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**SAILING ILLICIT VOYAGES: COLONIAL SMUGGLING OPERATIONS  
BETWEEN NORTH AMERICA AND THE WEST INDIES, 1714-1776**

A Dissertation Presented

by

CARL A. HERZOG

Submitted to the Graduate School of the  
University of Massachusetts Amherst in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

September 2020

History

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BETWEEN NORTH AMERICA AND THE WEST INDIES, 1714-1776**

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CARL A. HERZOG

Approved as to style and content by:

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Department of History

## **DEDICATION**

To Laurie, whose love, support, and perpetual encouragement made this possible.

## **ACKNOWLEDGMENTS**

This project would not have been completed without the support and influence of a broad community of resources.

I could not have asked for a better committee for this project. Each of the members contributed in ways I could not have foreseen at the outset, and I am grateful for their patience, insight, and guidance. My advisor, Barry Levy pointed me in the initial direction of this topic and encouraged my contribution to this historiography. Throughout the process he continued to provide much needed direction and nuance. Marla Miller's detailed editing and organizational guidance were particularly invaluable at a pivotal moment.

I am grateful to the many ships and crews I have sailed with who gave me the firsthand knowledge and the underway experience that deeply informs this work. I am also deeply honored by the long friendship, encouragement and keen analysis of Professors Matthew MacKenzie and Timothy Walker. Their insights over long discussions of this and associated topics as well as shared experiences at sea gave me new ways of assessing this story and my contribution to it. My parents, Phil and Marge Herzog, both passed away during this degree process, but their enthusiasm and pride that I was pursuing this was all a son could ask for.

Lastly, but most importantly, this project and its associated mid-life career shift would not have started, nor ever finished, without the love, support, and long sacrifice of my wife, Laurie Weitzen.

**ABSTRACT**

**SAILING ILLICIT VOYAGES: COLONIAL SMUGGLING OPERATIONS  
BETWEEN NORTH AMERICA AND THE WEST INDIES, 1714-1776**

SEPTEMBER 2020

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This dissertation examines colonial smuggling in the mid-eighteenth century between British North America and the Caribbean from the operational perspective of the captains and crews of the coastwise merchant vessels engaged in that trade. In doing so, this work seeks to recast these particular smuggling mariners as agents of a unique professional maritime skillset, whose expertise created paths for upward mobility in their communities and careers. Returning the mariners' skills and core occupation to their historical identity refines and corrects arguments about mariners' perceived attitudes toward the Navigation Acts, smuggling, and the American Revolution. Focusing on operational skills differentiates the coastwise mariners engaged in the trade between British North America and the West Indies trade from trans-oceanic mariners, navy crews and other shoreside maritime professions during this period. The success of the coastwise smuggling trade further situates these smuggling mariners in the eighteenth-century historiography of advances in navigation, ship construction, and rigging design.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

|   | Page |
|---|------|
| ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS .....  | v    |
| ABSTRACT.....   | vi   |
| LIST OF FIGURES .....   | viii |
| INTRODUCTION: THE SMUGGLERS' PURSUIT .....                        | 1    |
| <br>CHAPTER   |      |
| 1: WHY SMUGGLING? .....   | 32   |
| Economy of North America.....                                     | 32   |
| The Volatile Caribbean .....                                      | 37   |
| Who Were the Smugglers? .....                                     | 43   |
| Mariners' Accounts.....   | 45   |
| Coastwise Characteristics .....                                   | 49   |
| Merchant, Mariner Relationships.....                              | 59   |
| Perceptions of Criminality .....                                  | 62   |
| 2: SKILLS AND TOOLS OF THE SMUGGLING MARINER .....                | 69   |
| Navigational Methods: Coastal Piloting and Ocean Navigation ..... | 73   |
| The Chart and Pilot Book .....                                    | 83   |
| The Smugglers' Use of the Combined Approach .....                 | 87   |
| Shipbuilding and Rigging Design .....                             | 93   |
| Vessel Supply.....  | 95   |
| Vessel Improvements.....  | 96   |
| Outfitting and Economy.....                                       | 99   |
| Ships as Trade Items .....  | 100  |
| 3: CONDUCT OF SMUGGLING .....                                     | 103  |
| Routing and Deception.....  | 108  |
| Neutral Stops .....   | 118  |
| Flags of Truce.....   | 121  |
| Arrivals and the Complicit Actors Ashore .....                    | 127  |
| 4: CAREER TRAJECTORIES .....                                      | 135  |
| CONCLUSION.....   | 148  |
| BIBLIOGRAPHY .....  | 152  |



## LIST OF FIGURES

| FIGURE   | PAGE |
|--|------|
| 1. Excerpt of “A New and Correct Map of the Trading Part of the West Indies” ..... | 38   |
| 2. Modern nautical charts, Long Island Sound to Delaware Bay .....                 | 92   |
| 3. Izaak Tirion, <i>Algemeene Kaart van de Westindische Eilanden</i> .....         | 104  |
| 4. Sailing ship course to the West Indies .....                                    | 105  |
| 5. George Foster, "The Seat of War in the West Indies" .....                       | 112  |

## INTRODUCTION

### THE SMUGGLERS' PURSUIT

On January 21, 1764, Capt. George Hopkins received a package of papers from the Providence merchant Nicholas Brown. Hopkins was a long-time crew aboard Brown's trading vessels, and earlier in the month had officially signed on as captain of Brown's sloop, *Nancy* -- then sitting in Providence harbor and preparing to depart for the West Indies. Among the papers were two nearly identical bills of lading, listing the cargo to be carried on the voyage, and two different sets of orders.<sup>1</sup> The only difference between the two bills of lading was the destination. One indicated that the *Nancy* was bound for the British island of Barbados, and the other said the ship was going to the Dutch colony of Surinam in South America.

