

## *A Timeline of the Life of Captain William Sturgis*

*February 25, 1782 - October 21, 1863*

- 1782** William Sturgis is born in Barnstable Village on February 25, 1782 to Hannah Mills Sturgis and Shipmaster William E. Sturgis in a house that later becomes Sturgis Library. <sup>1</sup>
- 1796** Sturgis works as a junior clerk at the Boston counting-house of his Uncle Russell Sturgis and later works for James and Thomas Perkins, prominent figures in the Pacific Northwest fur trade. <sup>2</sup>
- 1798** Following his father's death in 1797 aboard a ship captured by pirates in the West Indies, 16 year-old Sturgis joins the crew of the *Eliza* as a green hand to support his family. <sup>3</sup> The Captain selects him as an assistant in trading with natives of the Pacific Northwest.
- 1799** Sturgis learns native languages quickly and wins good-will by fair dealing. <sup>4</sup> He makes one of the earliest attempts to create a phonetic dictionary of Aboriginal languages for the Pacific Northwest. <sup>5</sup>
- 1801** After three years at sea, Sturgis is named Captain of the *Caroline* <sup>6</sup> and becomes one of the youngest shipmasters in the American merchant fleet at 19 years old.
- 1809** During his fourth voyage to China, Sturgis' ship *The Atahualpa* is attacked by pirates while moored in Macau. Sturgis and his crew manage to get the ship underway and fight off the pirates. <sup>7</sup>
- 1810** A busy year, William returns to Boston and marries Elizabeth Marston Davis of Barnstable. They go on to have one son and five daughters. Also that year, Sturgis forms a partnership with John Bryant to create a mercantile firm that dominates Pacific Northwest and China trade routes for the next 40 years.
- 1812** Daughter Ellen Sturgis is born in February and later becomes a noted transcendentalist poet.
- 1814** At age thirty-two, William Sturgis joins the Massachusetts State Legislature to represent Boston and continues to serve for the next thirty-one years. <sup>8</sup>
- 1818** Daughter Caroline Sturgis is born in August and later becomes close friends with journalist and women's rights activist Margaret Fuller and poet, author and abolitionist Ralph Waldo Emerson. <sup>9</sup>
- 1827** Sturgis' only son William Watson Sturgis dies after receiving an injury while on a packet boat during the summer of his sophomore year at Harvard. <sup>10</sup>
- 1839** While planning for Barnstable's Bicentennial celebration, "Sturgis departs from social custom and insists that women be allowed to sit at the banquet table. His wishes prevail and more than 400 women join in the festivities." <sup>11</sup>
- 1845** As one of the foremost experts on the Pacific Northwest, Sturgis is invited to give four lectures between 1845 and 1850 concerning the history of the Northwest Coast trade, character and treatment of Northwest Coast natives, and the Oregon question concerning the boundary between the U.S. and Canada. <sup>12</sup>
- 1863** Captain William Sturgis dies on October twenty-first at the age of eighty-one. In his will, he donates his childhood home to the Village of Barnstable to be used as a library. He also donates his considerable collection of books along with the sum of \$15,000 to support the library and create a lasting legacy. <sup>13</sup>
- 1867** After lengthy renovations, Sturgis Library opens in August 1867.

*The background image is a map of the Northwest Coast painted by William Sturgis in 1845.*

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Sturgis Library. “History of the Library” [www.sturgislibrary.org/history/history-of-the-library/](http://www.sturgislibrary.org/history/history-of-the-library/). Accessed 3 February 2017.

<sup>2</sup> Sturgis Library. “William Sturgis Family Papers” MS. 20, p.1. <http://www.sturgislibrary.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/04/williamsturgisfamilypapers.pdf>. Accessed 3 February 2017.

<sup>3</sup> Sprague, Francis William. *Barnstable and Yarmouth Sea Captains and Ship Owners*. F.W. Sprague, 1913, p.10. [https://archive.org/stream/barnstableyarmou00spra/barnstableyarmou00spra\\_djvu.txt](https://archive.org/stream/barnstableyarmou00spra/barnstableyarmou00spra_djvu.txt) Accessed 4 February 2017.

<sup>4</sup> Meany, Edmond S. Book Review of *The Northwest Fur Trade and The Indians of The Oregon Country, 1788-1830*, (Boston: The Old South Association, Old South Meeting-house, 1920). p. 304. <https://journals.lib.washington.edu/index.php/WHQ/article/viewFile/6124/5198>. Accessed 4 February 2017.

<sup>5</sup> ABC BookWorld. “William Sturgis” [www.abcbookworld.com/view\\_author.php?id=2704](http://www.abcbookworld.com/view_author.php?id=2704). Accessed 4 February 2017.

<sup>6</sup> Crawford, Mary Caroline. *Famous Families of Massachusetts*. (Little, Brown and Company, 1930). Vol. I, Chapter XIX: The Sturgis Family, pp. 319-326. [http://library.albany.edu/preservation/brittle\\_bks/Crawford\\_Familiesv1/Chpt19.pdf](http://library.albany.edu/preservation/brittle_bks/Crawford_Familiesv1/Chpt19.pdf). Accessed 5 February 2017.

<sup>7</sup> Sprague, Francis William. *Barnstable and Yarmouth Sea Captains and Ship Owners*. F.W. Sprague, 1913, p.10. Accessed 4 February 2017.

<sup>8</sup> Sturgis Library. “William Sturgis Family Papers” MS. 20, p.1. <http://www.sturgislibrary.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/04/williamsturgisfamilypapers.pdf>. Accessed 3 February 2017.

<sup>9</sup> Harvard University Library. “Caroline Sturgis Tappan Papers.” <http://oasis.lib.harvard.edu/oasis/deliver/~hou00406>. Accessed 9 February 2017.

<sup>10</sup> Emerson, Ralph Waldo. *The Letters of Ralph Waldo Emerson*, (New York, Columbia University Press, 1941) p.205 “William Watson Sturgis, a young Harvard student, was accidentally injured on a packet boat and died on August 2. (*Boston Patriot*, August 8, 1827) Charles Storer Storow was in the same class.”

<sup>11</sup> Farrar, Stephen. *Barnstable* (Barnstable Historical Society: Arcadia Publishing, 2013), p.8. <http://bit.ly/2kDYrrv>. Accessed 8 February 2017.

<sup>12</sup> Sturgis, William. *A Most Remarkable Enterprise: Lectures on the Northwest Coast Trade and Northwest Coast Indian Life*, Mary Malloy, Editor, (Rock Village Publishing, 2013).

<sup>13</sup> Sturgis Library. “William Sturgis Family Papers” MS. 20, p.1. <http://www.sturgislibrary.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/04/williamsturgisfamilypapers.pdf>. Accessed 3 February 2017.



*The William Sturgis Timeline was created in celebration of the 150th Anniversary of Sturgis Library by the following Sturgis Charter Public School Students and Faculty*

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