

# A SEVEN-YEAR SEARCH FOR NICHOLAS OLIVER LAWSON

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## PROLOGUE

In 2000, when I was writing about encounters in the second chapter of my book on coincidence (Marcel Nordlohne, *Rudolf Steiner und der Zufall*, Maastricht, Shaker Publishing, 2008), I came across the important encounter between Charles Darwin and Nicholas Lawson in the Galápagos archipelago in 1835, an encounter that, first of all, would have been a most unlikely event to have happened at all. Nevertheless, it did take place owing to the fact that the following prerequisite conditions were met and these facts came about.

1. The Galápagos archipelago had to become Ecuadorian through a ceremonial act on 12-2-1832 (Darwin's 23<sup>rd</sup> birthday!), with General José Villamil (1789–1866) as its first governor. This date is commemorated every year as Galápagos Day.
2. General Villamil had to be so busy with other Ecuadorian affairs that in 1835 he appointed Lawson, a captain in the Ecuadorian navy, interim governor for the duration of about one year.
3. Darwin was in the Galápagos archipelago for 34 days (16 September – 20 October), of which he spent a mere 3½ days (from 24 September, late, until the 28<sup>th</sup>, early) on Charles Island, where Lawson lived.
4. Lawson came down from the highland settlement, not so much for the *Beagle* (!) but in order to greet a whaling ship that had also arrived recently (K. Thalia Grant and Gregory B. Estes, *Darwin in Galápagos. Footsteps to a New World*, Princeton, NJ, Princeton University Press, 2009, chapter V, p. 112). Even so, Lawson did also board the *Beagle* and ... invited Captain FitzRoy and Darwin to have dinner with him at the settlement on the following day: Friday 25 September 1835. And that was to be the day of "Lawson's casual remark". From the very start, then, the sheer encounter with Darwin was a miraculous coincidence!

Nearly all books on Darwin make mention of the following story: "Mr. Lawson, Vice-Governor of the Archipelago, informed me that the tortoises differed from the different islands, and that he could with certainty tell from which island any one was brought." (Charles Darwin, *The Voyage of the Beagle*, with an introduction by H.G. Cannon, London, Dent & Sons, 1839, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition 1845, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, reprint 1979/1980, p. 379), "their shells being characteristically flanged or flared according to their home location" (Janet Browne, *Charles Darwin. Voyaging*, volume I of a Biography, London, Jonathan Cape, 1995, p. 304). Darwin remarked: "I did not for some time pay sufficient attention to this statement" (Charles Darwin, *The Voyage of the Beagle*, with an introduction by H.G. Cannon, London, Dent & Sons, 1839, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition 1845, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, reprint 1979/1980, p. 379). Indeed, the "significance of this statement escaped Darwin at the time and he, himself, failed to notice the differences in the tortoises he saw on the islands Chatham and James. However, nine months after leaving Galápagos ..., Darwin reflected on Lawson's words" (K. Thalia Grant and Gregory B. Estes, *Darwin in Galápagos. Footsteps to a New World*, chapter V, p. 123). He understood at last that Lawson's observation could lead to the idea of "variation by change of environment".

That amounted to the first step in Darwin's long development of what is now called the Darwin theory of evolution by means of natural selection.

The second step was "not only variation but a new animal species" while the third step would be "not only a new animal species but, in the end, the birth of mankind". Every step was related to a coincidental change of environment. Darwin needed all his courage because this theory is of necessity based on extrapolation in time and, moreover, on enlargement from small variation towards the origin of mankind. It was far from easy for him.

Due to my interest in coincidence, I began to wonder who this man was that had changed history because he could help Darwin take his first step, most likely without him ever even realising this himself. Darwin called him an Englishman, which indicates that Lawson spoke 'real' English, at least a kind of English that Darwin could recognize as being spoken somewhere on the British isles. According to David Lack (1910–1973), "it may be wondered whether the *Origin of Species* would have been written if Mr. Lawson had not existed ... . Credit should be given, as Darwin gave it, to Mr. Lawson, who must have been a naturalist of perspicacity and accuracy" (David Lack, "Mr. Lawson of [sic] Charles", *American Scientist*, vol. 51, no 1, March 1963, pp. 12-13). John Hickham wrote in 1985: "Lawson, of whom we know nothing else, got a sort of scientific immortality by his chance remark to Darwin" (John Hickham, *The Enchanted Islands. The Galápagos Discovered*, Oswestry, Nelson, 1985, chapter IX, p. 75).

Where should I turn to find data on Lawson, that famous unknown?

In 2004 I began by contacting the Mormons in Salt Lake City, Utah as they possess the world's largest collection of genealogy records. However, they came up with over 80 persons called Nicholas Lawson in their files, and without a birthdate my Lawson could not be found.

On 11-11-2004 I tried the library of my hometown of Flushing (Vlissingen) where I found that Lawson was not mentioned in *The Correspondence of Charles Darwin* (8 volumes), not even in volume I (1821–1836). There I did, however, learn quite by chance (from the first footnote on p. 472) that all letters Darwin wrote on the Galápagos have been lost.

On 22-6-2005, the Darwin scholars of the Charles Darwin Foundation, the scientific advisory service to the Galápagos National Park Service, knew next to nothing about Nicholas Lawson. Their advice was to write to the National Archives in Kew, Richmond, Surrey, England. So I did, but Lawson could not be traced, not even in the papers of the British consul to Ecuador of around 1835 that the Foreign Office held..

I now proceed in telegram style.

31-3-2006. Letter in English to the Charles Darwin Research Station in Ecuador. No answer.

27-4-2006. Lawson could not be found in the Court Guides for 1830–1835, in the Westminster Archives Centre, London.

19-5-2006. Letter in English to the Ministry of the Interior, Quito, Ecuador. No answer.

18-12-2006, 23-2-2007 and 4-5-2007. Letters to an acquaintance of mine in Quito, Ecuador. No answer.

20-12-2006. A neurologist colleague, having visited the Galápagos, wrote to me to the effect that, in his opinion, Ecuador would only answer if some money were forthcoming.

6-3-2007. Letter in Spanish to the government in Quito, Ecuador. No answer.

15-3-2007. Again, a letter in Spanish to the Charles Darwin Foundation for the Galápagos Islands.

17-5-2007. This time, the advice came back to ask John Woram, New York, a Galápagos historian.

26-5-2007. John Woram's answer was immediate: "I believe Lawson was not an Englishman but just one of many foreign nationals in the service of Ecuador ... . If Lawson eventually died in his mainland Ecuador, perhaps there is a record of his birth and death in the records of the cemetery in Guayaquil, a very elegant cemetery". Woram also advised me to enquire at the Museo Naval in Guayaquil. I did both, using Spanish for my enquiries, but to no avail: no answer. John Woram also mentioned a series of books, not in his possession, entitled *La Marina Ecuatoriana en la Historia de Galápagos* (Armada del Ecuador, Dirección General de Intereses Marítimos). Tome VI covers the period 1830–1840. This book was not to be found in any Dutch library. Finally, he gave me the text of chapter XIV of *Voyage Around the World on the Frigate La Vénus, during the years 1836–1839* by Abel du Petit-Thouars, translated from the French by K. Thalia Grant, with corrections by Anne Guézou, 2004, to be consulted at <http://www.galapagos.to/texts/petit.htm>. Page 3 of that chapter mentions Lawson as an "officer of an energetic character ..., a bright and clever sailor ..., lieutenant of an Ecuadorian navy vessel." I learned from this text that Lawson had been a naval officer.