Although Hopkins would not have been at all confused by this, any question he may have had was clearly spelled out in the two sets of orders. One set directed Hopkins to sail to Barbados, sell the goods on board, buy molasses and return. The other set of orders, however, countermanded that and laid out another plan: "Our orders to you are to proceed immediately to Surinam Taking particular care to get well to windward while you are Northward," the orders read. In the copy of these orders that Brown kept in his own file, he had then written "So as to Past Barbados by your reckoning at least." That phrase is crossed out, and instead Brown specified, "At least 1000 miles more thn Dif L (than

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<sup>1</sup>Nicholas Brown, "Orders to George Hopkins on Sloop 'Nancy'," January 21, 1764, Box 469 Folder 6, Nicholas and John Brown Co. Archive, John Carter Brown Library.

difference in longitude)."<sup>2</sup> This specific phrasing was a nautical order to Hopkins to set an initial course from New England to the southeastern Caribbean that would give all appearances that he was bound for Barbados, but one that would put him much further east of the islands once he was at that latitude.<sup>3</sup>

In this season—winter 1764—British naval ships were patrolling the waters on the eastern approaches to the islands, looking to block illicit trade. Brown's bogus bill of lading for Barbados would ensure that the *Nancy* would look legitimate if stopped, but Brown's deceptive routing orders to Hopkins were designed to ensure that the *Nancy* would avoid interdiction in the first place.

Once in Surinam, Hopkins was to meet up with Abraham Whipple, then the captain of another of Brown's ships, the brig *George*. After leveraging Whipple's greater experience in disposing of the cargo, Hopkins was to load the *Nancy* with Dutch molasses and sail to Dominica, an island that had formally transferred from French to British control just a few months earlier as a result of the treaty ending the Seven Years War. There, Hopkins was "to Endeavor in as best and safe a manner you can to get a complete set of English papers for your Molasses cargo Specifying Molasses to be of English produce or duties paid." In the event Hopkins could not acquire the falsified papers in Dominica, he was

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<sup>2</sup>Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Longitude was not measured from a universally accepted prime meridian, but frequently as a difference from the longitude of the starting point of the vessel. Ordering Hopkins to proceed 1,000 miles more than the difference in longitude was to indicate that he was pass Barbados that far to the east of the island. He may have meant 100 miles, which still would have had the effect putting Hopkins out of range of the patrolling British ships.

instructed to continue working his way up the chain of Caribbean islands until he had acquired such paperwork, before returning to Providence. A small amount of additional high-end merchandise had been loaded aboard, along with an additional cash allowance, to help Hopkins buy the papers as needed.<sup>4</sup>

Eight months later, after a successful voyage and a summer visit to Surinam, Hopkins set off to sail back, and on September 7, wrote to Brown that the *Nancy* had arrived in the Dutch island of St. Eustatia. From there, Hopkins planned to send a small boat over to Anguilla where, he assured Brown, he would be able to purchase the falsified papers for a nominal fee.<sup>5</sup>

The success of complex smuggling operations like Hopkins' depended on a variety of factors, including the sailing skills of the captain and crew and their ability to tap into networks of support on shore. Hopkins had to be familiar with the coastal environments of South America, the West Indies and his New England destination, as well as be able to navigate long distances offshore. Small vessels with a single mast, sloops like the *Nancy* were common in the coastal and West Indian trade and could sail with as few as five crew: the captain, a mate, and three sailors. With so few crew, a captain like Hopkins relied on his mate to share the ability to navigate both offshore and along the coast. He

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<sup>4</sup>Nicholas Brown, "Orders to George Hopkins on Sloop 'Nancy'," January 21, 1764, Box 469 Folder 6, Nicholas and John Brown Co. Archive, John Carter Brown Library.

<sup>5</sup>George Hopkins, "From Sloop 'Nancy' in St. Eustatia," September 7, 1764, Box 674 Folder 3, Nicholas and John Brown Co. Archive, John Carter Brown Library.

relied on each of his crew to have solid seamanship and small boat skills, as well as the ability to make repairs as necessary during the voyage.

But demonstrating these skills was only one step in a long voyage that included getting outbound cargo out of the colonies en route to a destination it was not supposed to legally go to and return with contraband that had to find a way past customs authorities on shore. For most of the eighteenth century leading up to the American Revolution, British North American colonial captains like Hopkins honed these skills smuggling British resources to the West Indian colonies of other European nations, and bringing back French, Spanish and Dutch cargoes in violation of the British Navigation Acts.

