

William Howard, sømand, marinesoldat, guldgraver, landmand og musikanter i California

Peter Kristian Stibolts erindringer om sin morbroder: (Written 1952, Archives of Bornholm, 1975-35)

Hos min ældste Morbroder, Christoffer, f. ca. 1820, viste det [bl.a. tilløb til Excentricitet...] sig som Lyst til Eventyr. Hele sin Ungdom tumlede han sig som Sømand Jordkloden rundt. Jeg har Breve fra ham fra Rio og andre fjerne Steder; i et af dem advarer han sine Forældre mod Mormonerne. I et andet afskriver han et Par Strofer af en norsk Sømandssagn: "Nu har jeg forvundet min Smerte/nu er jeg fornöiet igjen". Han var da blevet befriet efter at være blevet kastet op under et Skibbrud paa en øde Ø, ene Mand som en Robinson. Under Krigen mellem Staterne og Mexiko lod han sig hverve til Marinen, men da Guldfeberen udbrød, deserterede han med 11 Kammerater. De kom i Land, men blev skarpt forfulgt af en Ryttertrop og indhentede, da de hvilede sig i nogle Indianerhytter. Morbroder reddede sig ud i en Bæk, hvorfra han, med Hovedet i en Busk, saa hvorledes der blev gjort kort Proces med Kammeraterne. Siden flakkede han en Del om i det Nordvestlige, men tog herefter – som "William Howard" – til det af Staterne ved Krigen erhvervede California. I dette skønne, da jomfruelige Land grundede han sammen med en bondesøn fra Rutsker, Carl Rømer, en stor Landejendom, som han til sidst blev Eneejer af. Men snart hørtes ikke mere fra ham, da han der var gift med en tysk Dame, glemte Modersmålet, men han levede endnu i Halvfemsernes Slutning, da min Fætter Herman Grønbech naede frem til ham."



Christoffer Folkmann (Kristoffer Thomsen Folkmand) f. 1823, d. 1899, søn af Jørgen og Elsebet Folkmann, Vestermarie, Bornholm, Denmark.



Se herunder, Christoffer Folkmanns brev til forældrene 1846:

Rio de Janeiro den 9 Juli 1846.

Kære Fader og Moder ieg kan lade vide at ieg lever Væl og ønsker at hør det samme fra dig igæn. mæn ieg beder eder at ondskyld mig for min Forsømmelse at skrive eder til før. mæn ieg haver ikke havt naagen Leilighed dertil. da ieg for lod danemark og skolde gaa til Amerika. var ieg forlist paa Reisen. vaar vi vare næste ale drogknede og ieg kom i Land paa en Planke. men for liste alt hvad ieg eiede og kom i land paa et vilt og øde Stæd. hvaar ieg konde virken faa spise eller drikke for 21 dage. Kære Foreldre. ieg haver været meget uheldig. kom til Amerika. den første gang og blev Syg og maate gaa til Huspitalet hvaar ieg blev i 2 Maaneder. da ieg omsider gik ud i en Brig for anden Styrmand. da ieg kom tilbage igen blev ieg atter Sy og maatte gaa til Huspitalet igæn da ieg blev frisk igæn. var ieg tagen til Amr boys i et stort Linie Skib. paa 120 Kanoner. og der fra blev ieg taget i en læt Frigat der skulde gaa til Kysten af Afrika for at slaas Vor vi ogsaa for liste 16 Mand og fik 18 saare og ræsten af Mandskabet blev Syge af Feber hvor ieg ogsaa blev Sy. men nu er ieg Godskelov frisk og lever Vel. om Bord i en Frigat paa 60 Kanoner. og er nu for Øiebliket i Rio de Janeiro hvor vi ære ventende paa Order. at ^{gaa} ga til Væstindigen for der er Krig i mellem Mæxsikanerne og Amerikanerne vi ere nu ude for 3 Aar men naar ieg kommer til bage er det min Bestæmelse at Reise til Danne Mark igæ. Kære for ældre. her vel ieg ende min kaarte og sempelte Skrivelse. og ikke mer klage min Nød langt heller ieg Hærren vel prise som mig haver sparet mit Liv. nu haver ieg for vondet min Skade nu er ieg for nøiet igæn. nu haver ieg for vaandet min Vaade til Søn min Attraa staar hæn. Kære Fader og Moder ieg beder eder hiilse Søskende og ale gode og ale gode Vænnere mer selv hilset fra mig deres op rigtige Søn Christopher Thomasen Folkmand.

næste side.

ieg haaber at i vil være af den Godhed at skrive mig til og lade mig vide eders omstendig heder. Vis du vil daar her min Adræse. Da beder ieg eder skriv det med de sælv samme Bogstaver og sænd det til Paasthuset i Kiøben Haven.