27-6-2007. Letter to the National Archives in Kew about Lawson's naval career.

10-7-2007. The answer this time was to seek the advice of Dr Steven C. Smith, in Kew, a historical researcher.

23-7-2007. Dr Smith responded to my request and carried out a thorough search of the Royal Navy officer records for the period from 1814 until 1834 in the U.K. National Archives at Kew. No evidence of Lawson's naval career was found.

2-10-2007. Letter to the Naval Historical Centre, Washington DC. Lawson could not be found (8-2-2008). The advice came back to enquire at the National Archives and Records Administration Old Military and Civil Branch, Washington DC. I did so but not until 18-9-2011, when I had learned the dates of Lawson's birth and death.

13-10-2011. Answer: your request does not specify whether Lawson was an enlisted man or an officer. For enlisted men, there are no files in existence before 1885. Personnel files for naval officers during the nineteenth century do not exist, either.

26-10-2007. Letter in Spanish to Armada de la República del Ecuador, in Quito. The comprehensive answer, in Spanish, received 30-12-2007, quoted extensively from tome VI of *La Marina Ecuatoriana en la Historia de Galápagos*, which proved extremely difficult to obtain. The quotes included that Lawson was an "Ingles nacido en Jamaica" (p. 24) and that his Christian middle name was "Oliverio" (p. 46). Both pieces of "information" would later prove to be terribly wrong ...

7-1-2008. Letter to the Caribbean Maritime Institute, Kingston, Jamaica. No answer.

20-6-2008. Letter to the Jamaica Archives and Records Department. No answer.

21-7-2008, 15-9-2008. Letters to the Registrar General's Department (RGD), Jamaica. No answer.

28-7-2008. Letter to the Official Jamaica Archives Website. Answer (11-8-2008): try the RGD ...

30-4-2009. Letters to each of the fourteen parishes of Jamaica. No answers but one parish had informed the RGD (!) and the RGD got back to me on 28-10-2009 saying that an investigation would be conducted. That was the last letter from the RGD ...

27-8-2009. Letter mentioning Lawson's Christian middle name Oliverio to the Mormons in Salt Lake City, but again to no avail....

The year 2010 was a black year for the search for Lawson. However, the darkest hour is before dawn. That dawn came in December 2010.

When my son-in-law Willem P. Spruijt, MSc in Leiden, heard about my long-term efforts to trace Nicholas Oliver Lawson, he came up with a solution:

1. He went to his computer in December 2010 and having typed in the combination "Lawson, Darwin and Galápagos", found long lists of websites mentioning the Christian name of Nicholas (English) as well as the name Nicolas (Spanish).

2. A search on "Nicolas" yielded one single result: a reference to the Chilean *Repertorio Nacional* dated December 1850, where Lawson is included, among civil servants and military men, as a "constructor naval" as of 17-6-1844, yet without any further information. Fortunately, this book has ended up in the library of Stanford, California, where it was stamped and scanned to become available on Google.

3. The combination "Lawson Chile" yielded information about a Spanish book, *La Sociedad en Chile Austral antes de la Colonización Alemana 1645–1850*, Santiago, Ediciones Universidad Católica de Chile, 1<sup>st</sup> edition 1979, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition 2006, by Gabriel Guarda, O.S.B., which provided some biographical details on Lawson on p. 607, such as his birth in Norway. Even though some of its details were partially incorrect, it did prove to hold the clue to the solution!

9-1-2011. Letter to the Naturhistorisk Museum, Oslo.

1-2-2011. Answer from the National Archives of Norway: Lawson was born as Nicolai Olaus Lossius on 23-11-1790, on the farm Vestad on Sekken Island in Moldefjord, Norway, and he was baptized in the parish church on the island of Veøy, just east of Sekken Island on 29-11-1790.

2-3-2011. Given his birthdate of 23-11-1790, the Mormons in Salt Lake City ought to be able to find Lawson, but no further details proved available.

6-6-2011. Letter to Nasjonalbiblioteket, Oslo.

20-6-2011. An answer from Tove Johansen, which includes several copies of texts mentioning Nicolai. Also mentioned is a newspaper article by W. Lassen.

20-7-2011. Letter to Nasjonalbiblioteket, with my request to find W. Lassen's article in the old Norwegian newspapers. The article, however, could not be found; neither through [www.nb.no](http://www.nb.no) nor during a search in July at the website of Nasjonalbiblioteket (through email, [nb@nb.no](mailto:nb@nb.no)). The collected manuscripts of the genealogist Wilhelm Lassen mention Nicolai in the notes: "Nicolai left Norway at the age of 16 and subsequently became an English naval officer". In addition, Lassen mentions an article about Nicolai's life published in a Norwegian newspaper some time during the period 1852–1854. This article could not be found in the records for 1850-1860 of the Oslo newspapers *Morgenbladet* (1852–today) or *Aftenbladet* (1855-1881). Enclosed were two letters from Nicolai to relatives in Norway, printed in the *Yearbook for 1977* for the Romsdal Local History Association, pp. 111–121.

5-8-2011. Important letter from Anders Kvernberg, Nasjonalbiblioteket: he has found the Norwegian text of nine letters, all of them written by Nicolai from Valparaíso to his relatives over the years 1823-1848. He wrote these letters in English because the everyday need to converse in Spanish and English had caused him to forget too much of his native Norwegian after thirty years (see 2<sup>nd</sup> letter).

The 1<sup>st</sup> letter was translated into Norwegian by either a merchant or a sailor or somebody Nicolai's parents knew personally, but the 2<sup>nd</sup> to 9<sup>th</sup> letters were translated into Norwegian by Wilhelmine Brandt (1827-1915) and were published by her in *Stamtavle over Familjerne Lossius og Brandt med flere i samme indgiftede slægter* (Geelmuyden in Bergen, 1863, pp. 16-27). Wilhelmine Brandt was an unmarried daughter of Nicolai's sister Wilhelmine (1795-1879). She was a pioneer and an authority in the field of Norwegian and Danish genealogy. Her first work concerned her own family! Moreover, she was a great help to poor families assisting them in getting the appropriate income support (see *Norwegian Biographic Lexicon*).

In January 2012 Anders Kvernberg searched the extensive personal files of Wilhelmine, in the National Archives in Oslo. He was not able to find the originals for the nine letters although he did find two other letters, to be called 10 and 11, dating from 12-9-1848 and 25-12-1849, in English and by Nicolai! For some unknown reason these were not published by Wilhelmine.

The nine letters in *Stamtavle* are arranged chronologically with the exception of the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> letter (12-2-1845 and 12-1-1844). This is most probably due to a writing error of Nicolai's own making as 12-1-1844 should be 12-1-1845 (hardly an unusual error in January!) for he writes in this letter about an event that happened at the end of 1844: he was called up again by the Chilean government, this time in his capacity as a naval architect. Moreover, the official appointment was to commence on 17-6-1844 (see above). The 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> letters could also be interchanged chronologically but I think it is best to avoid any confusion over numbers.

The nine letters have also been transcribed and modernized in *Slektsbok for Familien Lossius* (Gunnar & Ivar Lossius, published by themselves in Vestby, 1973, pp. 13-25).

19-1-2012. Letter to the Norwegian ambassador in Santiago. No answer.

25-1-2012. Letter to the Mormons in Salt Lake City.

3-2-2012. Answer: the wife and child(ren) of Lossius/ Lawson could not be found.

5-2-2012. Letter to the Archivo Naval de la Armada in Valparaíso. No answer.

30-3-2012. Letter to Archivo Nacional Historico in Santiago. No answer.