### **Approach and Goal of this Dissertation**

This dissertation seeks to examine colonial smuggling from the perspective of those who were conducting the voyages that carried contraband cargo – the captains and crews of the merchant trading ships. Though their role was critical to the very existence of the trade, their actual work has remained in the background of colonial historiography while they themselves have become caricatures of an outsized reputation based on their time ashore.

But these were not the hedonistic drunken sailors of popular imagination, nor unskilled labor merely pulling on ropes.<sup>6</sup> Operating relatively small vessels as part of a minimal

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<sup>6</sup> For a survey of popular depictions of the hedonistic sailor, see Juliann Reineke, “Three Sheets to the Wind: The Jolly Jack Tar and Eighteenth-Century British Masculinity” (Dissertation, Carnegie Mellon University, 2018). For sailors as a homogeneous labor force, see Marcus Rediker, *Between the Devil and the Deep Blue Sea: Merchant Seamen*,

crew through hazardous waters while evading legal authorities, the coastwise merchant mariner harnessed a diverse knowledge of coastal piloting, offshore navigation, vessel maneuvering and shoreside networking in order to succeed. Those who demonstrated competence found vertical mobility on the ship's crew, creating careers that led to positions of command, and often translated their seagoing skills to positions ashore.

To recast these regional mariners as the agents of a unique skillset and an extra-colonial business model, I focus on the operational details of smuggling voyages and the broader coastwise trade between the North American colonies and the colonies of the greater Caribbean basin. Understanding the practice of seamanship, its demands on coastwise mariners, and the complications that smuggling added to that pursuit provides a context for explaining how and why mariners were able and willing to continue trading throughout the tumultuous decades leading up to the American Revolution. Returning the mariners' skills and core occupation to their historical identity further helps refine and correct arguments about mariners' perceived attitudes toward the Navigation Acts, smuggling, and the American Revolution.

By addressing mariners' evolving acquisition and use of specialized skills, this study also situates mariners within the broader historiography of the development of seafaring, navigational knowledge, and ship and boat design during this time period. The coastwise and Caribbean trade and its tools that I focus on here were dramatically influenced during the eighteenth century by the growth of the global maritime trading economy, the

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*Pirates and the Anglo-American Maritime World, 1700 - 1750* (Cambridge University Press, 1987), particularly Chapter 2: "The Seaman as Collective Worker", 77.

scientific achievements of the Enlightenment, and substantial advances in ship design and construction. These broader events contributed to the development of seafaring as a much more sophisticated, organized and documented pursuit, in which the role of the mariner becomes much more than merely a labor occupation.

Identifying mariners by their work, this dissertation also differentiates actively sailing coastwise merchant mariners from myriad other maritime occupations with which they are frequently conflated. Because the average merchant mariner left less written record behind, navy sailors, pirates and dockworkers have often been used as a proxy for the broader sailing profession that also blurs distinct periodizations.<sup>7</sup> However, the shipboard cultures, motives, and activities of each of these groups is notably distinct from much of the merchant marine profession, and particularly the less studied, less romanticized coastal merchant mariner. In this study, I seek to consider those coastwise merchant mariners engaged in smuggling as a distinctly skilled group operating with agency at an international level. By doing so, this dissertation serves as a corrective and reassessment of historiographical depictions of mariners as either rabble rousers on the waterfront or as proletariats in a shipboard collective.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Marcus Rediker, *Between the Devil and the Deep Blue Sea: Merchant Seamen, Pirates and the Anglo-American Maritime World, 1700 - 1750* (Cambridge University Press, 1987); Peter Linebaugh and Marcus Rediker, *The Many-Headed Hydra: Sailors, Slaves, Commoners, and the Hidden History of the Revolutionary Atlantic* (Beacon Press, 2001); See Paul A Gilje, *Liberty on the Waterfront: American Maritime Culture in the Age of Revolution* (Philadelphia, Pa.; Bristol: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2007).

<sup>8</sup> In addition to the above, see Niklas Frykman et al., “Mutiny and Maritime Radicalism in the Age of Revolution,” *International Review of Social History* 58 (2013): 1–14; Johnathan Thayer, “Sailors Ashore in New York’s Sailortown,” in *City of Workers, City*

In drawing this distinction, I also argue that the average mariners who were sailing on smaller vessels along the coast and to the islands carried a greater individual responsibility within the vessels' smaller crews. Consequently, this responsibility demanded that those crew had to have a greater skill level than many crew members serving on larger trans-oceanic vessels in which more discrete task assignments and redundancy allowed for greater participation by less skilled individuals.

Additionally, the type of seamanship and navigational skill conducted on sloops and ketches maneuvering among shallow reefs and poorly marked coastlines was quite different, and in many ways more challenging than that of the larger, less maneuverable naval warships and merchant vessels involved in long-distance voyages across open oceans. In making this distinction, I seek to clarify the challenges facing mariners on board and identify critical differences in the skillsets that made the coastwise mariner particularly well-suited for the specific demands of smuggling operations between the West Indies and the North American colonies.

