

Arthur Knight Gregson  
Research Document  
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Arthur Knight Gregson was the eighth child (seventh son) of Henry Knight Gregson and Eliza Mary Donaldson Selby Knight Gregson. Born in 1854<sup>1</sup>, Arthur was one of three sons of Henry and Eliza to follow a maritime career. While Arthur is cited at the family residence in the 1881 England Census, he does not reside at Lowlynn in the 1871 count. Thus far, I have not located his census records for that year. At age 17, he is likely at school or at sea.

In a rare book *Under a Border Tower*<sup>2</sup> we find an interesting anecdote. Referring to a date in November of 1872, the author states:

*“A still more dangerous shot was one of Gregson’s young sailor boys, Arthur. One day in the back avenue just as his father and grandfather came round a corner; he killed the rabbit but peppered his father and grandfather severely. Gregson was shot in the knee and roared with rage and pain for about five minutes (though he wasn’t really hurt). When he had quite finished bellowing, the dear old Rector very quietly remarked: “He has shot me too.” He was rather dangerously wounded in the neck, close to the jugular vein, and it swelled up enormously. A man was sent to gallop into Berwick for a doctor, and the Rector was all right in a few days. The contrast between the excitable father and the placid grandfather of the culprit was very striking. The same boy very nearly blew my head off the same day, as getting over a wall just in front of me, he let his gun off, close to my face. The shot must have gone within a few inches of my head, causing me to*

The author calls young Arthur ‘one of Gregson’s young sailor boys’. From what I know, Henry Knight Gregson had three sons who made their lives at sea; in addition to Arthur the others two were Henry jr. and Charles Edward, the third and fourth sons of Henry and Eliza. Henry began his naval career serving as a Naval Cadet aboard HMS Britannia in Portsmouth Harbor, while Charles Edward was registered as a pupil aboard the school ship HMS Conway. The school was set up by the Mercantile Marine Service Association and was moored in Liverpool on the River Mersey. While I do not have evidence at this time, it is likely that Arthur followed his brother Charles Edward aboard the Conway.

The 1881 England Census records an Arthur *Grigson*, a twenty-seven year-old mariner (seaman) born in Northumberland, England and living as a boarder (he is single) in Stepney, Limehouse, England. This is located on the east end of London, not far from when his brother Charles Edward is resident and sailing with the East India Company.

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<sup>1</sup> England & Wales, FreeBMD Birth Index, 1837-1915 lists him in the second quarter (Apr.=Jun) of 1854.

<sup>2</sup> Neville, Hastings Mackelcan, *Under a Border Tower: Sketches and Memories of Ford Castle...* Swan & Morgan( Newcastle-on-Tyne, 1897). This book was found by Ellen Stoddart. [Library availability](#)

In an 1894 Directory, Arthur Knight Gregson is listed as an agent for Jardine, Matheson & Co. at the Port of Wuhu, China. Wuhu is located on the river Yangtze in the province of An-hwei, upriver from the port city of Shanghai. Although Jardine, Matheson was a diversified company, shipping played an important role, and after Parliament ended the monopoly for the East India Company, in 1855 the company launched a cargo line from Calcutta and operated on the Yangtze River, Shanghai being the port city on the China Sea.<sup>3</sup>

While acting as a shipping agent Arthur Knight Gregson established a private local post at Wuhu. An interesting description is given in the Philatelic Record<sup>4</sup> listed under *Novelties, Discoveries, and Resuscitations*.

*[the stamps] "are due to the bright idea of a Mr. Arthur Knight Gregson, who advertises that he has established a local post at Wuhu. the stamps are therefore not a local but a private issue."*

Five types of stamp were issued, each in denominations from 0.5 cents to a dollar. The pictures on the stamps are: (1) A river with rice growing on the banks, (2) Water fowl on a lake, (3) A very tall pagoda, (4) Golden pheasants feeding, and (5) The Chinese character *Foo*.