11-6-2012. Letter to Archivo del Arzobispado de Santiago. No answer.

## BIOGRAPHY

Nicholas Oliver Lawson was born as Nicolai Olaus Lossius!

In the 3<sup>rd</sup> letter, 12-1-1845, to his brother-in-law Peter Andreas Brandt (1792-1862 in Brazil) he wrote: "In my next letter I will tell you what my motive was for taking the name Lawson". It is unfortunate, but he never did so in any letter that has been preserved ....

Nicolai was born on the farm Vestad on Sekken Island in Moldefjord in Norway on 23-11-1790 and he was baptized in the parish church on the island of Veøy (i.e. "holy island", from Old Norse), just east of Sekken Island on 29-11-1790.

His father was Christopher Lorentz Nilsen Lossius (1745-1827), a farmer and an army officer, in the position of a commanding officer with the Opdal Company from 1796. His mother was Anna (Ana?) Cathrine Margrete Sigholt (1756-1841), the daughter of Israel Olaus Sigholt, a colonel in the Danish army (Norway and Denmark were united from 1380 until 1814). They were married in 1788 and had five children: besides Nicolai, four daughters: Kirstine, Jacobine, Wilhelmine and Anna Katrina (see *Slektsbok for Familien Lossius*, p. 12, as well as *Stamtavle*, pp. 19-20, for a letter dated 22-4-1843 from W.H. Rouse, the English consul at Valparaiso, to the Earl of Aberdeen).

Some of Nicolai's childhood years (approximately the period 1795-1802) were spent in Opdal in the Trøndelag region of Norway. His father seems to have been stationed there for some years because of his army career (*Stamtavle*, p. 14).

On 2-12-1801, when he was eleven years old, Nicolai was given control of the second farm, which was laid down on 3-8-1802, as he was destined to become Odelsbonde of Vestad (*Yearbook for 1977* for the Romsdal Local History Association, p. 114), which denotes a form of property ownership whereby a family acquires ownership of a farm after having lived there for at least twenty years.

As his parents could not afford for him to study or undergo training, Nicolai decided to go to sea. After all, he had always felt a strong yearning to go to sea, which his parents had just as strongly objected to, according to the commentary on the 1<sup>st</sup> letter (*Slektsbok for Familien Lossius*, pp. 15-16). Finally, he got their permission, in 1806.

On 5-11-1806 he left Molde on a Norwegian ship under Captain Tønnes Andersen Dahl, which carried dried fish to Barcelona (*State Archives in Trondheim, code no F.054.5.4*). On the voyage home, however, Captain Dahl fell overboard and died on 17-4-1807 (Niels de Seve, *Molde bys historie*, Volume I: *For året 1838, Ladested og kjøpstad*, published by the municipality of Molde, 1962, p. 367).

In the spring of 1807 he departed from Molde "as a cabin boy on a ship registered in Stornoway, Scotland, stowed away among a herd of Scottish sheep, under that scoundrel (!) of a captain, Adam Morison" by whom he was treated shabbily (1<sup>st</sup> letter, and *Slektsbok for Familien Lossius*, p. 13). "When I left him, I couldn't even call my clothes my own! Such was my first acquaintance with the world" (1<sup>st</sup> letter).

In this 1<sup>st</sup> (preserved) letter to his father dated 12-7-1823, he wrote; "From the start I have intended insofar as it is in my power to cultivate myself as a man, make a fortune and see my homeland again as an independent person, which chance I have already had. However, Fate has ordained that it would be more beneficial to me to take it away".

"I left my country with only a limited knowledge of my own language but I quickly learned enough English to familiarize myself with navigating" (2<sup>nd</sup> letter, dated 12-2-1845, to his nephew Christopher Lossius Brandt, Mexico, 1820-1861). "I have been my own teacher in everything I have learned" (3<sup>rd</sup> letter, 12-1-1845, to his brother-in-law Peter Andreas Brandt (Brazil, 1792-1862).

He wrote two letters to his father in the first year (neither has been preserved) but nothing in the second year (1808), due to the war. Curiously enough, though, I have not been able to learn of any war taking place on the American continents in 1808. Napoleon, however, introduced the so-called "continental system" (the Berlin Decree of 21-11-1806 and the Milan Decree of 17-12-1807), which resulted in a blockade of Denmark and Norway from 1808 until 1811. This was not so much a military war as an

“economic” war measure that effectively separated Norway from Denmark, and cut off both these countries from the United Kingdom. It brought famine to Norway, and emigration.

After his return to Liverpool from Brazil (1809) Nicolai wrote again to his father (which letter has not been preserved) but not so in 1810, for in that year he was twice taken prisoner of war, and in the end taken to Tunis (Barbary pirates!), where he was bartered (1<sup>st</sup> letter to his father and 2<sup>nd</sup> letter to his nephew Christopher Lossius Brandt).

“When I was free again, I wanted to go where this freedom could be retained and North America seemed to me the only land of freedom on earth and the best suited to me and the way I had planned to live now as I had already seen so much of that miserly European despotism.

At the end of 1810 I arrived in Philadelphia. Soon after, I was given the post of officer with the East Indian-Chinese trade. That was the start of my life in the southern hemisphere” (1<sup>st</sup> letter). This can only refer to Australia, the then Dutch Indies and the southern half of Africa.

“After great effort, with much diligence and many scratches, I succeeded in getting the command of a ship registered in Philadelphia. That was in 1811, and then I began to earn money” (3<sup>rd</sup> letter).

In the meantime, war had officially broken out between North America and England on 18-6-1812, when the American President James Madison (1751-1836) signed the declaration of war. America had many reasons for this, the two most important being:

1. The American view was that Britain’s restrictions violated its right to trade with other countries.
2. The Americans were outraged by the English practice of intercepting and searching U.S. merchant ships for “deserters”(i.e. naturalized sailors born in Britain!). It was estimated in 1805 that out of 11,000 naturalized sailors, 9,000 had been born in Britain. The Royal Navy challenged America’s authority to naturalize foreigners. One of these was Lawson, with his American citizenship (1811).

Lawson took part in this war (1812-1814) as a lieutenant at sea, taking the side of America. In 1812 he was promoted to commander of a beautifully armed ship. “I considered myself just as entitled as anyone else to fight the British, especially because I had already come to hate that haughty pride of the English long before. I undertook several successful voyages until 1813, when I was engaged by an English warship off Cadir,<sup>1</sup> west of Gibraltar, which took me by surprise. I was overpowered, imprisoned and taken to Gibraltar, where I escaped straightaway with the help of three other fellow prisoners by taking the prison rowing boat at night, crossing over to France and from there to England (!), where I stayed for a short while in Newcastle, whence I wrote to you before I left again for North America. After arriving in Halifax in North America I wrote to you again and sent that letter with an English ship” (1<sup>st</sup> letter) “and I began to do business with shipbuilders etc. in the occupied British territories in New Brunswick, Canada” (2<sup>nd</sup> letter). “At the time I had command of a very beautiful ship with which I did a flourishing trade, which led me to expect that I would be able to visit you once more, as a man, independent of the world and with some riches, having made some fortune (1<sup>st</sup> letter).

The war ended in deadlock with the Treaty of Ghent on 24-12-1814. On 8-1-1815 the Americans won a major victory after all by capturing New Orleans, for news of the peace had not yet reached America!

