

Henry Mariano Ramos de Castilla (1821 – 1868) Master Mariner



Henry Mariano Ramos de Castilla was born in Norwich¹, Norfolk, England on 20 December 1821 to parents Mariano Jose and Rebecca Ramos de Castilla (nee Cooke). We believe his father, Mariano was born in South America of Spanish descent, probably in Buenos Aires, was a lobbyist for revolutionary South Americans and lived a significant portion of his life in England.

Henry went to sea in 1838² at the age of 16 years as an apprentice seaman on the sailing ship *Susan*. He was apprenticed for five years until July 1843. It would appear that between then and about 1846 he gained experience on steamers. His testimonial supporting his Foreign Going Master's Certificate application³ (June 1861) records him as Master of the steamers *Aurora* for three years and the *Lyra* for one year between 1846 and 1850 based at Hong Kong. However, he notes that these "dates are entirely from memory".

Certainly by 1851 Captain Henry Castilla appeared to be based in Hong Kong and seemed to be a 'contract' Master Mariner on the Pearl River operating between Hong Kong, Canton and Macao working for different companies. We have pieced this story together from Patricia Lim's book *Forgotten Souls*⁴, copies of letters⁵ written by Henry to Jardine Matheson & Co., a trading house operating in China, and other references.

The steamer *Spark*⁶, a wooden paddle steamer of 133 tons gross, was built at New York and sent to China and erected at Whampoa in 1850 for the American Captain James B. Endicott.⁷ Henry Castilla was its Master from about 1851 to 1854. He was described by Albert Smith, a newspaper columnist of the time, as "a No. 1 piecey-man". He was also noted for his hospitality and "Yankee cooking" on his ferry trips. As he was English this was probably because he was working for an American company at the time. There was an attempt in 1854 by pirates to take the *Spark* which was carrying a cargo of opium and treasure. Smith reported that Castilla suspected the plot

¹ My thanks to Kristel de Wulf in Belgium for sourcing family documents in Norfolk for me.

² UK, Apprentices Indentured in Merchant Navy, 1824-1910; Ancestry.com

³ My thanks to Gillian Alexander in the UK for sourcing these documents from the National Maritime Museum in London for me.

⁴ Patricia Lim *Forgotten Souls, A Social History of the Hong Kong Cemetery*, Hong Kong University Press, 7 Tin Wan Praya Road, Aberdeen, Hong Kong, first (2011) 978-962-209-990-6.

⁵ Website *Janus University of Cambridge archives, Jardine Matheson archives* (<http://janus.lib.cam.ac.uk/>).

⁶ A wooden paddle, 133 gross tons, 86.5 net tons, 128 feet long 17.5 ft wide 6.6 ft draft

⁷ Haviland, Edward Kenneth, *American Steam Navigation in China 1845 - 1878, Part I*, The American Neptune 16(3) (1956): 157 – 179.

and that armed guards were placed at the cabin door at dinner time. A bag of swords was discovered on board, and the attempt was foiled.^{8 9}

Lim records that Henry was initiated into the Zetland Masonic Lodge in Hong Kong in 1853,¹⁰ further evidence that he was residing in Hong Kong during this period.



Steamer Spark (Hong Kong Maritime Museum)

The steamer *River Bird*¹¹, a wooden side-wheel steamer of 527 tons, was built at Brooklyn in the United States for Robert Sturgis, J.B. Endicott and Gideon Nye Jr. and sailed from New York on 5 February 1855 under Captain Sampson. She arrived in Macao on 24 May 1855,¹² and was consigned to Captain Endicott, who was evidently the managing owner.

Henry Castilla was the *River Bird*'s Master for about one year (1855 – 1856). On 20 December 1855 the beam of *River Bird*'s engine broke, causing damage to the engine and smashing the roof of the upper cabin putting her out of service for some time.¹³

The steamer *Fei Ma*¹⁴ (*Flying Horse*), a wooden paddle steamer of 121 tons, was built by J.C. Cowper at Whampoa and launched on 28 June 1856 intended for Lyall, Still and Co.'s service between Hong Kong, Canton and Macao. Lyall, Still & Co. owned

⁸ Patricia Lim *Forgotten Souls, A Social History of the Hong Kong Cemetery*, Hong Kong University Press, 7 Tin Wan Praya Road, Aberdeen, Hong Kong, first (2011).