Smaller crew sizes and broader responsibilities on shorter voyages also produced a shipboard social structure with fewer hierarchical layers and more direct contact among all members of the crew than those of navy ships and larger trans-oceanic traders. As a result, this social environment and the relationships of the crew with each other and with the authority of command provided less opportunity for conflicts to remain unresolved or

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*of Struggle*, ed. Joshua Freeman, *How Labor Movements Changed New York* (Columbia University Press, 2019), 38–51; Paul A Gilje, “On the Waterfront: Maritime Workers in New York City in the Early Republic, 1800 – 1850,” *New York History* 77, no. 4 (1996): 395–426.



fester to the point of challenging the authority of command. Small vessel captains were more familiar with every member of their crew and more likely to be working alongside them sharing similar hardships both in the normal course of operations as well as in times of crisis. In clarifying this shipboard structure, I seek to refine historiography that has relied on accounts of larger crews and vessels, often in different time periods or in military settings, for broad assessments of shipboard culture and the role of mariners as labor within that structure.<sup>9</sup>

The navigation and seamanship skills required of the coastwise mariners were further amplified and compounded for those involved in illicit trade. In order to evade enforcement authorities (naval forces, customs officers and privateers), smuggling ships' captains and crews relied on specific knowledge of local conditions and geography. Putting this knowledge to use depended on the ability of the crews to maneuver sailing vessels in and out of diverse and often remote locales to receive and offload cargo.

To load and offload cargo in many of these small ports also required access to small boats and small boat operators who were willing and able to transfer cargo from ship to shore in areas where there were no wharves capable of accommodating even the smaller Caribbean trading vessels. This meant that smugglers also relied on networks of coastal residents who owned small boats as well as other complicit actors ashore such as customs agents and other government representatives willing to provide false paperwork that gave

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<sup>9</sup> See, for example, W. Jeffrey Bolster, *Black Jacks* (Harvard University Press, 1998), Chapter 3: "The Way of a Ship"; Rediker, *Between the Devil and the Deep Blue Sea*, Chapter 4: The Seaman as Plain Dealer; Gilje, *Liberty on the Waterfront*, Chapter 3: "A Sailor Ever Loves to Be in Motion."

legal cover to cargo and voyages. For mariners involved in the trade, the constantly shifting colonial status of Caribbean colonies, the on-and-off nature of 'trading with the enemy', the widespread participation of markets ashore, and cultural perceptions of such trade as a victimless crime dampened the perceptions of imperial loyalty imposed on discussions of smuggling operations.

As employees of the merchants who often owned the ships, mariners frequently acquired a dual identity as international free traders by vocation, while still members of their town communities. Particularly in the more insular communities of New England, mariners often remained invested in the highly localized political economies where they came from and where their merchant employers lived and conducted business. Yet at the same time, mariners were uniquely removed from that structure to some degree by virtue of their work in distant places evading the framework of broader imperial political economies. This duality contributed to shaping mariners' understanding and response to the English navigation acts and similar trade restrictions of other European nations whose West Indian colonies served as critical trading partners to New England.

### **Smuggling Defined**

At its core, smuggling is the illegal movement of goods across a political border. In the study of colonial smuggling, however, definitions vary depending on what aspects of smuggling are under consideration. In studies considering the impacts of the British Navigation Acts on the British North American colonies, smuggling is considered only

that transport that broke those particular laws.<sup>10</sup> If smugglers were breaking other nations' importation laws with the cargo they were delivering to West Indies islands, that may not have been considered. Nor was trading with the enemy during wartime necessarily considered smuggling as it broke a separate set of laws.<sup>11</sup>

This dissertation, however, is less concerned with which nation's specific laws were being broken by any given voyage. My focus is on the operational efforts and maritime skills that were required to successfully pursue these illicit voyages in the first place. To that end, I define smuggling as any trading voyage that required additional consideration in planning and execution in order to evade legal consequences of illicit cargo. This includes how the voyage itself was conducted; how and where cargo was taken on board; how and where it was offloaded; and, to a lesser degree, what the cargo was.

Smuggling in this definition took place among all American colonies as well as between European nations and the Americas. For purposes of this study though, I restrict the discussion to smuggling by British American colonial ships transiting the eastern North American coast and the greater Caribbean basin. As will be discussed, this parameter reflects the operational nature of coastwise voyaging and considers the Caribbean as an

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<sup>10</sup> Thomas C. Barrow, *Trade and Empire: The British Customs Service in Colonial America* (Harvard University Press, 1967); O. M. Dickerson, *The Navigation Acts and the American Revolution* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1951); James F. Shepherd and Gary M. Walton, *Shipping, Maritime Trade and the Economic Development of Colonial North America*, Reissue edition (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 91; Peter Andreas, *Smuggler Nation: How Illicit Trade Made America*, 1 edition (Oxford University Press, 2014), Chapter 2: "The Smuggling Road to Revolution."

<sup>11</sup> Dickerson, *The Navigation Acts and the American Revolution*, 82.

extension of that coastwise operating area – distinct from the longer trans-Atlantic voyages of European and African traders.