Mr. Thomas Faulkner
Care of Edward Cook
No. 280 Font St.
New York

William ("Dutch Bill") HOWARD was born on 23 Oct 1823 in Bornholm, Baltic Sea, Denmark. He died in 1899 in San Francisco California USA. William married Caroline KOLMER (COLMEN) on 5 Oct 1855 in Bodega Township, Sonoma County, Santa Rosa California USA. William was named Real name is: Christopher Thomas Folkmann. He worked as Sailor.

Caroline KOLMER (COLMEN) was born on 31 Dec 1838 in North Carolina, USA. She died in Jun 1882. They had the following children.

1. Elizabeth "Lizzie" HOWARD was born on 10 Dec 1857.
2. Charles HOWARD was born on 13 Apr 1859.
3. Theodore "Spud" HOWARD was born on 11 Jul 1861. Theodore worked as Stage coach driver. (Hestevognskusk)
4. Amelia HOWARD was born on 31 May 1863.
5. Clara HOWARD was born on 12 Jul 1865.
6. William HOWARD was born on 24 Jan 1868.
7. Annie HOWARD was born on 20 Sep 1870.
8. Emma HOWARD was born on 31 Dec 1873.
9. Alfred HOWARD was born on 21 Dec 1877.

California Place Names: *The Origin and Etymology of Current Geographical Names of Erwin G. Gudde, William Bright: About William Howard: A settler of 1849, jernbanestationen hed Howard indtil 1891 efter William Howard. Senere Occidental. (p. 264)*

Caroline Kolmer, c. 1855, daguerreotype. Josephine Kolmer Benitz collection

William Howard & Caroline Kolmer.

Caroline Kolmer was born in North Carolina (USA), 31 December, 1838. She was the third child of Michael & Josephine Kolmer who had emigrated from Endingen, Baden, Germany, in 1833. In about 1841 the family moved to Missouri. Four years later they crossed the plains, arriving at Sutter's Fort in Sacramento, California, in October, 1845. Sometime in early 1846, Caroline's older sister, Josephine, married Wilhelm Benitz of Fort Ross, California. At about that time the Kolmer family settled in a valley that still bears their name (anglicized to Coleman) south-west of present day Occidental, California. In 1850 or 1851, the Kolmer family moved again, to a farm at Timber Cove given them by their son-in-law. On the northern



edge of Benitz's property, it was close to Fort Ross. This is where they were living at the time of Caroline's impulsive marriage.

Two months shy of her 17th birthday Caroline unexpectedly married William (Dutch Bill) Howard on 5 October, 1855. Her sudden decision and choice of husband infuriated her father for, by all accounts, Dutch Bill was a colorful character. He was not Dutch but Danish and his name was not his but that of *the captain of the ship he had deserted*. He was born **Christoffer Thomsen Folkmann** on October 23, 1823, on the Danish island of Bornholm in the Baltic Sea. He was 32 years old at the time their wedding.

In his "auto-biography" (see below) Dutch Bill claims they were married at the home of Alexander Duncan, Salt Point, California - which would place them in Salt Point Township. However the county records show they were married in *Bodega Township* - the township in which his farm was located. The biography of Caroline's nephew, Alfred Benitz, doesn't say which township but it depicts a more likely scenario in which they were married at a town hall spontaneously and without her father's permission by a traveling minister (see below).

A former seaman and miner, Dutch Bill owned a farm he'd bought in 1850 on shares with a partner, Charles Roamer, (Carl Rømer from Rutsker) next to the settlement that later became Occidental. In fact, he was one of two founders of that village, which for a time was known as Howard's Station. (We strongly recommend you visit the Occidental web-site for a fascinating account of his activities. Is not seen any more!) During the late 1860's and early 1870's their Benitz nephews would come for extended visits at the farm. According to Alfred Benitz's biography, it took them several changes of train and coach to reach Howard's Station from Oakland. William and Caroline had 9 children, all living with them in 1880. A family tree and list of descendants is available below. Caroline died at the age of 43 in June, 1882. Dutch Bill lived another seventeen years. He remarried, lost his farm due to financial reverses (modgang) and became a musician in San Francisco - where he died at age 67 in 1899.

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State of California
County of Sonoma

I George Robinson a Justice of the Peace
within and for Bodega Township in said county do
hereby certify that I did on the 5th day of October A.D. 1855
at the County aforesaid solemnize the marriage of William
Howard and Caroline Colner,
December 3rd A.D. 1855 George Robinson
Justice of the Peace

Filed for Record December 3rd A.D. 1855 and
Recorded December 5th A.D. 1855, Book 16, Minister, Recorder,
Hypsoel Miller, Deputy.