⁹ Haviland, Edward Kenneth, *Early Steam Navigation in China, Hong Kong and the Canton River*, The American Neptune

¹⁰ Patricia Lim *Forgotten Souls, A Social History of the Hong Kong Cemetery*, Hong Kong University Press, 7 Tin Wan Praya Road, Aberdeen, Hong Kong, first (2011).

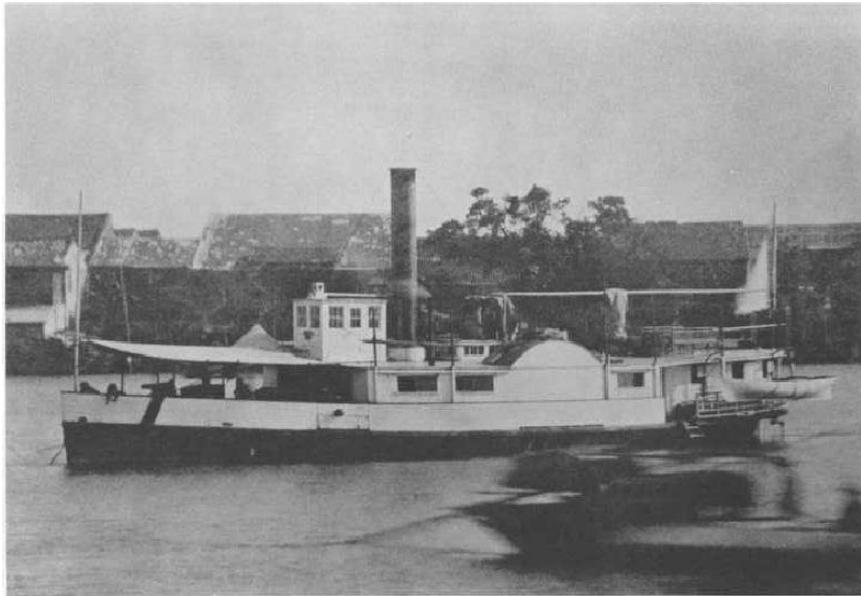
¹¹ A Wooden side wheel paddle, 527 gross tons built by Sneden, 174 feet long 31 ft wide 10ft 6ins draft, engine built by Fulton of Vertical Beam type

¹² Haviland, Edward Kenneth, *American Steam Navigation in China 1845 - 1878, Part I*, The American Neptune 16(3) (1956).

¹³ Haviland Edward Kenneth, *Early Steam Navigation in China, Hong Kong and the Canton River*, The American Neptune.

¹⁴ A Wooden paddle steamer, 192 gross tons, 121 net tons, built by Cowper, 158 feet long 18 ft wide 8 ft draft, engine built by Thomson J. & G. Engine type Steeple.

48 of her 64 shares, the remaining 16 being held by Henry Castilla, her Master. Henry Castilla was her Master for four years until 1859.



Thomas Hunt and Company's steamer *Cum Fâ*
Courtesy of the Peabody Museum of Salem

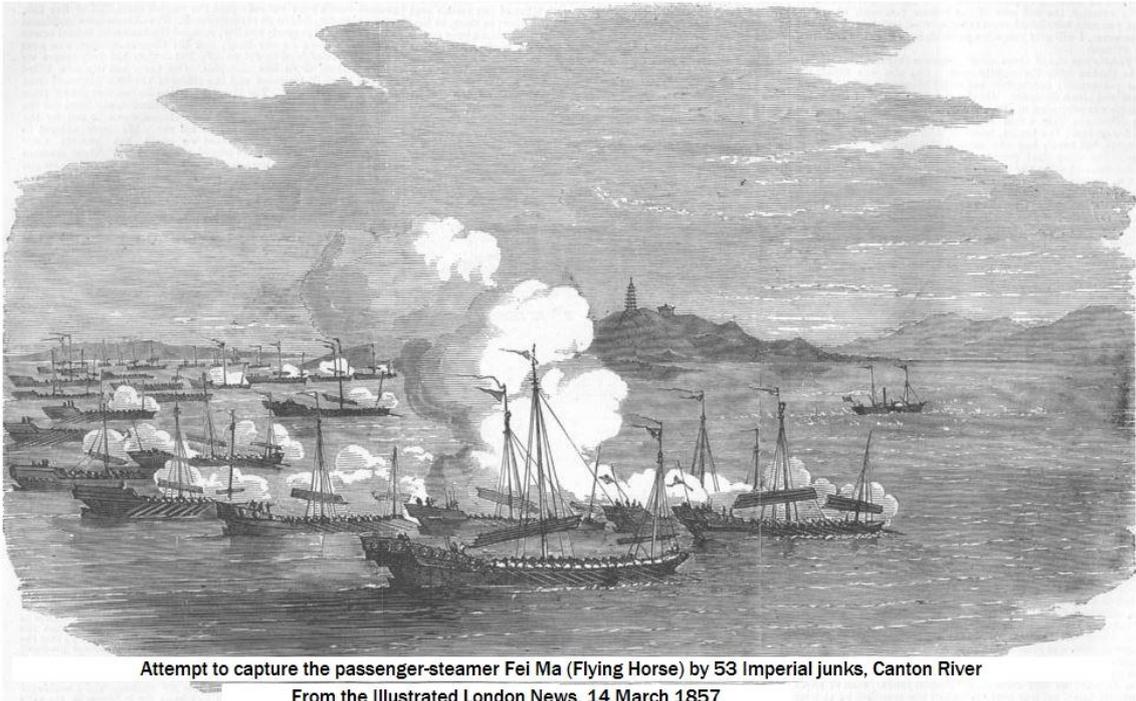
A type of river paddle steamer built at Whampoa at the time
(Peabody Museum of Salem)