“By the end of the war I had earned 16,000 dollars” (2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> letter) “but when peace came, my partners and I lost nearly everything” (2<sup>nd</sup> letter). “From my 16,000 dollars, there remained some 500 dollars” (2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> letter). “Towards the beginning of 1816 I lost 6,000 Spanish piasters in a fish speculation on a load of fish I had sent to the West Indies, which six months earlier would have yielded

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<sup>1</sup> The old name for Cadiz

me a 200% profit, but then, one cannot foresee everything. After that I took over the building of a large ship for the same Brunswick-based company, which I had done business with before as a freight captain and business associate. I also owned a considerable amount of timber, which I myself sent to Liverpool in 1816. But I was still haunted by bad luck for when I arrived there, timber was sold at a price that was a quarter of what I had paid. And so my bankruptcy was inevitable. From my capital of 14,000 Spanish piasters, no more than 1,000 piasters remained. And this incident, my dear father, was the cause of my involvement in the revolutionary wars in South America to find military employment" (1<sup>st</sup> letter), and so he did. He arrived in Chile on 2-10-1818 (3<sup>rd</sup> letter) in the middle of the Wars of Independence (1810-1824). For this, see Salvatore Bizzarro, *Historical Dictionary of Chile*, Metuchen, NJ & London, Scarecrow Press, second revised and updated edition, 1987, p. 250.

The Spanish colonisation of Chile goes back to the conquistador Pedro de Valdivia (1500-1553). In 1540 he marched with a force of 100 men from Cuzco (in Peru) to central Chile, and founded the cities Santiago (on 12-2-1541), Concepción (in 1550), Valparaíso (in 1552) and Valdivia (in 1552), which was to become Spain's strongest military base in the Pacific (idem, pp. 510-511). The movement towards self-government was initially provoked by Napoleon's 1808 attempt to reduce Spain to a French satellite state (idem, p. 250).

On 18-9-1810 Chilean patriots proclaimed a *junta militar de gobierno* to rule Chile in the name of Ferdinand VII (1784-1833) who lived in exile from 1808 until 1814 (idem, p. 269 and p. 352, respectively). "Junta" denotes "a meeting or committee, specifically in the political sense, when normal political institutions have broken down" (idem, p. 269). When this junta came to be dominated by advocates of outright independence – notably the patriot José Miguel Carrera Verdugo (1785-1821), the ruler of Chile, who besieged Chillán, then in royalist hands, with his patriot troops in August 1813 – the Viceroy of Peru, Fernando de Abascal y Sousa (1743-1827) gave orders to Mariano Osorio, a Spanish-born career officer in the royalist army (1777-1819) to invade Chile and to re-establish his authority, which he did by defeating the patriots at Chillán (August 1813) and at Rancagua (1 and 2 October 1814) (idem, pp. 106, 250, 430). Osorio was appointed governor of Chile, an office he held from 9-10-1814 until 26-12-1815. Under pressure from the Viceroy he ruled with an iron hand, though this was not harsh enough to satisfy Abascal (idem, p. 356).

At Rancagua Osorio managed to cut off the defenders' water supply in the night of 1 and 2 October 1814 and at the end of the day the patriots were forced to break out and retreat; however, only a third of them succeeded in doing so ... (idem, p. 430). The later Admiral Manuel Blanco Encalada (1790-1876) was taken prisoner and condemned to death; however, his sentence was commuted to exile on the Juan Fernández Islands, off the coast of Chile, to the west, in the Pacific (idem, p. 62). The brutal despotism of the restored royal government (*Reconquista Española*) convinced Chilean patriots that the time had come for independence (idem, p. 356).

José de San Martín (1770-1850), an Argentine patriot and a lieutenant-colonel at the age of 31, is remembered in Chile for his invaluable help in throwing off the Spanish yoke. As governor of Cuyo he provided a refuge for the Chilean patriots who had fled after the *Reconquista Española* and with the support of the Argentine Supreme Director Juan Martín Pueyrredón (1777-1850), he incorporated them into the Chilean-Argentine Army of the Andes (Ejército de los Andes), which invaded Chile after a legendary crossing of the Cordillera (i.e. an Andes mountain range) (idem, pp. 32, 451, 452). Pueyrredón gave whole-hearted backing to José de San Martín's plan to attack Peru, the seat of Spanish power in South-America. Pueyrredón was held in exceptionally high esteem by contemporary Chileans (idem, p. 424).

The Chilean-Argentine army under José de San Martín and Bernardo O'Higgins (1778-1842), the national liberator of Chile, who had been appointed commander-in-chief in January 1814, defeated the royalists at Chacabuco on 12-2-1817. Three days later, a *cabildo abierto* (an open town meeting attended by all townsmen when matters of grave importance faced the community) in Santiago proclaimed Bernardo O'Higgins Supreme Director of Chile. After a stormy five-year rule the *cabildo abierto* of 28-2-1823 demanded his resignation whereupon he went into voluntary exile in Peru (!), where he died on 24-10-1842. After the victory at Chacabuco, Blanco Encalada was freed (*idem*, pp. 250-251, 351-353).

Despite a patriot disaster at Cancha Rayada on 19-3-1818, the campaign was won decisively at Maipú on 5-4-1818. Blanco Encalada participated as an artillery colonel in both battles. The Spanish in Chile were then reduced to what would ultimately prove to be a fruitless guerrilla war (1819-1822) (*idem*, pp. 62, 74, 250, 304). Only Chiloé Island in southern Chile would remain Spanish until Ramón Freire Serrano (1787-1851), Supreme Director of Chile, conquered it on 13/14-1-1826 (*idem*, p. 106). Formal recognition of Chile's independence from Spain was achieved in 1844 (*idem*, p. 114).

After Maipú, Bernardo O'Higgins realized that Chilean independence could only be secured by ending Spanish power in Peru and that an attack on Peru was only feasible by means of a sea-borne invasion, which, in turn, required an adequate navy (*idem*, p. 339). Thus, Blanco Encalada began the organisation of the Chilean Navy (*idem*, p. 62).

The Chilean Navy (Armada Nacional) traces its origins to 1813 when the former Spanish naval officer Francisco de la Lastre y de la Sotta (1777-1852), Governor of Valparaíso, sought to break Spain's blockade of that port and acquired the ex-U.S. frigate *Perla* as well as the brig *Potrillo* (*idem*, p. 284 and pp. 338-339, respectively).

Lawson was hired by the Chilean Navy on 2-10-1818 (2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> letter), where, in the function of lieutenant, he piloted the frigate *Lautaro*<sup>2</sup> as a sailing master just before the naval battle of Talcahuano (the port city of Concepción) on 28-10-1818. This battle was waged between a Spanish squadron of two smaller ships, six transport ships with 1,000 men infantry just arrived from Spain, under the command of a Spanish frigate, the 50-gun *Maria Isabella* and the Chilean fleet under Blanco Encalada consisting of the 56-gun *San Martín*, Lawson's 44-gun *Lautaro*, the *Chacabuco* and the *Aurucu* (2<sup>nd</sup> letter, and Bizarro, *Historical Dictionary of Chile*, pp. 118, 339, 498). "The *Maria Isabella* was boarded – whereby I suffered a deep wound in my shoulder – and the other ships came into our possession as well, including all their cargo, the crew and the soldiers, about 3,000 prisoners" (3<sup>rd</sup> letter). "The *Maria Isabella* was renamed the *O'Higgins* after the creator of a modern navy (Bizarro, *Historical Dictionary of Chile*, p. 339). "This was the greatest naval battle ever seen in the Pacific, and for this I was promoted to the official rank of lieutenant on this ship on 11-1-1819" (3<sup>rd</sup> letter and cf. Guarda, *La Sociedad en Chile Austral*, p. 607). Also, "I was decorated with a distinguishing badge, worn on the left arm" (1<sup>st</sup> letter).

