

Frank Stanert's Journal

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On 2 July 2010, I received an email from the Curator of Manuscripts at the National Library headed 'Dr Longshore Potts' in which David Colquhoun informed me that the library had recently acquired 'the journal/scrapbook' of Frank Stanert, the stereopticon (or lantern) slide operator for Dr Longshore Potts on her 1892-1894 world tour. I was seized with excitement. I was doing occasional research on Dr Longshore Potts, whose 1887 book, *Discourses to Women on Medical Subjects*, had been given to me in 1983 as a present by Michael Cullen, at that time MP for St Kilda, one of my former history lecturers. It was a gift that, nearly forty years later, is resulting in a biography of Dr Potts.

That email from David Colquhoun proved invaluable. I now had access to something I never imagined existed: a journal of someone who accompanied my subject on her second world tour. Composed retrospectively, that journal is Stanert, Frank C, b 1893 : *Journal of his travels as a stereopticon accompanying Dr Longshore Potts¹*, MSY-6809: <https://tiaki.natlib.govt.nz/#details=ecatalogue.584005>

Who was Frank Stanert and why did he compose this journal? A large bound volume measuring 335 x 215 x 25mm, the journal consists of 107 pages, and although it had entries that take it to 1907, it is primarily concerned with the years 1892 to 1894. The Alexander Turnbull Library purchased it in 2010 from Antipodean Books, Maps and Prints in the United States. Somehow the Journal had survived to be picked up by this company.

The hard to read inscription on the front of the volume appears to be 'My Dollar Hunt' although the middle word is particularly difficult to decipher.² It might then be seen as a record of a young man's employment for extraordinary world travel in 1892 to 1894, composed retrospectively before he forgot the details of where he had been. He included in it photographs, perhaps taken by himself as he was a keen photographer, hotel cards and cuttings from his travels. Did he write it all down as an aide memoire for himself or was it for his family?

Frank was born in Philadelphia on the 6th of February 1872¹, one of four children, two of whom lived to adulthood. His father was a brass finisher but Frank aspired to be an actor. We could speculate that his father worked for the Louis E. Stilz & Bro Company, Manufacturers of Society, Military and

Theatrical Goods in Philadelphia who produced magic lanterns with brass fittings.³ Whether or not that was the case, at some point Frank learned to operate what was known as a 'stereopticon', a magic lantern which had a double lens that allowed images to dissolve, creating a spectacle of movement. The lantern threw up images on a very large screen, said to be 115 feet square (35 meters). Audiences were thrilled by such dramatic images in the days before the advent of moving pictures.

In late March 1892, Mrs Anna Longshore Potts MD was giving a series of lectures "illustrated with magnificent stereopticon views of subjects discussed, also of Art, Travel, etc" at Philadelphia's Broad Street Theatre and then the Chestnut

Street Theatre.⁴ Perhaps it was there, or at her lecture at the YMCA Hall, that Frank Stanert met Dr Potts.⁵ The twenty-year-old aspiring thespian was prepared to join Dr Potts's theatrical "combination" for a great adventure. Combinations were touring companies that brought theatre to small towns across the United States, particularly after the railways developed from 1869 with the completion of the trans-continental railway. Dr Potts was at the centre of a combination that gave medical lectures and also medical consultations. The party that Stanert joined included George Harrison MD, her business manager, his brother J. Charles Harrison MD, and their mother, Polly Harrison who acted as a companion to Dr Potts. J. Charles Harrison gave lectures to men only. George Harrison's wife, Carrie, accompanied the combination on the tour which Stanert's journal describes.