William Couper [spelt Cowper in newspaper reports of the time], Henry's future father in law and the father of J C Couper, the ship builder at Whampoa, was kidnapped on 20 December 1856 from his chop boat [house boat] by Chinese pirates and was never seen again. Within the first fortnight of 1857 local newspapers reported a 'daily chronical of Chinese atrocities' including that a headless body had been discovered in the Wong Nai Chung valley¹⁵. Whether these two events were linked is unknown. This event was the likely source of the family story "that great grandfather's head was served up at a family dinner on a covered plate". So far, we have not been able to substantiate this nor find evidence of Couper Senior's fate. The Second Opium War was beginning to escalate at this time, and continued until 1860.

The *Fei Ma* appears to have been the last commercial vessel to remain on the Hong Kong – Canton route before the British Navy blockaded the Pearl River. *The China Mail Newspaper* (15 January 1857) remarked "In our last issue we mentioned the intention of Captain Castilla to continue running *Fei Ma* on the [Pearl] river between this and Canton, but on his last trip [9 January 1857] he was so nearly taken by the Chinese that he is not likely to run such a risk again." However, the *Fei Ma* continued to operate between Hong Kong and Macao during this war. The Navy blockaded Canton below Honan Island which meant that the Couper docks at Whampoa were

¹⁵ Eitel, Ernest J., *Europe in China* (1895), chapter XVII; LUZAC & COMPANY, London

abandoned as they were up river of Honan Island. Hence the destruction of these docks by the Chinese.¹⁶



A personal account of the 9 January incident by a *Fei Ma* passenger was published in *The London Standard newspaper* (2 March 1857). “we had to run the gauntlet through 53 Imperial junks, who attacked us.....The *Fei Ma* was hulled 11 or 12 times.... the junks appeared to be gaining....the Malay left the wheel...Captain Castilla, however, took the helm, full power steam was put on....Gradually we left the ‘gallant’ 53 behind us, after being under their fire for at least 20 minutes....several shots went right through the ship, and her port side is studded with 18’s and 24’s half embedded in her timbers.”