"Two months later, I was wounded once more, when I overpowered a Spanish schooner under the coast of Peru; I was then a lieutenant under Lord Cochrane" (2<sup>nd</sup> letter). Meanwhile the Chileans had gone to war against the enemy: Bernardo O'Higgins recruited "Lord Thomas Cochrane (1775-1860), 10<sup>th</sup> Earl of Dundonald from Scotland, who had joined the Royal Navy at the age of 17 and held a distinguished fighting record in the Napoleonic Wars, for which he was knighted. Due to a debatable affair concerning some stock exchange dealings in 1814 – although he always maintained his innocence in this matter, on which general opinion agreed with him – he had no political future in Britain. But if it had not been for this affair, he would never have fought for the independence of Chile,

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<sup>2</sup> Lautaro is a small town north of Valdivia, named after a sixteenth-century Mapuche leader

Peru, Brazil and Greece, and been revered by all four countries ...” (summarized from Bizzarro, idem, p. 118). In May 1817 he accepted O’Higgins’ invitation to take command of the infant Chilean Navy. He arrived in Valparaíso on 29-11-1818 (2<sup>nd</sup> letter and cf. Bizzarro, idem, pp. 118, 498). On account of his daring and his tactical skills he soon achieved the command of the sea that made liberation of Peru possible (idem, p. 339). With his characteristic mixture of courage, daring, superb seamanship, ingenuity and sheer bluff, he had his small force sweep the Spaniards from the South Pacific. They called him “El diablo”! (idem, p. 118).

On 2-5 February 1820 “we captured the Citadel Baldivia (in Valdivia), which had 119 cannon, mostly 24-pounders, and a 900-men strong garrison. We took them by surprise with one frigate, the *O’Higgins*, one *chalupa* (i.e. a sloop or small boat) and 250 soldiers. The surprise attack was one of Lord Cochrane’s hallmarks” (1<sup>st</sup> letter).

The conquest of Valdivia did not by any means go unnoticed in Europe. Agents for Lloyd’s in Santiago wrote two letters which arrived in Plymouth with the whaler *Hydra*, extracts of which were published in the *London Times* of 30-5-1820: “We consider the capture of the strong fortress of Valdivia of that consequence to those engaged in the trade of Chili, that we hasten to communicate the same through you” (letter dated 18-2-1820).

It began with Lord Cochrane taking “250 troops on board the frigate *O’Higgins* (50 guns), the schooner *Montezuma*<sup>3</sup> (10 guns) and the brig *Intrepid* (18 guns); but in leaving the harbour of Concepcion the frigate struck on a sand-bank, tore off the whole of her copper, and she made eight feet water. The gallant Admiral not, however, dismayed would not suffer himself to be delayed a single hour, he went on in this state. On approaching Valdivia, the *Intrepid* struck upon a rock and was lost. Notwithstanding this, Lord Cochrane entered the harbour” (letter of 22-2-1820). “By daylight eight batteries were carried – and on the night of the 11<sup>th</sup> current” (letter of 18-2-1820)<sup>4</sup>, he assailed the forts himself, leading the men, and with his own hand planting the Chilean standard in the great square. The place, by far the strongest hold in Chili, surrendered. This is, perhaps, one of the greatest feats ever performed” (letter of 22-2-1820).

The spoils of war amounted to: “116 pieces of brass cannon” (letter of 18-2-1820), “15 forts, 128 guns, 50 tonnes of powder and 130,000 pesos of Spanish pay” (Bizzarro, *Historical Dictionary of Chile*, p. 118).

“For this action, we were awarded a medal to be worn on the chest. Valdivia is, as to the strength of its garrison, comparable to the South-European Gibraltar” (Lawson’s 1<sup>st</sup> letter).

The capture of Valdivia, with which Chile’s freedom was wholly achieved, provoked the most widely differing comments. “Conquering this extremely heavily armed Spanish fortification, with only 16 men killed and 18 wounded, immortalized him and his heroes” (Gabriel Guarda, O.S.B., *La Toma de Valdivia*, Santiago, Zig Zag, 1970, p. 116), but what were the views of José I. Zenteno, “the corrupt cold-blooded Minister of Marine of Chile” (1768-1847)? “It was an act of madness, and the admiral deserved hanging for acting without orders (*sic*)” (Christopher Lloyd, *Lord Cochrane*, London, Longmans, Green & Co, 1947, pp. 144, 151).

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<sup>3</sup> Montezuma is the name of fifteenth-century Aztec kings

<sup>4</sup> This should be the 4th current! Cf. Gabriel Guarda O.S.B. *La Toma de Valdivia*, Santiago, Zig Zag, 1970, chapter V, which gives a day-to-day account and p. 108, for the letter Cochrane wrote on 5-2-1820 about the victory.

The conquest of the Citadel Baldivia would not be Nicolai's only conquest in Valdivia, however. For, "in Valdivia Captain Asenjo of the Royal Spanish Army was taken prisoner by me. He was badly wounded and before he died he said to me: 'Though we are enemies, I beg you to take care of my family'" (3<sup>rd</sup> letter) "and he recommended his daughter to me" (2<sup>nd</sup> letter). Nicolai promised as much. "Daughter Rosario was then 13 years old. We were married in 1824 and she has always made my life happy" (3<sup>rd</sup> letter). "She is a niece of the Spanish General Molina, who died in the massacre in Chile" (2<sup>nd</sup> letter).

I fear that the translator of Lawson's English letters in 1863 was not aware of the existence of Chillán, the capital of the former province of Nuble, and must have assumed that "Chile" was what was meant. The Siege of Chillán on 3-8-1813 was terrible: "atrocities were committed on both sides, and many inhabitants were brutally murdered. The death count exceeded 500" (Bizzarro, *Historical Dictionary of Chile*, p. 106). This could tie up with the expression "*invierno de 1813*" (Guarda, *La Sociedad en Chile Austral*, p. 385), adopted to refer to General Lucas Ambrosio de Molina, born 9-12-1772, who died in the Siege of Chillán. From the 50 or 60 or so Molinas in Guarda's book, I consider Lucas A. de Molina the most probable candidate.

"She is also a niece of General Cruz in the Chilean Army, who died as governor of Valparaiso" (2<sup>nd</sup> letter). I was able to identify him with certainty through Guarda's book (*La Sociedad en Chile Austral*, p. 293) as Luis Bartolomé de la Cruz (1768-?), a governor of Valparaiso.

Rosario's two uncles were therefore each other's enemies in a military sense ... "She is related to various members of the first families in South America and these have always treated me with the highest respect" (3<sup>rd</sup> letter). The reason is clear: his efforts on behalf of Chile's liberation.

As yet unsolved remains the problem of the exact birth date, wedding date and the paternal name of Nicolai's wife. Gabriel Guarda (born 1928) has tried to fill these gaps in his 150-page thick book *La Toma de Valdivia* (see p. 105). He found in the *Parochial Archives of the Spanish Marriages in the Cathedral of Valdivia*, books I and II, that Nicolai was married, in that cathedral, to Maria Bernarda de Asenjo Mena (!). Guarda must have discovered later that this is complete nonsense and he will have found that Nicolai was married to a "Rosario", which was not an uncommon name in those days. But which Rosario?