William Howard (1823) - Caroline Kolmer (1838), Vital Records. Marriage, 5th of October, 1855, Bodega Township, Sonoma County. *Source: Sonoma County Recorder's Office, Santa Rosa, California, USA.*

Impulsive Proposal & Marriage

The following excerpt is taken from the biography of **Alfred Benitz**, nephew of *Caroline Kolmer*: "*Alfred Benitz: Pioneer, Sportsman and Gentleman*", ghost-written by *Lillian Marsh-Simpson*, published by *Olga Benitz*, "*La California*", *Argentina, 1952, pages 28-30.*

Late in the year 1857, Mrs. Benitz' father, Michael Kolmer, died after several years of a steady bout with the demon Rum, which ruined his health and ate up his fortune. One of the stories told about him at the time of his death was his refusal to forgive his daughter, Caroline, for the unorthodox manner of her marriage. The story of some interest in itself as it illustrates one of the "mores" of frontier life.

When Caroline took the step that enraged her father, there were no resident clergymen in California, or in the rural districts, at least, and it was an important social event when one would make the long and difficult journey to the remote areas from the nearest large city to legalize the various unions that had occurred since the visit of the last minister. Prior to the visit of the minister, most marriages were formalized only by the mutual consent of the principals and had the sanction of neither law nor church. When the news spread that a minister was en route, all the newly-weds were collected in the most accessible town-hall for a mass ceremony, which invariably was made the occasion for feasting and dancing.

Such a collective ceremony duly came to pass at Sonoma, and of course everyone for miles around went to the party, including William and Josephine Benitz who took Caroline with them. At the end of the evening, the minister made a speech in which he thanked all members of the community for their hospitality, and particularly thanked the new bridegrooms for their generosity in the matter of fees. In fact, he said, he was so impressed by this generosity that he offered then and there to marry free any other young couple who cared to step forward.

At this, William Howard, one of the young swain (ungersvend) of the neighborhood who had been seeing quite a bit of Caroline, approached her and murmured into her ear. She said yes, so they were married on the spot, using one of the rings from the platform curtain as a wedding ring.

It was this entirely unforeseen marriage that caused Michael Kolmer to fly into a rage. When he heard the news, he rushed to Caroline's room, tossed all her furniture and clothes into the yard where he made a bonfire of them and vowed that he would never see nor speak to his daughter again. He kept this harsh vow for several years, but eventually relaxed it enough to seek Caroline and speak to her, but he never did completely forgive her.

William Howard: "Auto" Biography, (1823-living in 1880).

The following biographical note is taken from: "*History of Sonoma County*", by *J. P. Munro-Fraser*, published by *Alley, Bowen & Co, San Francisco, 1880, pages 491-494.* It appears the author took down Dutch Bill's account almost verbatim. In the following text we have highlighted names and inserted paragraph breaks to make it easier to read on the web.

William Howard – Christoffer Thomsen Folkmann

This pioneer was born on the island of Bornholm [Denmark], in the Baltic Sea, October 23, 1823. He received a limited education in the common schools of his country in his early youth.

He began his career as a sailor at the age of thirteen, on board the Danish brig "Cecilia," then engaged in seal fishing on the coast of Greenland. One voyage, though a successful one, cured him of all longings he may have entertained for this kind of adventure. Shortly after his return, he shipped on board the Danish bark "Concordia," at Copenhagen, bound for a whaling cruise in the north-western sea. The voyage consumed about two years.



The parents of William Howard, Jørgen, 1788-1879, and Elsebeth Folkmann, Bornholm, Denmark.

At the age of sixteen Mr. Howard engaged as a seaman on board an American ship at Elsinor, bound for Boston, United States. They touched at Turks Island, where they found the American brig "Norman," from the coast of Africa, homeward bound, in distress, having lost all her crew, of African fever, the captain and mate being the only survivors. Mr. Howard volunteered to assist in working the brig to New York. They sailed from Turks Island, West Indies, with a crew consisting of five, all told. The captain (who was convalescent from the fever), the mate, Mr. Howard, and two negroes, one employed as cook, by almost superhuman efforts, this small crew managed to sight the Sandy Hook lights, where they received on board a pilot.