The West Indies colonies of both England and other European nations provided critical markets for the North American colonies. Timber, iron, livestock, flour, and other agricultural provisions provided the infrastructure and sustenance needed by the burgeoning plantation economies on the islands in the early to mid-eighteenth century. Smuggling mariners were able to meet that demand while circumventing British navigation acts and similar trade restrictions imposed by other countries. Their success in doing this through times of both war and peace secured North American merchants' perception of being part of an international business propriety, and solidified an expectation of access to those markets. Smuggler sailors were the linchpin in an economy that became central to the issues leading up to the American Revolution, yet their role has not been explored in terms of the skills that made their success as a group possible, or the individual mariner's ability to translate the development of those skills into upward mobility.

### **Finding the Smugglers**

In part, neglecting to recognize mariners from an occupational perspective stems from the difficulty in obtaining records of their activities. Like most illicit activity, smuggling tended to leave few written records, at least when it was successful. Court records can provide only a biased window into an assessment of smuggling operations in that they restrict study to those smugglers who got caught. The standards, skills, and activities of unsuccessful smugglers thus shapes the overall view of the activity.

Unlike many other illicit pursuits, the remote nature of maritime trade is, in itself, a hinderance to study. By definition, working mariners are on board the ship when it leaves port, but it is also at that very moment that much of the societal paper trail historians rely on (newspaper accounts, court and government documents, etc.) disappears. The ship's deck logbook provided the primary record of the daily activities on any merchant ship. Relatively few commercial logbooks survive compared to naval or whaling logbooks, and even fewer when compared to the numbers of voyages that occurred. This phenomenon is only exacerbated by the additional secrecy accompanying a smuggling operation.

At the same time, however, it is the very commonality of smuggling in the mid-eighteenth century that offers windows into the methods and skills at work. Smuggling was taken so much for granted that it occasionally lacks some of the constraints on communication one would otherwise expect of an illegal activity.

This dissertation relies on a mix of anecdotal evidence of individual smuggling voyages, much of it in the form of communication between smuggling captains and their merchant shipowners. This correspondence tends to survive in the records of the merchants. These letters often offer a window in the professional frustrations of the captains over vessel conditions, as well as descriptions of market conditions they were finding in foreign ports, difficulties with weather, crew, and threats from customs enforcement and privateers. That merchants kept captains' correspondence as well as copies of their direction to the ships and the responses from the ships indicates the sense of normality that surrounded the operations. So much so, that it raises substantive questions about broader community perceptions. Smuggling may have been illegal, but many smugglers were not viewed as criminal. Some shipping business papers also survive, but these tend

to be for larger ships with more complex finances. The smaller coastwise schooners and ketches were simpler and fewer official papers outside of correspondence survive.

However, all captains not operating their own vessel received orders from the merchant shipowner, and some merchants kept copies of these in their records. In cases of smuggling with dual sets of orders providing a guise for illicit activity, some merchants kept both sets of orders in their records, some of which have survived in archival records.

I have also turned to the marine insurance records of Ezekiel Price, housed at the Boston Athenaeum.<sup>12</sup> This unique archive includes the records of insurance contracts written on specific individual voyages between 1759 and 1781, nearly all of which were sailing either to or from New England ports. Price began his work as an insurance broker in 1759 and continued until his retirement in 1783.<sup>13</sup> Following the revolution he worked as clerk of the court for Suffolk County and served on the board of selectmen for Boston.<sup>14</sup> His surviving insurance records for voyages during Seven Years War provide a window into the trade for French goods through Monte Christi or trading with the Dutch either in the islands or in Dutch Surinam, as well as what the primary dangers and likeliness of success were. Of the nearly 1,100 policies issued by the firm between 1759 and 1762, 420 were for vessels likely smuggling contraband or trading with the enemy in the Caribbean by virtue of their destination (In categorizing policies by likelihood of

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<sup>12</sup> Ezekiel Price, “Marine Insurance Policies, 1756-1781”, Boston Athenaeum.

<sup>13</sup> Edward Rochie Hardy, *Reports of 1888-1900, with An Account of the Early Insurance Offices in Massachusetts, from 1724 to 1801* (Insurance Library Association of Boston, 1901), 41.

<sup>14</sup> Hardy, 42.

smuggling, my focus remained on the North American-Caribbean trade. Of the remaining policies not included in the 420 likely Caribbean smugglers, there are a number of voyages from New England to Europe and West Africa that may have included contraband cargo of one type or another, but not meet the coastwise North American trade focus of this study.) Marine insurance at the time was not issued in a blanket policy. Individual voyages were insured for the value of specific elements of the voyage. Usually these elements were the vessel and cargo, but often separate policies were written to cover the value of any currency that was being carried on board. During the period for which records are extant, there are numerous voyages for which multiple policies were written.

Specific exclusions to coverage and discounts to premiums for specific actions provide insight into the courses taken and the threats that underwriters expected would be faced on specific routes to specific destinations. These distinctions help paint a picture of where and what the hazards were that smugglers were facing from enforcement authorities and foreign privateers.