In his later book mentioned earlier (*La Sociedad en Chile Austral*), Guarda made an effort at correcting: on page 607, he has Nicolai marry a Rosario Asenjo y Mena. That may look better already, but this "correction" is, in fact, not correct at all! For on page 339 he states that she was born on 25-8-1801 while we know from Nicolai's 3<sup>rd</sup> letter that she must have been born around 1807, being thirteen years old in 1820. In addition, the father mentioned by Guarda (p. 339), Santiago Domingo Asenjo Pinuer, born 25-7-1774, had already died on 27-3-1813 in the Battle of Talcahuano and consequently could not have been the father of Nicolai's Rosario. Moreover, Nicolai did not arrive in Chile until 1818! Unfortunately, the Archivo Nacional Historico de Chile in Santiago were unable to help me with my questions due to a staff shortage (letter dated 13-2-2011).

"On 5-11-1820 we clobbered the Spanish frigate *Esmeralda* near Callao (a seaport in Peru, a little to the west of Lima). This ship (possibly identical with the gunpowder ship before the fort of Callao mentioned in the 2<sup>nd</sup> letter) lay safe at anchor under the fort of Callao, where 256 cannons had been mounted, with 350 men and 32 gunboats as well as 15 armed merchant vessels. We overpowered, my dear father, this ship, including her crew and soldiers, a sabre in our hands, in the midst of the pitch-dark night, with 240 of our selected best men, with three ships, Lord Cochrane in front. That was a masterpiece from Lord Cochrane, and the heaviest and most difficult attack we had ever taken part in

on the coast. The *Esmeralda* was renamed the *Valdivia*. I came away, thank God, with only a slight sabre cut to my head from a damned fellow, who paid for this with his life" (1<sup>st</sup> letter).

"After the conquest of Valdivia, where its batteries wounded me" (3<sup>rd</sup> letter), "I received the command over a 16-cannon brig but I had to withdraw in 1823" (2<sup>nd</sup> letter) "because of my wounds" (3<sup>rd</sup> letter) and "because there was nothing left to fight for anymore at sea. I applied to be dismissed from service with the Navy and as soon as this was granted" (1<sup>st</sup> letter), "I immediately sailed to India commanding a big ship registered in Calcutta" (2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> letter) and "then I began to earn money.

In 1824 I returned to Chile with a fortune of 15,000 dollars" (3<sup>rd</sup> letter) or "18,000 dollars" (2<sup>nd</sup> letter) "with which I went into business – I owned a brig (!) – in the hope to earn more" (3<sup>rd</sup> letter).

In the 1<sup>st</sup> letter (to his father), dated 12-7-1823 he wrote: "I can hardly express how glad I was when on 13-2-1823 I received the letter you had written to me on 18-7-1822 and read that you and my beloved mother and sisters are alive and well, and in good health. I had then just launched my new boat, while conditions were favourable, so your letter came exactly when my work was finished, arriving like a blessing at the completion of my work. I am still single and I shall probably remain so for ever."

Things can, however, change quickly ...: as soon as the next year, 1824, he would marry Rosario Asenjo (3<sup>rd</sup> letter).

"My good fortune held out until 1826, when I lost one ship in the roadstead of Valparaiso and another one near the South Sea Islands. In 1827 I lost the house I owned in Callao in a fire. Since then my situation has been less good" (3<sup>rd</sup> letter).

In 1828 he saved some shipwrecked people from the *Sarraceno* (Guarda, *La Sociedad en Chile Austral*, p. 607). In one of the years 1828/1829/1830 he must have gone into Ecuadorian service, most probably in order to earn a living.

"On 5-1-1830 Ecuador separated from Gran Colombia. General José Villamil suspected that a dispute might arise over ownership of the Galápagos Islands. He prompted Ecuador to claim the archipelago for its own, and at the same time persuaded President Juan José Flores to grant him exclusive rights to colonize and govern Charles Island. Charles was then renamed Floriana (now spelled Floreana), in honour of the nation's first president" (K. Thalia Grant and Gregory B. Estes, *Darwin in Galápagos. Footsteps to a New World*, pp. 114-115).

As early as "1830 Captain Nicholas Lawson introduced some domestic animals, such as goats, sheep, and pigs" to Charles Island, and possibly to some of the other "fertile" islands as well, with "the well-founded hopes of deriving, after a little while, great advantages". In 1832, "two years later, Lawson joined forces with Governor Villamil's colonization of Charles Island, helping, among other things, with the introduction of even more domestic mammals" (idem, p. 138).

"In June 1835 Lawson sent a group of 22 men and women to James Island (i.e. Isla San Salvador, or, as Villamil called it, Isla Olmedo) to set up camp and start the tortoise exploitation business, a lucrative enterprise, while the tortoise population remains high" (idem, pp. 117, 122).

On 25-9-1835 the famous meeting between Darwin and Lawson took place but Lawson does not mention Darwin in any letter that has been preserved. However, as to 1835, one sentence written by Lawson himself (in English!) has been preserved and has added some weight to the Norwegian translation of the third letter in 1863 (*Stamtavle*, p. 23). This may be considered proof as to the identity of Lossius-Lawson: "I have been ill only once in my life, and that was in 1835 when I commanded the colony of Floriana for the government of Ecuador."

Around 1837 the Charles Island settlers established a small settlement on Indefatigable Island (i.e. Isla Bolivia or Isla Santa Cruz), where Nicholas Lawson is believed to have moved to and have become the mayor of a small colony of 21 settlers (cf. K. Thalia Grant and Gregory B. Estes, *Darwin in Galápagos*.

*Footsteps to a New World*, pp. 116, 131, personal communication to the authors by Octavio Latorre, p. 300). Considering what was to follow in September 1839 this will have been of rather short duration, if it happened at all.

On 22-6-1838 Lawson had a meeting on Charles Island with Abel du Petit-Thouars, author of the book *Voyage Around the World on the Frigate La Vénus, during the years 1836-1839*, 1841, translated from the French by K. Thalia Grant, with corrections by Anne Guézou, 2004, (to be consulted at <http://www.galapagos.to/texts/petit.htm>). On p. 284 he recounts: "In the cove of Black Beach we met a little schooner under the flag of the Republic of Ecuador; she was commandeered by Mr Lawson, lieutenant of a navy vessel of this State. Mr Lawson, officer of an energetic character, who had often been in interim charge of the governing of Floriania, is a bright and clever sailor; he hastened aboard to offer his services; and he has been a useful help to us, as much for the nautical information that we have received about this archipelago, as for the interesting information that he has given us on the occupation of these islands by the government of the Republic of Ecuador; on the establishment of the new colony on Charles Island; on the different products of this island; on the fertility of its soil, the possibility of expanding the cultivations already started and of forming new ones; and, lastly, on the climate, the reigning winds, and all that can be of interest, whether for the sciences or for navigation." "On 26-6-1838 Captain Lawson, whose schooner had changed anchorage at the same time as the *Vénus*, came to join me on board, and we left straightaway uplands to Black Beach and from there to the settlement of Floriania (du Petit-Thouars, *Voyage Around the World on the Frigate La Vénus, during the years 1836-1839*, p. 286). "Along the way. Mr Lawson showed me the plants that were useful, those whose use is the most widespread among the inhabitants" (idem, pp. 283, 287): for instance, "the sap of the grey incense tree *Bursera graveolens* was used as a salve for cuts" (idem, p. 112). "It is not clear how Lawson remained on Charles Island" (idem, p. 116), nor is it clear whether and, if so, how long he remained on Indefatigable Island.