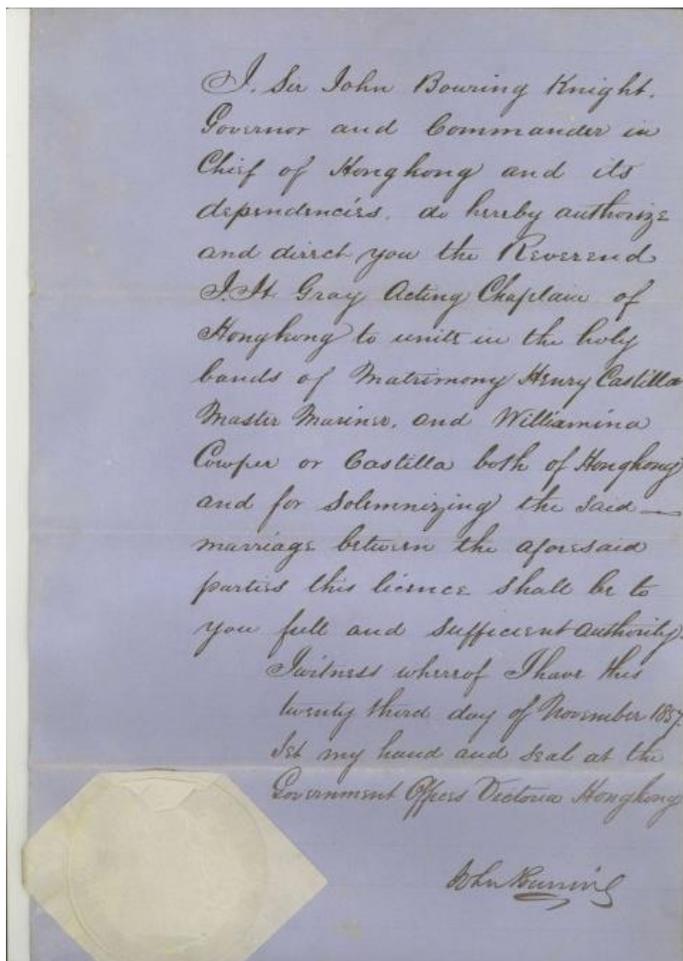


In the midst of all of this, late in 1857 Henry Castilla married Williamina Couper, daughter of the late William Couper [Cowper of Whampoa docks] on 23 November in Hong Kong.

The blockade of Canton was removed on 10 February 1858 signalling the resumption of the river steamer service to Canton and the shipyards at Whampoa being reoccupied, by J.C. Couper, Williamina’s brother.¹⁷

¹⁶ Haviland Edward Kenneth, *Early Steam Navigation in China, Hong Kong and the Canton River*, The American Neptune.

¹⁷ Haviland Edward Kenneth, *Early Steam Navigation in China, Hong Kong and the Canton River*, The American Neptune.



The Certificate of Marriage authorising their marriage signed and sealed by the Governor of Hong Kong Sir John Bowering

The Singapore Morning Post, Tuesday 1 June 1858, reported "American clipper *Courser*...was wrecked on Prata Shoals April 4. Captain and crew took to their boats, hoping to reach Hong Kong, but fell in with pirates, who attacked them. One of the boats capsized and two men drowned. However, she was righted and reached Hong Kong. The other two boats were picked up by the *Fei-ma* steamer on her way to Macao."

Castilla was probably the Master of the *Fei Ma* on this occasion but we have not been able to confirm this.

On or about 23 September 1859, A. Yue, Compradore on board *Fei Ma*, wrote to Henry Castilla Captain of the vessel, wishing "Mrs Captain" well "on going home England". We had assumed Henry and Williamina

[who would have been pregnant] travelled together back to England [vessel unknown], however, this may not have been the case. Henry's application for his Master's Certificate records him as Master of the steamer *Fu Sun* at

Hong Kong at the time. Their daughter Margaret Rebecca was born at St. Mary's, Reading, England, on 9 April 1860. The 1861 Scotland Census records Henry and Williamina living in Glasgow, Scotland and their second daughter Williamina Mary born at St. Mary's, Reading, England on 21 September 1861. These facts together with Henry's association with the steamer *Express*, described next, suggests that he probably sent Williamina home for the birth of Margaret Rebecca and followed her to England a year later.

The paddle steamer *Express*¹⁸ was launched from J&G Thomson ship yard at Govan, Glasgow Scotland on 21 September 1861, built for the coast and river trade in China. The *Express* was owned by Lyall, Still & Co., of Hong Kong, and was commanded by Captain Castilla, "well known on that station".¹⁹

¹⁸ Similar construction to the steamers in the Hudson River, *Express* is 964 tons, fitted with a pair of diagonal engines of 200 horse-power.

¹⁹ *The Glasgow Herald newspaper*, 23 September 1861

The steamer *Express* commanded by [Henry] Castilla arrived at Hong Kong from the Clyde [Scotland] on 18 May 1862.²⁰ Tragedy soon struck the family with the death of little Williamina Mary only one year old and she was buried in Hong Kong Cemetery in October that year²¹.

Henry and his family were based in Woosung, Shanghai from July 1862 to about February 1865. Henry and Williamina's son Henry Couper was born in Shanghai, China on 19 July 1863. During this time, he plied the Yangtze River between Woosung and Hankow [modern day Wuhan] as Captain of the *Express*, for Jardine Matheson & Co.²²

The Yangtze River trade was only opened to Westerners in 1860. The Taiping Rebellion had mainly been in inland China including the Yangtze River basin. However, it serves to illustrate the risky environment that Henry Castilla was working in. In 1861 the Shanghai merchants formed a private army of Chinese mercenaries officered and armed by Westerners which held off the Taiping from overrunning the foreign sector of the city. The rebellion was eventually crushed in 1864.²³

It would seem that sometime between early 1865 and late 1866 the Castilla family returned to Scotland where the birth of their fourth child John Stephen at Glasgow, Scotland occurred on 21 December 1866.