Stanert, having been recruited in Philadelphia, accompanied Dr Potts on the express train to Chicago and then to cabins near Park Rapids, Minnesota, where they set up camp in the pine forest and practised the show.⁶ They spent five months there, holidaying, Stanert exploring with his camera, and working. The latter involved preparing the smooth integration of words and images that their show demanded for success. They broke camp around October 3rd and went to San Francisco. On

October 14th they sailed out of the harbour across the Pacific stopping to perform in Honolulu, a brief stop in Samoa and then to Auckland for a seven month tour of New Zealand.⁷

In New Zealand, a country with a widespread population of circa 700,000, women doctors were still a novelty, but debates about women's rights were high on the agenda. Twenty thousand women signed a petition for a failed attempt at women's suffrage in 1892 and a new petition was circulating in 1893. No woman had yet entered the country's only medical school in Otago, tentatively begun in 1876. George Harrison took the opportunity of Longshore Potts' status as an MD to write a column for the Hawke's Bay Herald on "Female Physicians" in which he outlined how forty years ago there were no opportunities anywhere for women to train as doctors. At that time married women in Pennsylvania had no rights over their own property and they were "practically unknown as clerks and saleswomen, very little known as teachers, and the professions were regarded as entirely beyond their reach". Even twenty years earlier a woman doctor was "next to a freak in her community, and contemptuously frowned upon by the profession". By 1893, he claimed, there was "general popular welcome" of women doctors. "The world" had "advanced with wonderful rapidity during the last half century in the recognition of the rights and capabilities of women". Longshore Potts was heralded as being at the forefront of change, in the "first class in the world to graduate in medicine" in 1852.⁸

Anna Longshore Potts expressed her enthusiastic support for women's suffrage while in New Zealand.⁹ Such was the interest in her lectures in Blenheim that the local branch of the Women's Christian Temperance Union postponed their meeting in order for members to attend.¹⁰ There the local paper, perhaps feeling the rising tide in favour of women's suffrage had gone too far, objected to Dr Potts' views on marriage, aligning them with those of Annie Besant, that "Married women are among the persons in subjection to the power of others." Her words on divorce, the paper noted, may "have been applicable to American audiences; but they had no bearing whatever on colonial experiences".¹¹

Stanert was fascinated by the differences between the colony of New Zealand and the United States, noting them in his journal. The American expression "Board and lodging", for example, was called "board and residence". New Zealanders spelt wagon, "waggon". The currency amused him: "quids, tanners and bobs". Saloons were called "Public Houses or Pubs" and the bars were tended by barmaids "with hair dressed on the top of their heads". He heard "thank you" and "I beg your pardon" so often he got tired of it but soon found he was saying these phrases himself. He asked a landlady for

a match and she replied “she had nothing but lucifers”. Policemen were called “bobbies” and janitors “custodians”. Boxing day was new to him and New Zealanders apparently had “numerous other holidays”.

The layout of the theatres was the reverse of the American model. In America, the main seating area was known as the parquet circle whereas in New Zealand this was known as the “stalls”, the “gods” were “below instead of above, the highest prices are paid for the dress circles”. Many of the theatres seemed to him to be “barns”. He observed how trains were divided into first and second class apartments.



Stanert claimed that the Salvation Army were everywhere in New Zealand. That was perhaps to counter the other obsession of New Zealanders: “the colonials are terrors for horse racing”. Racing and gambling, in his view, “are the curse of the colonies”. He noted that “ladies” did “a good bit of horse riding” although there was much walking in the streets rather than on sidewalks. In Nelson he observed the horse-riding city lamp lighter who, when he came to a lamp, stood on his horse and lit it with a match, and then rode to the next one.