Before reaching New York harbor they encountered a heavy north-wester that drove them out to sea; they were driven about for four days. A little before daylight of the fifth day of the storm the brig went ashore on Barnegat. The day previous to their going ashore one of the negroes died from exposure. Mr. Howard sewed his remains up in canvass, preparatory to consigning them to a watery grave. When the vessel struck they found they were on a sandy coast. The pilot and captain went ashore in the "dingy," the mate and Mr. Howard commenced preparing to follow in the long-boat. While gathering the ship's papers and instruments the surf, which was constantly increasing lifted the stern of the long-boat from the davits. This mishap rendered it necessary to jump in and cut loose the bow at once. They had hardly cleared the brig when their boat was swamped. This was the last that Mr. Howard knew until he found himself under the shelter of the long boat, where he had been placed by the mate, who had rescued him from the surf. That evening they were visited by a wrecker, who conducted them to his shanty where they were provided with such comforts as the place afforded. The mate and Mr. Howard returned to the vessel as soon as the storm had subsided sufficient to permit of their again venturing into the surf, and brought off the surviving negro, whom they were compelled to leave, also the corpse they had prepared to bury at sea. With the assistance of the wreckers, the brig was lightened and worked off the sand. Mr. Howard, in company with the mate, returned to the shore to collect such articles as they had left, and while thus engaged the brig was taken in

tow by a tug, sent out for that purpose, leaving them on shore. Several days after they boarded a coaster bound for New York, but were again driven out to sea by adverse winds; they finally succeeded in reaching Staten Island.

Over-exertion and exposure proved too much for Mr. Howard. On reaching Staten Island he was taken down with lung fever, and went to the sailors' hospital. Not being favorably impressed with the management of the hospital he remained but two days; by representing himself much improved, he gained assent to his leaving, and went immediately to New York. He barely reached the city when he lost consciousness, and was conveyed to the city hospital, where his life was for a long time despaired of, but his constitution proved equal to the strain, and brought him through.

On recovering strength he entered the United States service, on board the receiving ship "North Carolina." He was transferred to the sloop-of-war "Preble," in 1844, then under orders to proceed to the African coast. Immediately on their arrival in African waters they were ordered up the river Besow to protect a Portuguese settlement from the natives. On reaching the settlement they found there was not sufficient sea-room for working the vessel. The guns of the "Preble" were transferred to an old hull lying in the river. This proved a disastrous move for the crew of the "Preble." But a day or two had elapsed when Mr. Howard and one other man were taken down with unmistakable symptoms of African fever. The surgeon ordered the sloop to vacate the river immediately. They sailed for the Cape de Verde Islands. Before reaching there between eighty and ninety of the officers and crew were taken down. Nearly twenty fell victims to the terrible disease, and as many more were sent home invalids. Mr. Howard in this case owed his life to the fact of being among the first to contract the disease, thereby receiving more favorable attention than could have been given a few days later. ...

On reaching Norfolk Mr. Howard re-enlisted on board the sloop-of-war "St. Mary's," bound for the Pacific station. They anchored at Monterey, in 1848; from there they sailed to San Francisco bay, where the vessel remained until Mr. Howard quit – he deserted the service.

On leaving the navy he followed the course of all seekers after fortune, or adventure at that particular time, and went immediately to the gold mines of California. He followed mining for two Summers on Beaver creek and in Hangtown cañon, spending the Winter in Sonoma county. He was moderately successful in mining, but lost all he had accumulated in a cattle speculation. In 1850 Mr. Howard, in company with Charles Roamer (Carl Rømer a countryman of his) settled on Government land, where he now resides. The two partners carried on the ranch, keeping bachelor quarters up to the year 1855, when Mr. Howard found in a young lady (Miss Caroline Kolmer) a more congenial partner.

Mr. Howard and Miss Kolmer were married at the residence of Alexander Duncan at Salt Point, October 3, 1855 [not likely, see above]. Mrs. Howard was born in North Carolina, December 31, 1838. She, with her parents, came to California in 1846 [correction: 1845]. They spent the first Winter at Sutter's Fort, near Sacramento; the following season went to Fort Ross; afterwards settled in Kolmer valley. In 1851 they moved to Timber Cove, where they resided at the time Mr. and Mrs. Howard were married.

On assuming his new relations he bought out his partner, who returned to Denmark. Mr. and Mrs. Howard have had the satisfaction of seeing the wilderness in which they commenced life together gradually settled and improved until a railroad passes through their farm, and a station, around which quite a village has sprung, bears Mr. Howard's name. They have been blessed with nine children all living, and who still reside with them. The following is a list of the children, with the dates of their birth: Elizabeth, born December 10, 1857; Charles, born April 13, 1859; Theodore, born July 11, 1861; Amelia, born May 31, 1863; Clara, born July 12, 1865; William, born January 24, 1868; Annie, born September 20, 1870; Emma, born December 31, 1873; Alfred, born December 21, 1877. *(Last updated: Wednesday May 06, 2009)*

You can see five of Mr. William Howards letters in Danish, written to his parents in 1846, 1854 and 1855 here: <https://picasaweb.google.com/annvknudsen/AVK32UdvandringTilCaliforniaWilliamHoward#>

Sources:

http://www.garycolquhoun.com.au/judaft/genealogy/bridger_daft/aqwg381.htm,

<http://www.benitz.com/HowardBill1823/KolmerCaroline.htm>

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