Henry was soon to take his last assignment. In April 1867 he was engaged by Jardine Matheson & Co. to conduct sea trials on their new steamer *Lamont*²⁴ and sail her to



Steamer Lamont (painting attributed to Henry Castilla)

China.

Sea trials completed, Henry as Master, the *Lamont* left the Clyde on 26th April 1867 for Hong Kong. This was a hazardous journey as this vessel was built for river and coastal trade and was not really

²⁰ *The Glasgow Herald* newspaper, May 1862

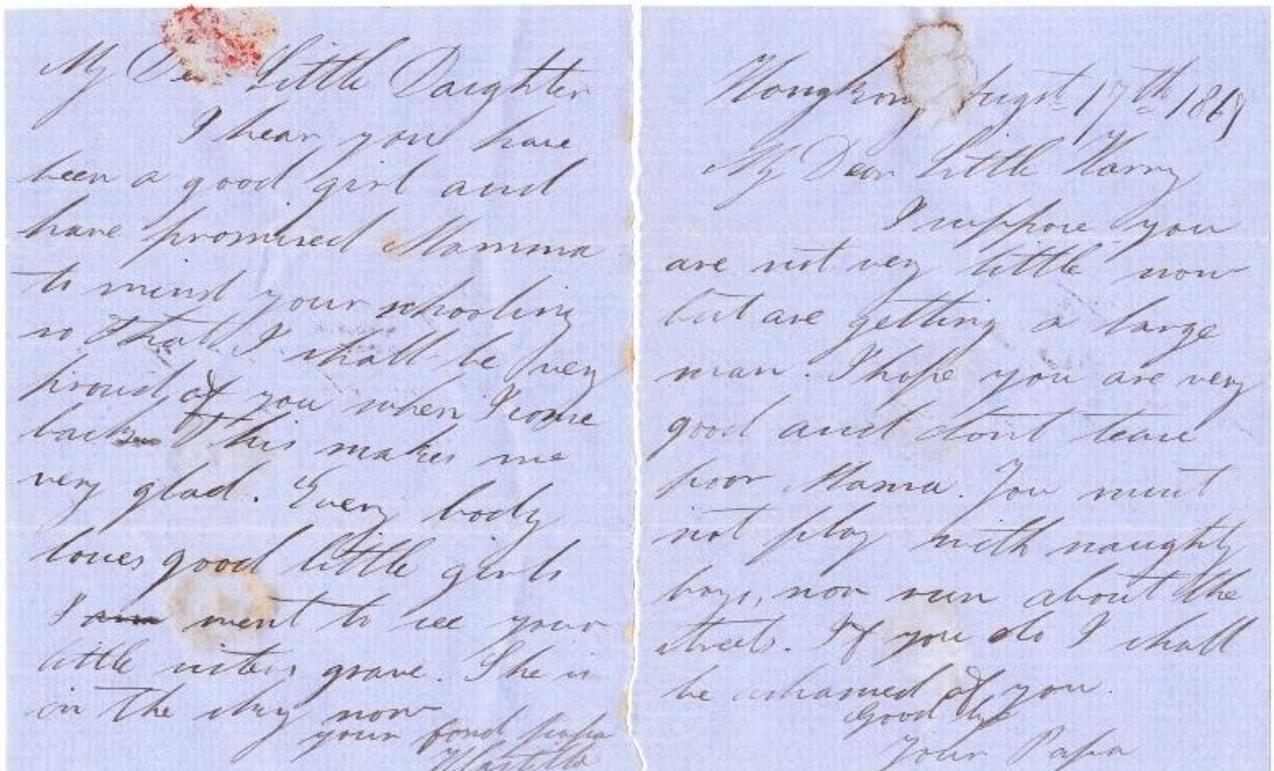
²¹ Patricia Lim *Forgotten Souls, A Social History of the Hong Kong Cemetery*, Hong Kong University Press, 7 Tin Wan Praya Road, Aberdeen, Hong Kong, first (2011)

²² *North China Herald (1850-1867) British Periodicals*, 25/2/1865

²³ Robert Blake, *Jardine Matheson – Traders of the Far East*, Weidenfeld & Nicolson, London, 1999.