The combination travelled around much of the country by steamer. They sailed from Onehunga to New Plymouth where Stanert found “Mount Egmont” to be a “beautiful sight”. There they ordered pamphlets advertising Potts’ and Harrison’s lectures from

Thomas Avery, a printer in New Plymouth, a sample of which resides in the Aplin Family Papers in the Alexander Turnbull Library.¹² Christmas in that town, according to Stanert, was like being in “a morgue”. New Year’s Eve in Wanganui was more lively with a parade, music and fireworks. Wellington was better again, the only town since Auckland that boasted electric lights and trams. Thanks to historian Ben Schrader, I know how one member of the combination’s Wellington audience responded to the show. Ben alerted me to the diary of Herbert Spackman, held by the Turnbull. In his diary entry for February 16, 1893, Herbert, awaiting the arrival his fiancée from the United Kingdom, recorded that he attended “Mrs Potts’s lecture

on 'Hearts and Homes: or Is Marriage a Failure?' at the Opera house. In his view the second part of her lecture "being the most practical" was the most enjoyable.¹³

From Wellington the combination boarded a boat to Nelson which the young man reported was "known for its high proportion of girls, 7 to one man". Nelson to Westport was another boat journey and then a boat to Reefton. In Greymouth the combination were serenaded by the town band several times.

The trip from Hokitika to Christchurch took two days and a perilous coach ride through the Otira gorge. When Stanert requested that the driver slow down, the man replied, "he knew the road and wanted no foreign influence". Warner's Hotel welcomed the party to Christchurch by flying the American flag. Their arrival coincided with two upheavals. First an earthquake, and second a scandal. The earthquake followed previous ones they had experienced in Napier and Wellington. The scandal involved another American woman, Mary Worthington, formerly Mary Plunkett, a "high priestess" of Christian Science who had arrived with her family in New Zealand in 1890 and had funded the family's enterprise.

Mary, along with her supposed husband, Arthur Worthington (Samuel Oakley Crawford) was one of the architects of Christchurch's Temple of Truth, a popular city church where enthusiastic followers had helped raise funds for a large temple and the Worthington residence. At the time of the combination's visit, Mary had become Sister Magdala. Her husband renounced her for inciting her followers to take a vow of celibacy. Since Arthur had already married and defrauded at least five women in the United States of their funds, Mary was taking steps to protect herself after coming to understand his true nature.¹⁴ Arthur had insisted that Mary sign an agreement that she would not divulge his past or use his name, that he would keep the children and that she would leave New Zealand.¹⁵

As the saga unfolded, Dr Potts leapt to Sister Magdala's defence, giving, according to Magdala, "a truer estimate of him than any other person could", which she shared with the newspaper. Dr Potts expressed the wish that her "Darling Sister" had come to

"not to believe that it is God's will that masculine human beings shall rule all the female department of the race. No one need try to convince me that God ordains that His followers should rupture family ties, separate mothers from their children, confiscate their property and send them adrift from the country, and gag them from speech or action..."¹⁶

In his journal Stanert mentions meeting and liking Mrs Worthington but says nothing about the goings on at the Temple of Truth.

In Dunedin, Stanert left the Potts' combination for a time "owing to the 'bullheadedness' and the desire to impose on me by her manager" (p.44). He joined and stage managed the London Gaiety Burlesque Company, a large variety show with lots of young women and men around his age. That company made their mark on Dunedin by attracting crowded houses and by wrecking the premises of the Otago Workman newspaper. The latter had cast aspersions of the characters of some of the women of the Company. Five women members and some of the men went to the Workman and thrashed the editor and printers present with horsewhips. When ejected, they broke the windows, smashed the doors and trashed the interior, leaving one printer on the floor with his face blacked with ink. They enjoyed the following court proceedings as much as a performance and after paying £4.10s for the damage to property, they went on to have another triumph at the theatre.¹⁷

Stanert stage-managed the London Gaiety's company's performances in Gore, Wyndham, Bluff, Winton, Orepuki, Invercargill, and Riverton. In Invercargill, after the Gaiety company departed from Bluff, he rejoined the Potts' party for their performances in Gore, Balclutha and Ashburton. On the 18 July 1893, the combination left for Sydney from Lyttelton, on "the little tub" S.S. Wakatipu. Stanert recorded that the almost seven month journey around New Zealand had been "most enjoyable".

