

Liffiton Family History 2017

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In 1884 Jane C. Mahon met a Mr. Liffiton from Montreal on the Steamship Vancouver. Photo: [Norway Heritage](http://www.norwayheritage.com)

The Young Mr. Liffiton of *Jane's Letters from Ireland*

By Thomas Liffiton

Sometimes the historical record is sparse on who, what, where. In a woman's diary titled *Jane's Letters from Ireland: 1884-1886*, I came across this entry for June 30, 1884.

"I know quite a number of the passengers now, a young Mr. Liffiton of Montreal, all the Beatty family, a Mr. Hewitt, Mr. Burke, Mr. Allen one of the owners, but it takes some time to find out their names."¹

The writer, Jane Caroline Mahon, was a twenty or twenty-one-year old American girl from Detroit on her way to Ireland. She was traveling on the Dominion Line steamship Vancouver from Quebec to Liverpool, the first leg of her trip. Some years later she would become a distinguished artist known for her watercolors under her married name, Jane C. Stanley. The Smithsonian Institution exhibited her work in 1944.² The dust cover of her published journal describes Jane's writing as "a fascinating picture of the upper class middling life of nineteenth century Ireland, as well as an insight into the early development of a young artist."³



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Learning about Jane the artist was interesting, but I wanted to know more about the young Mr. Liffiton of Montreal.

Jane gives us few clues, but she does mention Mr. Liffiton one more time. Several ship passengers, including Jane, planned to perform in a Friday night concert during the voyage. On July 4, she wrote “The concert programmes came out ... they were sold by auction and those with portraits went for 3 to 5 shillings. I did not invest but Mr. Liffiton gave me one. He has a pretty good voice but sings rather out of tune and strains himself.” And later, “Our concert went off pretty well on the whole, though some of the gentlemen’s songs were dreadfully out of tune. Several people that had promised to perform backed out.”⁴

So, our unidentified young Mr. Liffiton comes through history to us as a man who sang out of tune. We can’t be sure he performed in the concert. He might have, singing dreadfully out of tune. Who was this young mystery man?

There are two possibilities. In 1884 two adult Liffiton men – brothers - lived in Montreal. The younger, William Thomas Liffiton, was 32.⁵ He had married ten years before and already had five children.⁶ He worked at John H. Jones & Co., “Importers of Watches, Clocks, Jewellery (sic), Fancy Goods, Cutlery, and Electric-plate Ware, 198 McGill.”⁷

His older brother, Charles Albert Liffiton, was thirty-five years old in 1884.⁸ He was single, as he wouldn’t marry until 1885.⁹ He was a founder and owner of the import-export firm Bourgeau, Heron & Liffiton, “Manufacturers and Importers of Coffee, Spices and Mustard, Trade Coffee and Spice Mills, 43 College.”¹⁰ He is known to have travelled internationally for his business, and seems the most likely to be mystery man.

However, the clincher for this story is the passenger list of the *City of Rome*, a steamship that sailed two months later from Liverpool to New York. It arrived in New York Harbor on September 1, and the passenger lists identified CA Liffiton as a Canadian on his way home to Montreal. Either he carried a lot of coffee samples, or maybe he packed a lot of clothes. He checked nine pieces of luggage.¹¹

Solved – CA Liffiton was the young man Jane met. He was the young man with the good voice who sang out of tune.

¹ Peter B. Franz. *Jane’s Letters from Ireland: 1884-1886*. Edinburgh: The Pentland Press Limited, 1999, 22.

² “Stanley, Jane C. 1863-1940,” OCLC WorldCat Identities, (OCLC Online Computer Library Center, Inc.), <http://worldcat.org/identities/lccn-n93063705/>.

³ Franz, *Jane’s Letters from Ireland*, dust cover front flap.



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⁴ Franz, *Jane's Letters from Ireland*, 23-24.

⁵ William T. Liffiton Baptismal Record, St. James Street Methodist Church, Montreal, 27 May 1852, National Archives of Quebec Film #128.25, Montreal NAQ Film #1594.

⁶ Family Bible of Jesse Fraser (Jackson) Liffiton (1855 – 1923).

⁷ *Lowell's Montreal Directory for 1883-1884*. Montreal, John Lowell & Son, 1883, 378. See https://archive.org/details/cihm_37058.

⁸ Charles Albert Liffiton Baptismal Record, East End Lagauchètiere Street Methodist Church, Montreal, 11 August, 1850. National Archives of Quebec Film #128.21, Montreal NAQ Film #1590.

⁹ *Registration of Marriages, 1869-1928*; Series: MS932; Reel: 55, Archives of Ontario; Toronto, Ontario, Canada; Registrations of Marriages, 1869-1928; Series: MS932; Reel: 55 County of Stormont, Township of Cornwall 010974, 503.

¹⁰ *Lowell's Montreal Directory for 1883-1884*, 245.

¹¹ Year: 1884; Arrival: *New York, New York*; Microfilm Serial: M237, 1820-1897; Microfilm Roll: Roll 479; Line: 15; List Number: 1131. See Ancestry.com, *New York Passenger Lists, 1820-1957* (databases on-line), Provo, UT, USA: Ancestry.com Operations, Inc. 2010. Original data: *Passenger Lists of Vessels Arriving at New York, New York, 1820-1897*. Microfilm Publication M237, 675 rolls, NAI 6256867. Records of the U.S. Customs Services, Record Group 36, National Archives at Washington, DC.

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