salary at £5 per annum. at present he's at £15 per annum. I recommend him as a very obliging young man he's now at Abitibi (Frederick House) in charge during Mr. Turnors absence. I assure you his removal will put me to much inconvenience and it's with no small regret I shall part with him*". [HBC A.11/45 fo 26d].

The rest of his career with the HBC follows much the same path. He is carried on the strength as a Writer but spends about half his time in Charge at various posts during the absence of the incumbent, or is in charge of new posts until the someone else is found. By 1796 his salary had advanced to the sum of £50 per annum, this shows that he was now a valued member of the company. In 1796 he established a 'new house' on the banks of Lake Winnipeg probably near the mouth of the Manigotagan River and he stayed here until the 10th of June 1797 when he returned to Osnaburgh arriving on the 4th July. It is during this period he survived an attack by an Indian while outside the fort.

During the period 1792 until 1797 he held the position of 'Master' within the Osnaburgh District at one or other of the subordinate forts and was listed as '2nd at Osnaburgh' meaning he automatically took charge during the absence of the Master of the district.

On the 13th July he departed for Martin Fall returning in August and remaining in charge until June 30th 1798 when he left for Albany and Moose. On the 15th of September with his employment with the company over, he left Moose on the 'Prince of Wales' for home, in the passenger list he is listed as 'Trader'. He had been offered another 3 years at £70 per annum but had decided against staying.

The term 'Governor' was applied, exclusively, to officers in charge of the Factories on Hudson Bay - posts that Edward never occupied. So whoever applied the title Governor to Edward was incorrect. For most of his career he was either a Writer (Clerk) or 'Inland Trader' (Chief of some Inland Trading Post). Achieving the post of Master only in the later years.

Edward wrote the letter from Rotterdam in 1802 and we know that he was building or re-building a house in Stromness from the builders bills during 1801-1804. Whether or not his trip to Rotterdam was successful we will never know as this is the only record found so far.

We must now deal with a less favourable side of Edward. In 1803 he was subject to an 'action of lawburrows', basically a restraining order issued by the Sheriffs Court of Orkney.

From a copy of the petition which led to this order it would appear that a lady by the name of Isabella Knarston petitioned that ever since her marriage in 1801 to Captain Andrew Stevenson "*Edward Clouston, late of the Hudson Bay Company, now residing in Stromness having without any just cause or provocation conceived as deadly malice and ill will to the petitioner yesterday proceeded to vent his hatred against her by striking her with his feet and calling her a whore and other opprobrious names*".

The court obviously found some substance in this petition because an order was issued instructing Edward to "find caution" in the sum of 300 Scots Marks, a considerable sum.

Edward we are led to believe by Joseph Storer [FOC Chapter 17] never married but the OPR of Scotland contains a record of a marriage between 'Edward Clouston and Isabella Knarston' in 1782. As we have seen Edward was in Canada in 1782 so this could not have been the same Edward Clouston - or could it. One of his companions on the trip was a Thomas Knarston.

No record of a divorce can be found in the Scottish Consistory Court (responsible for divorces until 1800) but this marriage did produce 2 children, Hary baptised 22 December 1782 and Marjory baptised 22 August 1785. Are these the '2 natural sons' JSC discloses in the FOC, I wonder?

In 1796 the HBC has record that he was listed as an Inland Trader in the Albany Fort District - in this same listing is the line "his daughter to return". I am attempting to get more details to investigate this further. This story is not finished yet.

Edward spent the last years of his life as a Merchant operating out of Orkney. He died in 1810 and as if to confirm the fact that he never married his property passed to his brother Joseph (1754-1815). Joseph it
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can be seen had married Jane Barkly in Newcastle Upon Tyne in 1786. In 1815 this property passed to Robert Clouston the eldest son of this marriage.

Peter Clouston and Ted Mole.