Sydney, however, offered a great contrast to all the small New Zealand towns. Stanert recalled "I felt as if I had been turned loose after being penned up for the winter". The venues were large, one holding over 3,500 persons. Newcastle, the next stop, appeared to Stanert to be "a morgue" in comparison. In the town of West Maitland, the Combination found floods had devastated the area and people were nearly starving, hence there was little interest in their lectures so the Combination provided the light effects for a charity concert "which turned out to be a great success".¹⁸ Armidale followed and then great success in the bigger city of Brisbane, with packed houses. Stanert enjoyed Brisbane very much: "I was treated as one of the family at the hotel where I stayed and made to feel quite at home by the ladies of the family ... together with a comedy company that made Rome howl". He then went as the advance man to prepare for show in Adelaide from where the combination planned to depart for India. In Adelaide, Potts and Harrison presented him with "a full dress suit" for his services during the year.

Stanert wrote: I never spent such a year every day something new occurred, new faces, new scenery, the different ways of the people, the lovely climates and last but not least the charming acquaintances I made both in Australia and New Zealand will always be a bright and pleasant spot in my memory, and broke down some of my erroneous ideas of English people.

How can one form any idea of a thing when they see it burlesqued as they do foreigners on stage, of course there are some ways of the English I do not like but as a class of people I find they are pleasant to deal with very hospitable and kind but inclined to take things much easier than their American cousins.

The combination departed Adelaide on 18 October 1893 on the SS Austral, the biggest ship they had been on, which, he remarked was "fitted up beautifully". In first class quarters he could only look down enviously on the steerage and second class passengers who seemed to have a good time. George Harrison had gone ahead to arrange their performances in what was then Ceylon. The oppressive heat and monsoon rains in Colombo perhaps convinced Harrison and Potts that India would not be a good idea, to Stanert's disappointment. On 16 November he left for England on the Orient liner Cuzco with the Harrison brothers and their mother. Mrs Dr Potts and Carrie Harrison remained in Ceylon to leave slightly later. They all reunited in London on 22 December.¹⁹

Stanert's record of his time with the combination in England, from December 1893 until April 1894, is more sketchy than his fulsome notes on New Zealand. He left Potts's employ in early April 1894 and joined a dramatic company in order to get "back on stage". His fondness for Anna Longshore Potts was such that when he had a holiday, he chose to spend it with her in London. Eventually he teamed up with Miss Jeanna Binns and started his own company, headquartered in Bradford, aptly named "The Wanderers".

Stanert's journal has been invaluable to me as I near the completion of my biography of Anna Longshore Potts. Most of my research has been in digital sources, newspapers in particular. I have trolled through thousands of reports of Longshore Potts (very thankful for the usual name which she came to adopt) in *Chronicling America*, *Newspapers.com*, *Paperspast*, *Trove*, *Nineteenth Century British Newspapers* and the *British Newspaper Archive*. *Ancestry.com* has also proved vital. But without Stanert's journal, I would have had no idea of the months of practice put into refining the show in the Minnesota forest and less appreciation of the internal dynamics of the combination. Examining the physical volume put me directly in touch, I felt, with the young man writing about his exciting journey.

Through the study of the newspapers I have come to appreciate how many columns that appear to be glowing reviews of the combination's shows were actually penned by George Harrison. Newspapers were hungry for copy and he willingly supplied it. The digital allowed me to follow the combination's two tours of much of the English speaking world

(1883-87; 1892-1898) in a way that would have been impossible without the word search facility. Ancestry's terrific collection of census documents meant I found out that Dr Potts was divorced, not the "widow" she was said to be by the Ashburton Guardian.²⁰ Ancestry has also allowed me to reconstitute family relationships. And on there I found Frank Stanert's Certificate of Registration of American Citizenship (c 1911), when he was resident in Liverpool, which to my delight, had a photograph appended.