These are not the only issues that remained unresolved ... . The literature on Lawson is completely silent as to the whereabouts of his wife Rosario in all these years. Did she remain in Valparaíso most of the time or did she accompany Nicolai to the Galápagos? One thing seems to be true: After fifteen years of marriage, they had a daughter Anna-Rita (named after his mother), born approximately in the first half of September 1839, a date that is traceable because Nicolai wrote in the 4<sup>th</sup> letter, dated 14-6-1845, addressed to his nephew Christopher Lossius Brandt that she was then five years and nine months old. If the happy event took place in Valparaíso, it is by no means impossible that Nicolai attended the birth (!). Put more strongly: it is also almost certain that he settled permanently in Chile after the birth, i.e. after September 1839. For in the 2<sup>nd</sup> letter he writes: "In 1840 I lost nearly 50,000 dollars" (*Stamtavle*, p. 20) or "5,000 dollars (*Stamtavle*, p. 22 and 3<sup>rd</sup> letter) on a cargo of tobacco in two beautiful small ships I owned for coastal navigation."

I find it unlikely that he could be active on Chilean business and at the same time be engaged in Ecuadorian service.

"I was then obliged to sell these two ships and I went to sail again for Alvarez & Sons in Valparaíso on a big ship, the Chilean barque *Almendralina*<sup>5</sup> (2<sup>nd</sup> letter and letter dated 22-4-1843 from W.H. Rouse, her Majesty's Consul at Valparaíso to the Earl of Aberdeen, published in *Stamtavle*, pp. 19-20) until the Chilean government, at the end of 1844, called me up again to serve as a naval architect in the rank of corvette captain for 1400 dollars per year" (2<sup>nd</sup> letter; the year 1844 should, in fact, be 1843, while the official date is given as 17-6-1844 in the *Lista de los oficiales de guerra i mayores de que consta la Marina Militar de la República*, in *Repertorio Nacional*, December 1850). "My expenses come to 900

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<sup>5</sup> Almendralina is a suburb of Valparaíso

dollars and each year I lay aside 500 dollars for my little Anna. I never take strong drink and am moderate in other respects (4<sup>th</sup> letter).

For the last six or seven years of Lawson's life we can only fall back on the letters 2 until 11.

In 1845, when he was 54 years old, he wrote about the transfer of Vestad, somehow, to the eldest son of his sister Jacobine (2<sup>nd</sup>, 3<sup>rd</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> letter). This would not be realised until April 1850, "as a gift and a present" (*Yearbook for 1977* for the Romsdal Local History Association: cf. the remark following the 2<sup>nd</sup> letter of 12-2-1845, pp. 120-121).

In the 2<sup>nd</sup> letter dated 12-2-1845 to his nephew Christopher Lossius Brandt he wrote: "I am living contentedly now, not being engaged in speculations and I hope to be able to continue thus until the end of my days. I lost a great deal of money through trusting others but never through gambling because that is an evil I particularly hate. So I am not rich but I have enough common sense to be content with my sufficient income. And I am blessed with the best wife and a pretty little daughter and further, I live in the most beautiful country of the world."

Alas, this harmony would not last ... . In the 6<sup>th</sup> letter dated 20-8-1847 he wrote to his nephew Christopher Lossius Brandt: "It is now more than six months, 15-1-1847, that I received your message from 14-8-1846. It even contained a small parcel with presents for my little Anna. But God did not let her live long enough to enjoy the kindness of her dear relative. She departed this life on 16 June 1847 due to recurrent fever<sup>6</sup>.

Since then I have felt so forlorn because she was my all and she bore a striking resemblance to my sister Wilhelmine when a child (see also 5<sup>th</sup> letter dated 21-6-1845 to his nephew Christopher Lossius Brandt). But God thinks it best to call her to Him and we mortals should not pity ourselves. In my latest letter dated 23-2-1847 (not preserved), via Hamburg, I expressed my and my wife's thanks for your friendly attention and sympathy" (6<sup>th</sup> letter).

"During the past three months (i.e. from May 1847) I have been very busy with the building of a cannon frigate for the government, first as a naval architect and supervisor, second as a supervisor of the marine docks, and finally as the first assistant of the harbour master, which gives a great deal of busyness" (6<sup>th</sup> letter dated 20-8-1847 to his nephew Christopher Lossius Brandt and 7<sup>th</sup> letter dated 30-3-1848 to his nephew Nicolai Lossius Brandt, both nephews being sons of Wilhelmine).

"My income remains the same, of which I lay aside 300 to 400 dollars every year" (6<sup>th</sup> letter).

"Our government is the most stable of all Spanish republics and because I am, through my wife, related to General Cruz and many others of the first families of the country, I will always retain a good position in case of a change of government. Our present governor is Admiral Blanco, under whom I served as a lieutenant for a long time. That is about 26 years ago now, during the early days of the revolution and he has always shown himself a friend" (6<sup>th</sup> letter).

Three subjects stand out in the majority of the eleven letters for the extensive attention they receive:

### 1. Wounds

In the 1<sup>st</sup> letter he writes about a beautiful ship that has been confiscated (the *Maria Isabella*, see 3<sup>rd</sup> letter), that had been captured from the Spaniards on 22-2-1818, bringing in, at least to him in his position as lieutenant, 4,000 piastres as well as 20 injuries to his thigh (1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> letter).

The other injuries can be summarized as follows:

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<sup>6</sup> Recurrent fever (febris recurrens) is a fever occurring, if it has not already been lethal, every seven to ten days and is caused by infection with *Borrelia spirochetes*, which are transmitted from one person to another through the bites of lice or ticks.

a) to his head: three scars from sable cuts	1820
b) to his left shoulder and arm: scars from two deep cuts from a lance	1818
c) to his right arm: two scars, elbow smashed and worn-out	1813
d) to his ribs: two ribs on my right have been broken	18??

“My right hand feels stiff because of a contraction in the fingers and the pain prevents me from holding my pen for a considerable period of time but the wounds are too old now to heal” (letters no 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7 and to Christopher Lossius Brandt, the 10<sup>th</sup> letter dated 12-9-1848).

“And yet I am taken for a strong man considering my 54 years” (2<sup>nd</sup> letter).

## 2. Contact with his Norwegian relatives

It began with the 12 (!) letters he wrote to his father in the years 1807-1823, of which only the letter of 12-7-1823 (1<sup>st</sup> letter) reached his father, by way of the business house of Lorch & Sønner in Trondheim. His father had to pay ten *spesidaler* (approximately ten dollars) to get the letter (*Slektsbok for Familien Lossius*, remark on p. 13 and likewise *Yearbook for 1977* for the Romsdal Local History Association, p. 114). Later letters were sent by Nicolai by the Chilean boat *Bio-bio*<sup>7</sup> by way of Hamburg (4<sup>th</sup> letter) or Apenrade (i.e. Abenrå in south Denmark) (6<sup>th</sup> letter), with a Norwegian officer on an English frigate in the Pacific (7<sup>th</sup> letter), and with Captain Henderson of HMS *Samson*, just ready for departure for England (9<sup>th</sup> letter).

It should of course be kept in mind that in those days the sending of intercontinental letters had to be organized by the senders themselves! And this manner of sending letters brought with it a great risk of letters being lost! Lawson was very much aware of this: “I assume that a number of your as well as my letters have been lost on the way” (6<sup>th</sup> letter), and his solution to that problem was to write much more frequently! “I expect you to write to me regularly for as long as I live” (7<sup>th</sup> letter, to his nephew Nicolai Lossius Brandt).

Nicolai wrote on 12-2-1845 in his 2<sup>nd</sup> letter, to his nephew Christopher Lossius Brandt that he had received the latter’s letters of 17-5-1844 and 1-10-1844: “I have often written before to my family, however, without ever receiving any answers, and in the end I gave up.”