### **Argument for Skills and Profession**

In this dissertation, I have chosen to use the term “professional” to refer to those mariners who established themselves and their expertise through their skillset. While this does not reflect the traditional definitions of profession, it does reflect a more common, modern use of the term to indicate someone whose occupation is part of a career that is based on the development of a specific skillset, performed to some accepted (if not necessarily

formalized) standards.<sup>15</sup> I argue that successful mariners not only developed skills individually, but participated in the aggregate development of skills akin to that of a modern professional community. As individuals they were expected to maintain certain standards of performance and conduct, and those who performed particularly well were able to translate their success into new opportunities among competing employers in a somewhat open job market.

Smuggling increased the value of the opportunities but also the demands. Mariners engaged in smuggling operations needed an even greater degree of skill to successfully load contraband, evade authorities and offload the cargo without incident.

Positioning mariners in the context of labor has long been difficult. The actual work of the mariner, by definition, took place at sea. The shipboard environment removed mariners from the abundance of societal record keeping that provides insight into many other forms of work ashore. One result of this is that perceptions of mariners are largely driven by the records of their activities ashore, when they were often engaged in interim work or leisure that was unrelated to their skills as shipboard sailors. Those skills, however, were very distinct and very much set the mariner apart from other occupations he may have been conflated or confused with during his time ashore. Actively sailing mariners were not the same as dockworkers.

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<sup>15</sup> Frank Marutello, “Thesemantic Definition of a Profession,” *Southern Review of Public Administration* 5, no. 3 (1981): 246–57; Morris L. Cogan, “The Problem of Defining a Profession,” *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 297 (1955): 105–11.



Sailing mariners were not unskilled labor. The skills needed to operate a small trading vessel as a member of the crew were often even more substantive than those required for a comparable crew member on a larger ship. They earned their skills mostly through experience along the coast and at sea, rising up to positions of more responsibility and authority on deck. Although specific and detailed knowledge was required, particularly in the area of navigation, little of this education took place in formalized settings, nor was it managed, certified or qualified by any governmental or trade organizations until the 19<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>16</sup> It is not, however, accurate to refer to them as being members of an apprentice trade, and nor were they artisans. Mariners starting out were not necessarily indebted to a master for an extended time of study as in a more traditional apprentice relationship. Many young seamen may have received promises of positions through family, and expectations from captains that they youth would stay, but there is little evidence that this was a formalized system.

Mariners were performing a service: the delivery of goods via a uniquely complex vehicle, which the mariner was tasked with operating. Although elements of their work resonate with the role of artisans such as blacksmiths, carpenters, and tailors, mariners did not create a product. They were not craftsmen, but many of the tasks required of them did entail craftwork in the form of necessary repair and replacement of rigging, sails, and hull parts. Nor do they meet the formal definition of professionals. Their roles were not to

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<sup>16</sup> Early skill-based certification of mariners followed tests of the federal authority to regulate interstate commerce but were driven by the advent of steam technology. A spate of boiler explosions led to vessel inspections and federal licensing of pilots and engineers in 1838 and 1852. See John G. Burke, “Bursting Boilers and the Federal Power,” *Technology and Culture* 7, no. 1 (1966): 1–23, <https://doi.org/10.2307/3101598>.

provide counsel or advice, and they were not trained through a formal certification process.<sup>17</sup> However, as an individual mariner's skills matured and developed, he could reach a point of becoming an expert at what he did. And like other modern professions, that expertise was often quite deep, if also narrow in its scope of application.

### **Experiential knowledge and the historical enterprise**

I come to this topic with a firsthand appreciation of the complexities of sailing eighteenth- and nineteenth-century ships along the East Coast and Caribbean. Prior to entering graduate school, I spent a long career as a professional mariner serving on a variety of traditionally rigged sailing vessels engaged in experiential education. I hold a 500-ton Ocean Master's license from the United States Coast Guard with a sail endorsement, and have spent about 50,000 nautical miles underway as a deck officer and instructor. This work has included sailing several different replicas of eighteenth-century square-rigged ships and gaff-rigged sloops, original nineteenth-century gaff-rigged schooners, and numerous modern vessels with traditional gaff and square rigs. About two-thirds of my experience has been sailing between New England and the Caribbean islands, with the remaining time spent in the Pacific Ocean. When not at sea, I also served as editor of a series of navigation handbooks and nautical almanacs used by ship

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<sup>17</sup> For the transition of professionalism to a modern era, see T. H. Marshall, "The Recent History of Professionalism in Relation to Social Structure and Social Policy," *The Canadian Journal of Economics and Political Science / Revue Canadienne d'Economie et de Science Politique* 5, no. 3 (1939): 325–40.

captains that included tide and current tables, coastal piloting and sailing instructions, and celestial navigation data.

When I began to explore eighteenth-century maritime smuggling, the perspective of my experiences drew me to operational aspects of the trade. The significance of what coastwise smuggling mariners were able to accomplish and how they did so struck me as being overlooked by historians less familiar with the challenges of maneuvering such vessels as well as navigating them along the coast and among the Caribbean islands. My experiences in the same waters on vessels much like theirs informs my readings of their logbooks and correspondence, and contributes to shaping my interpretations of their operations in ways that I believe have been overlooked by historians without the same practical background.