As far as I am aware, and I have searched, Anna Longshore Potts left no personal papers. The closest thing I have to her voice is the lengthy newspaper reports she sent back to San Diego to the National City Record, a newspaper edited by her brother-in-law, about her first world tour. Because my interest in her is registered in the digital sphere, I was fortunate to be contacted through Facebook by a person in the United States who was delighted to send me a family photograph of her which had come into his possession. I also have her carte de visite, sent to me in digital form by an American collector of such cards. When the Wellcome Library was offered some ephemera related to her, they emailed me to learn more about her. This material has also proved invaluable. I have benefited greatly from the detective work of archivists looking for individuals who can round out knowledge of their collections. I am in David Colquhoun's debt, in particular, because, thanks to being alerted to Stanert's journal, my study is much the richer.

While the newspapers are addressed to a wide public, and much of the newspaper content about the combination takes the form of their prolific advertisements, Stanert's Journal presents a singular view. It has given me a sense, from the twenty year old's decision, first to accompany sixty-three-year old Dr Potts on a world tour, and second to spend valuable vacation time with her, that she was good to him and he liked her. The singular Journal, together with the multiple newspaper sources, has given me a stereoscopic view of Anna Longshore Potts, one that helps give a three-dimensional portrait of a canny show woman, and pioneering doctor, who also endeared herself to others.

Endnotes

1. Stanert, Frank. Stanert, Frank C, b 1893 : Journal of his travels as a stereopticon accompanying Dr Longshore Potts, Alexander Turnbull Library, MSY-6809.
2. Many thanks to Rebekah Clements and her colleagues at the Alexander Turnbull Library for their attempts to decipher the title and for measuring the volume and providing its provenance. Thanks also to Jane McCabe who read the draft paper and made important suggestions which I have incorporated.
3. For one example, see https://www.luikerwaal.com/newframe_uk.htm?merk_divusa1_uk.htm
4. Amusements column, 'Broad Street Theatre.' The Philadelphia Inquirer, 24 March 1892, p.6.
5. Amusements column, 'Broad Street Theatre.' The Philadelphia Inquirer, 30 March 1892, p.6
6. Detail on practising the show and all Stanert's observations that follow derive from his journal.
7. For their time in Honolulu, see Barbara Brookes, "The Travelling Stereopticon," in A. Cooper, L. Paterson and A. Wanhalla, eds., *The Lives of Objects*, University of Otago Press, 2015, pp.152-157.
8. Female Physicians.' Hawkes Bay Herald, 18 January 1893, p.3.
9. 'The Harrison-Potts Lectures.' Mataura Ensign, 27 June 1893, p.2.
10. 'Local and General News.' Marlborough Express, 7 March 1893, p.2.
11. 'Is Marriage a Failure?' Marlborough Express, 14 March 1893, p.2.
12. Aplin Family Papers. , Alexander Turnbull Library, MS-Papers-2873.
13. Herbert Spackman Papers, Folder 5. Alexander Turnbull Library, MS-Papers-1788-5
14. Richard S. Hill. 'Worthington, Arthur Bently', *Dictionary of New Zealand Biography*, first published in 1993. Te Ara - the Encyclopedia of New Zealand, <https://teara.govt.nz/en/biographies/2w32/worthington-arthur-bently> (accessed 23 February 2022)
15. 'A.B. Worthington,' Star (Christchurch), 2 June 1893, p.3; Star (Christchurch), 3 June 1893, p.5.
16. 'The Worthington Scandal.' Lyttelton Times, 7 June 1893, p.5.
17. 'Wrecking a Newspaper Office. The Gaiety Company off the Stage,' Otago Daily Times, 6 June 1893, 2.
18. Stanert, p.51.
19. The National Archives of the UK; Kew, Surrey, England; Board of Trade: Commercial and Statistical Department and successors: Inwards Passenger Lists.; Class: BT26; Piece: 45; Item: 3 Source Information Ancestry.com. UK and Ireland, Incoming