²⁴ A screw steamer; length 240 ft., breadth 34 ½ ft., depth 22 ft. Tonnage 1390 tons, bm. The vessel and engines were constructed by Messrs. R. Napier and Sons the boilers were overhead beam-gear for 200 horse power, propelling her at a speed of twelve knots an hour.

suitied for open ocean sailing as Henry's report back to his clients detailed²⁵. The *Lamont* had to stop at Lisbon and again at Cape St. Vincent to secure the boiler which had worked loose on its mountings in heavy seas. Henry remarks that they left the Clyde about two months too late for a ship of the *Lamont's* class. However, the remainder of the voyage was fair to average weather and uneventful, reaching Hong Kong by early August where *Lamont* was dry docked for repairs before steaming on to Shanghai for handover. While in Hong Kong Henry wrote a short letter to each of his two older children, Henry Couper and Margaret Rebecca, dated 17th August 1867, presumably his last letters home before his death.



In September 1867 Captain Henry Castilla handed the *Lamont* to the company in Shanghai and paid off the crew and presumably himself. The crew had their passage back to the UK paid for on the SS *Glengyle*. We have not been able to find evidence of Henry's arrangement for his return passage, however he died in Point de Galle, Ceylon [Sri Lanka] on 3 January 1868 while returning from Hong Kong.

²⁵ Website Janus University of Cambridge archives, Jardine Matheson archives (<http://janus.lib.cam.ac.uk/>).

Serial No.	Date	Name	Inscription
679	Dec. 29 1866	Arthur James Coely	ARTHUR JAMES COELY, 42nd Royal Highlanders (The Black Watch), aged 32.
680	Jan. 3 1868	Henry Castilla	Capt. HENRY CASTILLA, aged 45, who died at Point de Galle, Ceylon, on his way home from China.

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All Saints' Cemetery, Galle—contd.

Serial No.	Date	Name	Inscription
681	Feb. 24 1868	John Nutt	JOHN NUTT, late of Shanghai, China, who died on board the P. & O. Co's Steamer China and

Headstone Inscription reads "Capt. Henry Castilla, aged 45, who died at Point de Galle, Ceylon, on his way home from China".²⁶

So ended an eventful life. We have been fortunate enough to discover a substantial amount of information on Henry's life given there are only a few letters that his wife Williamina obviously treasured. Almost no family records for Henry came to Western Australia when the family eventually migrated here sometime in the 1880's. Daughter, Margaret Rebecca never married and died in Perth in 1934. Son, John Stephen moved on to South Africa during the Boer War with the West Australian Mounted Infantry (2nd Contingent), later married there and died in South Africa in 1938 without issue.

Henry's son, Henry Couper had a successful career in Western Australia as a Public Works Department Assistant Engineer and Surveyor and his descendants live on in Western Australia, Tasmania and New Zealand.



River and coastal steamer routes

²⁶ Lewis, J. Perry; Tombstones and Monument in Ceylon (1913) Government Printer, Ceylon

Appendix 1

Summary – Henry Castilla timeline

1821	Birth
1838 – 1843	apprentice seaman, 5 years
1843 – 1846	moved from sail to steam?
1846 – 1849	Master <i>SS Aurora</i> , 3 years (launched Belfast 1839)
1849 – 1850	Master <i>SS Lyra</i> , 1 year (launched Glasgow 1848)
1851 – 1854	Master <i>SS Spark</i> , 3 years (launched Whampoa 1850)
1855 – 1856	Master <i>SS River Bird</i> , 1 year (launched 1854 left NY for China January 1855)
1855 - 1856	Master <i>SS River Bird</i>
1856 – 1859	Master <i>SS Fei Ma</i> , 4 years (launched in Whampoa 28 June 1856)
1857	Married
1859 – 1860	Master <i>SS Fu Sun</i> , 1 year (launched ?)
1861	in England & Scotland – gained Master Mariner Certificate
1861 – 1862	Master <i>SS Express</i> (launched Glasgow 21 Sept 1861) arrived in Hong Kong May 18, 1862
1862 – 1865	based in Woosung, Shanghai, plying the Yangtze River to Hankow. Last record found
1866 – 1867	Scotland – activity unknown
1867	Master <i>SS Lamont</i> Glasgow to Hong Kong and Shanghai
1868	Died in Ceylon while returning from China