### **Historiography**

This dissertation is situated at the intersection of several different Early American and Atlantic World historiographies: the study of the navigation acts and their enforcement, mariners as a social force, perceptions of law and illegality in maritime commerce, and the role of science in the development of navigation and nautical architecture. In these histories, depictions of coastal mariners have tended to be neglected in favor of better documented, or more dramatic participants. Even when these mariners are featured, their actual work, operating underway sailing vessels, is relegated to the background in favor of better documented or dramatic roles and activities on shore.

The historiography of the Navigation Acts and their enforcement has long been a central focus of Early American historians seeking to understand the causes of the American

Revolution. For much of the twentieth century, historians tended to work from the perspective of official government policies, or from the perspective of the colonial merchants and authorities who opposed the regulations. An early modern foundational work on this was George Louis Beer's *British Colonial Policy, 1754-1765*, published in 1907.<sup>18</sup> Addressing the intent and shortcomings of the British efforts during and immediately after the Seven Years' War, Beer's work focused on the motivations of the crown in creating the acts, and the methods of enforcement that were used. Writing in the years preceding World War I, Beer saw the navigation acts as a logical extension of paying for the unquestioned imperative of defending the empire. Although his specific arguments and opinions may seem anachronistic today, his work has continued to be cited regularly by later generations of historians of smuggling due to the depth of his research.

In the 1930s, Richard Pares created the seminal work on the topic, *War and Trade in the West Indies, 1739-1763*.<sup>19</sup> In this highly detailed exploration, Pares analyzed the conflicts associated with ongoing trade between the island colonies, the European imperial centers, and the North American colonies. Pares details the types of trade that were occurring among the various parties and focuses on the political implications for the imperial interests. Although Pares considers the operational specifics of how trade was conducted, his sources and focus restrict these mentions to explanations of how imperial enforcement

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<sup>18</sup> George Louis Beer, *British Colonial Policy, 1754-1765*. (Macmillan Company, 1907).

<sup>19</sup> Richard Pares, *War and Trade in West Indies, 1739-1763* (London: Frank Cass & Co Ltd, 1963).

efforts were being conducted and thwarted.<sup>20</sup> Pares did extensive research into naval efforts to protect trade during wartime, focusing on competing strategies and policy debates that were occurring within the English government. Like Beer, Pares has continued to serve as a resource for newer authors working on the West Indies trade. But also like Beer, Pares focused on politics, economics and naval involvement – mostly with regard to trade between England and the islands. So like Beer, Pares' focus on institutional involvement in trans-oceanic trade neglects the view of the West Indies as an extension of the North American coastwise trade.

As a correction to this, Pares followed his pivotal work with a more detailed look strictly at the nature of trade between the English North American colonies and the West Indies. *Yankees and Creoles*, published in 1956, is more strictly an analysis of the balance of trade between the mainland and island colonies, with explanations of what products were headed in each direction.<sup>21</sup> In *Yankees and Creoles*, Pares addresses the role of smuggling, but it is largely in the context of smuggled goods' impacts on overall trade. To the extent that he explores the operational details of the trade, it is strictly in order to understand the relative market values and sources of the various products and materials being traded. Like other economic works, *Yankees and Creoles* does inform research as a resource for understanding the enticements of the smuggling trade and its distinct localized forms in various parts of the American colonies. This work is complemented by

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<sup>20</sup>Pares, ch.IX.

<sup>21</sup> Richard Pares, *Yankees and Creoles; the Trade Between North America and the West Indies Before the American Revolution*. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1956).

elements of McCusker and Menard's *The Economy of British America, 1607-1789*, which sought to create an even more detailed statistical analysis of the trade.<sup>22</sup>

In 1951, Oliver Dickerson connected the Navigation Acts specifically to the American Revolution, arguing that opposition to the acts and the evasion of the acts served as impetus to war. While Beer and Pares had included trading with the enemy during times of war as an element of smuggling, Dickerson's *The Navigation Acts and the American Revolution* made clear distinctions among three different kinds of resistance: evasion of those acts that predated 1700, trading with the enemy during wartime, and opposition to the revenue-generating acts that imposed fees on specific cargo. Dickerson specifically exempted trading with the enemy in wartime, citing it as a temporary change in otherwise legitimate markets, rather than an element of a permanent system, which made it less of a concern to merchants.<sup>23</sup>

Because Dickerson considered these issues from a strictly political and economic perspective, this structure may make sense, but it is also an example of why the perspective of the mariners necessitates a different approach. Unlike merchants and politicians, the captains and sailors may have been less concerned with the long-term status of trade than with the immediate consequences to themselves and their ships if seized. More significantly, the mechanisms for evading seizure were often the same, and

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<sup>22</sup> John J. McCusker and Russell R. Menard, *The Economy of British America, 1607-1789* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1985).

<sup>23</sup>Dickerson, *The Navigation Acts and the American Revolution*.

relied on the same skills, producing much less of a distinction among the various types of prohibitions.