*Stamps issued by Arthur Knight Gregson at Wuhu*

The period during which Arthur was in China was one of political unrest. There was growing concern in China over the influence of foreigners in the country. This included foreign economic influence as well as the activities of missionaries. This led to the Boxer Rebellion (1898 -1900). In a 15 DEC 1894<sup>5</sup> letter to the Marine Superintendent, Indo-China Steam Navigation Co. Arthur Knight Gregson writes:

*Enclosed I ... send you a sample of the pictures which are being sold in Wuhu to the Chinese re the present war. You will observe in every case the Chinese appear to be the winners of the battles. This is the manner in which the natives of this country are deluded.*

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<sup>3</sup> [Wikipedia](#)

<sup>4</sup> Philatelic Record, vol. 16, Theodor Buhl (London, 1894) [p. 229](#) .

<sup>5</sup> [Jardine Mateson Archive](#) (Thanks to Lilian Caley for finding this document)

The letter is signed Arthur Knight Gregson, Local postmaster.

The next record I found for Arthur Knight Gregson is a story published in *The Overland Monthly*.<sup>6</sup> Written as though he was talking to a fellow passenger, Arthur describes the scene as they travel along the river toward Shanghai.

*“This wonderful emporium of commerce, with its varied industries and institutions, is situated on the banks of the Whangpoo river... It was upon a bright and beautiful morning toward the end of October some years back, that the Canadian Pacific steamer from Vancouver dropped anchor... to discharge certain Shanghai cargo before proceeding on the trip towards Hongkong. A little lower down the river ... were moored a line of battleships representing the countries of Great Britain, America, Germany, France, Russia and Japan... On board the American man-of-war as we passed the band was playing “My Country Tis of Thee” and as on that still, and every morning I with delight listened to the strains of that glorious melody with no other sound save the measured beat of the tender’s engine, the thought that came uppermost in my mind was this: “How long would it be ere I should once more see that sweet land of Liberty?”*”

What I read in this my immediate conclusion was that Arthur spent time in America, most likely in San Francisco, as this would be on the trade route from China, and Australia. My guess is that the statement: “...toward the end of October some years back, that the Canadian Pacific steamer from Vancouver dropped anchor... to discharge certain Shanghai cargo...” is a reference to Arthur’s arrival in China. If he was in San Francisco, it is likely that he traveled to Vancouver, Canada and then by steamer to Shanghai. Clearly, his reference to that “*sweet land of Liberty*” indicates that he did more than pass through the U.S.

There is a reference to the Boxer Rebellion in the story. Arthur is now in a British club in in Shanghai. He has described the elegant gardens and culture of this outpost of empire. He describes to us an incident that occurs in the club.

*“Suddenly some one came rushing up the club steps, and collared hold of a man standing near to me, saying in an undertone: ‘Have you heard the latest, old man?’ ‘No, what is it?’ replied the other. ‘Anything exciting?’ ‘Exciting! I should just say so, indeed. Another riot up the Yangtze, and for pity’s sake don’t say anything about this, otherwise it will be all over the place and scare the ladies to death. But it is reported that two more missionaries are murdered. Whatever is going to be the end of all this business I cannot say, but if China does not hurry up with reform and keep the peace, she will have her country partitioned up safe as eggs are eggs.’”*

At the end of the story, Arthur again meets his fellow passenger on the boat to Shanghai and he tells him that tomorrow, he is traveling to Wuhu. To which Arthur replies:

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<sup>6</sup> Gregson, A. Knight, *Shanghai, Overland Monthly: An Illustrated Magazine of the West* (San Francisco, 1904), vol. 44, [p. 437](#)

*“Why, how singular... it never occurred to me to mention it before, but Wuhu is my port, and I am also starting to-night, which means that we shall again be shipmates...”*

His friend asks arthur: *“What sort of a place is this Wuhu, as I have heard some very rummy stories about the port.”*

To which Arthur replies,

*“...all I can tell you is this. I have lived a good many years in the place, and it has been my happy lot to meet there some of the most charming ladies and the best fellows it is possible to find the world over; and if shooting, tennis, tea and dinner parties are any inducement, you can have lots of such amusements.”*