In his 3<sup>rd</sup> letter, of 12-1-1845, he wrote to his brother-in-law Peter Andreas Brandt (1792-1862, Brazil) that he had received the latter’s letter of 2-5-1844 from Lagoa Santa in Brazil (slightly to the north of Belo Horizonte) and also: “I had not expected to hear anything from my family, for I believed that you had forgotten me altogether because I never got any answers to the letters I wrote earlier. But now I had the pleasure of hearing from you once more.” “That relieved me of a feeling of heaviness” (2<sup>nd</sup> letter dated 12-2-1845). Again in the 3<sup>rd</sup> letter: “I will consider this a new period in my life. Please inform me as much as possible about everything to do with my sisters and their children.” He kept silent about the death of his father (1827) and his mother (1841) but on the death of his beloved unmarried sister Anna-Katrina (1798-1829) he writes: “God bless her” (2<sup>nd</sup> letter).

Nicolai’s address must, therefore, have been known in Norway and that was his nephew’s Christopher Lossius Brandt’s doing, who succeeded – by way of the British government – in tracing Nicolai’s address in Chile (see the letter dated 22-4-1843 from W.H. Rouse, the English consul at Valparaiso, to the Earl of Aberdeen in *Stamtavle*, pp. 19-20 and the comment in *Slektsbok for Familien Lossius*, p. 16).

“And before long I will send a certificate of transfer for the farm Vestad for the benefit of Jacobine’s eldest son” (3<sup>rd</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> letter). In the 4<sup>th</sup> letter dated 14-6-1845 to his nephew Christopher Lossius Brandt he wrote: “I had the pleasure of receiving several letters from my unforgettable family and another one from you, for which I thank you cordially.” Subsequently, however, his complaints increase

<sup>7</sup> Bio-bio is a Chilean river a little south of Concepción

more and more in every letter until the 11<sup>th</sup> letter dated 25-12-1848 to his nephew Nicolai Lossius Brandt in Bergen. In the 9<sup>th</sup> letter dated 30-9-1848 to the same Nicolai he writes: "I can't help believing that you have all forgotten me for I have written several letters this year without getting an answer." His complaints about the contact with his family never ended...

The relative ease with which he had left his family in 1806 seems to have increasingly turned into its reverse during the lonelier, last stage of his life. Maybe his growing interest in his family should be seen as a way to catch up? And besides, it is also quite understandable: I know how it feels if all your letters, even those not sent to relatives, are only occasionally answered .... (see my Prologue!).

### 3. Norwegian-Swedish Consulate in Chile

In the 2<sup>nd</sup>, 7<sup>th</sup>, 8<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> letters Nicolai expresses a wish: "I would like to obtain the post of consul for Swedish and Norwegian ships from the Swedish government. I consider myself perfectly suited to that task, maybe even more so than anyone else because of my knowledge of the laws of this country and its commercial ties" (2<sup>nd</sup> letter).

"For some time I have been a member of a committee for Lloyd's as an inspector in matters of damage and insurances in this harbour. But this is not a permanent position, therefore nothing would be more welcome than a consulate for me and the Norwegians in Chile as well because so far they have had to ask unknown consuls for their protection" (7<sup>th</sup> letter). "If there is any hope of my getting the Norwegian-Swedish consulate, please let me know" (8<sup>th</sup> letter, to his nephew Nicolai Lossius Brandt, in Bergen).

In the 9<sup>th</sup> letter he writes: "I hope to be sent out with a 44-gun frigate that needs repairing, probably in Europe" (possibly the *Lautario*?). "Our governor, Admiral Blanco, has promised me that I will get supervision over the repairs. If so, I can be in France within six months."

It remains unknown if these wishes and hopes were fulfilled.

In the 8<sup>th</sup> letter dated 29-4-1848 he wrote: "Our political affairs in Chile are doing well but I cannot help fearing that the year 1850" – (should be 1851!) – "when we get a new president, may bring some disturbance with it." And he was proved right. When the conservative President Manuel Bulnes Prieto (1799-1866, cf. Bizzarro, *Historical Dictionary of Chile*, pp. 69-70) was to be succeeded after ten years by conservative President Manuel Montt Torres (1809-1880), who had been elected on 26-7-1851, and after a mutiny had taken place on 20-4-1851 by Colonel Urriola (1797-1851, killed in action, for which see Bizzarro, *Historical Dictionary of Chile*, pp. 325, 331, 506, 507), the discontented Liberals tried in vain to prevent his inauguration by means of an uprising on 7-9-1851. This in turn led to the Civil War of 1851, which lasted three months and cost an estimated 3,000 lives.

Lawson did not live to see his misgivings come true as he died on 1 March 1851, in Valparaíso, probably from cholera.

The day before he had signed, together with his wife, a joint testament in Valparaíso before Friar José Navarrete O.H. (born 20-10-1794), an envoy at the Royal Hospital de Valdivia; his wife was the sole inheritor (see Guarda, *La Sociedad en Chile Austral*, p. 607).

Rosario received a widow's pension, which she, however, lost again when after eight weeks she married Captain Brækan (dates unknown) from Trondheim (*Stamtavle*, pp. 18-19). When she was widowed again on 4-2-1871, she requested the government of Chile that her widow's pension from her first husband be resumed "in view of his long and excellent services to the Republic since the first campaign at sea in which Chile conquered the Pacific" (see Guarda, *La Sociedad en Chile Austral*, p. 339).

## EPILOGUE

From the above we have now learnt something of Lawson's biography.

In a way, Lawson was an adventurer. And, adventurers are often original: indeed, they need originality to overcome the frequent setbacks of their adventurous life. What also applies to adventurers is that their life often depends on small things. The minor difference between the giant tortoises was such a small thing and for Lawson, living in his time, it was original, too.

"There has been much speculation as to why Darwin did not notice the different forms of tortoises on the different islands while he was in Galápagos:

1. The tortoises Darwin saw in the wild and examined up close on Chatham Island and James Island do not look dramatically different from each other.
2. FitzRoy saw a quantity of saddle-backed tortoise shells lying about the ground on Charles Island (according to Robert FitzRoy, *Narrative of the Surveying Voyages of His Majesty's Ships "Adventure" and "Beagle" between the years 1826 and 1836*, London, Colburn, 1839, p. 492) but Darwin never mentioned having observed the same. Did he simply not see them or was he perhaps embarrassed by not having seen them?
3. Darwin never had a chance to look at two different carapace types side by side ..., because of the lapse in time between the two *Beagle* collections" (as summarized from K. Thalia Grant and Gregory B. Estes, *Darwin in Galápagos. Footsteps to a New World*, pp. 125-126).

Lawson and Darwin were both excellent observers but Lawson could boast one special experience in life that Darwin lacked. It was not by accident but through his own will power that Lawson had left his parents, his family and his native country, for good, at the age of sixteen: he changed his environment (!) and expressed as much by adopting new names and new languages (English and Spanish). He assumed a new personality but his individuality remained the same. And that is the only difference with regard to the tortoises because we all know that a tortoise has no individuality for it is already divided, being only one of its particular animal species. Nevertheless, what Nicolai unconsciously shared with the giant tortoises was adaptation to one's environment, and it was on the basis of this that he could help Darwin take the first step.

Put more strongly: it was that particular coincidence of adaptation that even led to the next coincidence of meeting Darwin. As so often happens, the unconscious was much stronger than the conscious!

For 177 years Lawson has been known in Darwinism but not as a Norwegian; Lossius was known in Norway, as Lawson even, but not because of his role in Darwinism. Between them was a gap. The intention of this article has been to bridge that gap!

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