We gain more information in an October 1911 newspaper article appearing in the Northern Miner,<sup>7</sup> published in Queensland, Australia. With his experience in China, Arthur’s comments are contained under the Byline **ENDING THE DYNASTY. THE FOREIGNERS WILL BENEFIT.**

*“I do not think this rebellion means the breaking up of China, but I do think it is the ending of the Manchu dynasty.” That Is the way Mr. Arthur Knight Gregson, who spent many years In China In the service of Messrs. Jardine, Matheson, and Co., views the revolt. Mr Gregson is at present in Sydney, after spending some years in America. He went through the riots in Wuhu in 1891, when with others he was instrumental in saving the missionaries and their property. Mr. Gregson was also in Wuhu during the Boxer troubles of 1900. “The present rising is a revolt against the Manchu Government,” he said, “and so was the Boxer trouble In its initial stages. It was primarily directed against the Government, but when the Boxers surrounded Peking the Dowager Empress cleverly diverted their attack, and made them wage war against the foreigners. I do not think the rebels will meet with opposition from the foreign Powers, who, so long as their subjects are unharmed will, I think, remain neutral. I expect the rebellion will be short-lived. It will probably be all over in a year. “If a new Government in establish-ed in Peking It will probably be advantageous to the foreigners, inasmuch as they will most likely be al- lowed to develop the riches China possesses as they have never been al- lowed to do in the past. Friends of mine are interested, for instance, in some coal mines on the Yangtaze, but they have been blocked by the officials at every turn when they tried to work the fields. With a wiser administration China could make great progress ”*

The article states that, indeed, Arthur has been in America. that *“Mr Gregson is at present in Sydney, after spending some years in America.”* What is not clear is when he was in the United States. Did he leave Wuhu during the rebellion, and spend time in America, or did he go to America before his stint in China? Clearly, his comments in the article point to his expertise in the issue China commerce. According to the article, Arthur *“was instrumental in saving the missionaries and their property.”* When this article was written in 1911, the problems in China are not over, but according to Arthur, he believes that the rebellion will be short-lived, and sees the future as one with opportunities for foreign investment and trade.

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<sup>7</sup> The Northern Miner Tuesday 24 October 1911, p. 2

In 1917 an Article in the Sydney Morning Herald<sup>8</sup> about Chinese Shipbuilding quotes Arthur Knight Gregson, shipping broker of the Royal Exchange

*[The Shanghai Dock and Engineering Company]... “has just built for America a fine transport steamer and a 6000-ton collier fitted with coal elevators, conveyers, and weighers of the latest type. Her appliances enable her to discharge coal on either side and at any angle required, the elevators being capable of discharging 600 tons of coal per hour. A novel feature of this vessel's appliances is that the coal is weighed automatically whilst being discharged. Another vessel built by the Shanghai firm was an ice breaker for the Russian Government having engines of a capacity of about 2500 h.p.”*

Although I am sure that Arthur did extensive traveling in the Asia Pacific region, I have found only one record. In 1920 he traveled from Australia to San Francisco arrival 10 AUG 1920. Arthur is listed as age 66; a *shipping broker*, and a *citizen of England*. His most recent residence: Sydney, Australia. On this trip He is accompanied by Louisa J. 63 also a citizen of England.

In 1930 and 1933 Arthur and his wife Louisa are listed on the voter rolls at Seven Hills, Paramatta, NSW, Australia. There is a record of the death<sup>9</sup> of Arthur Knight Gregson Death in January, 1935, Paramatta NSW Australia

#### **OBITUARY: CAPTAIN A. K. GREGSON**

*“The late Captain Arthur Knight Gregson, of Toongabbie, who died last week, aged about 86, was an interesting personality. He was a retired naval officer, and was a brother to Commander Gregson, of the Royal Navy. Another brother is an Archdeacon of the Church of England, In England.”*

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<sup>8</sup> The Sydney Morning Herald, Wednesday 30 May 1917, [p. 13](#)

<sup>9</sup> The Biz, Friday 25 January 1935, [p.7](#)