Thomas Truxes differed with Dickerson in his 2008 monograph, *Defying Empire: Trading with the Enemy in Colonial New York*.<sup>24</sup> Truxes' work on the topic had begun with the publication in 2001 of his comprehensively edited and annotated *Letterbook of Greg & Cunningham*, a New York firm with partners in Ireland that had been actively involved in wartime smuggling to French colonies in the West Indies.<sup>25</sup> In *Defying Empire*, Truxes began to unveil some of the methods and logistics of wartime trade, but his thematic focus remained on the citywide conspiracy among merchants to keep the illicit trade intact throughout the Seven Years' War. By connecting smuggling operations and merchants' attitudes though, Truxes does begin to identify an international trading culture that relied on dispassionate skilled professionals to fulfill its agenda regardless of the political environment.

Carl Ubbelohde's *The Vice-Admiralty Courts and the American Revolution* argued that the enforcement of the navigation acts through the mechanism of the Vice Admiralty courts served as a persistent contribution to the causes of the Revolution.<sup>26</sup> Ubbelohde assessed the relationship between merchants and the court systems, comparing the

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<sup>24</sup>Thomas M. Truxes, *Defying Empire: Trading with the Enemy in Colonial New York* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008).

<sup>25</sup>Thomas M. Truxes, ed., *Letterbook of Greg & Cunningham, 1756-57: Merchants of New York and Belfast*, 1 edition (Oxford ; New York: Oxford University Press, 2001).

<sup>26</sup>Carl Ubbelohde, *The Vice-Admiralty Courts and the American Revolution* (University of North Carolina Press, 1960).

common law courts and the vice admiralty courts – either of which were often viable avenues for resolving contract and customs disputes. Ubbelohde demonstrates the fluidity of the court system in practice in the colonies and how the merchants were able to leverage it to their advantage.

The work of Ubbelohde and the earlier work of Elizabeth Hoon also makes clear that in cases of seizures, it was the vessel's owner rather than the professional crew that often suffered the greatest consequences for illegal actions. Mariners were even able to access the same vice-admiralty courts for redress of unpaid wages by the ships they had worked on while illegal commerce was being conducted.<sup>27</sup>

John Tyler's *Smugglers and Patriots* expanded greatly on the role of the smuggling merchants in shaping their own circumstances. Tyler's quest to identify specific merchants as definite smugglers helped him cast light on the logistics of specific smuggling operations, but he did so only for the purposes of connecting those identified merchants to their revolutionary tendencies. In doing so, he avoids much consideration of the mariners themselves. However, Tyler's work is notable for his use of insurance records and attention to operational details as a gauge for determining whether specific merchants were, in fact, engaging in smuggling.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>27</sup>Elizabeth Evelynola Hoon, *Organization of the English Customs System, 1696-1786* (New York: Augustus M. Kelly, 1968).

<sup>28</sup>John W. Tyler, *Smugglers & Patriots: Boston Merchants and the Advent of the American Revolution* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1986).



Tyler's work also highlights a notable pattern among political and economic historians. When discussing smugglers, it is the merchants bankrolling the operations who are identified as the "smugglers", not the crew doing the actual transporting. As has been indicated, this perspective has contributed to a historiography in which one of the most fundamental elements – the people actually doing the work – has been largely dismissed.

While mariners themselves have generally not shown up in works dedicated to smuggling, they do show up in much greater frequency in works dedicated to social impacts and political activism. Jesse Lemisch's pivotal 1968 article, "Jack Tar in the Streets", sought to reassess mariners as political activists in the lead-up to the American Revolution.<sup>29</sup> Paul Gilje's *Liberty on the Waterfront* sought to revise that view, depicting mariners as more self-interested.<sup>30</sup> Both of these works, however, conflate a variety of maritime professions ranging from dockworkers to navy seamen to merchant mariners. Gilje, in particular, openly rejects any discrimination among roles, periods, or ship vs. shore work, to "emphasize a larger unified American maritime culture, rather than focus on the differences." But as this dissertation argues, smuggling merchant mariners had a skill set and professional relationships that distinguished them from other maritime groups and influenced their attitudes toward free trade and imperial law.

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<sup>29</sup> Jesse Lemisch, "Jack Tar in the Streets: Merchant Seamen in the Politics of Revolutionary America," *The William and Mary Quarterly* 25, no. 3 (1968): 371–407.

<sup>30</sup> Paul A Gilje, *Liberty on the Waterfront: American Maritime Culture in the Age of Revolution* (Philadelphia, Pa.; Bristol: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2007).

The role of mariners on shore has also been considered in the many studies of individual colonial communities along the New England coast. In *Commerce and Culture: The Maritime Communities of Colonial Massachusetts, 1690-1750*, Christine Heyrman looked at the role of maritime trade on smaller New England coastal communities.<sup>31</sup> Refuting the Puritan declension view of New England communities, Heyrman argued that in Gloucester and Marblehead, religious and social order rose in conjunction with the towns' growth. However, the mariners in her narrative are mostly fishermen with debts on shore, and the higher maritime profile in the community belongs to the merchants and other community elites who benefitted from trade. Similarly, Daniel Vickers' *Farmers and Fishermen: Two Centuries of Work in Essex County, Massachusetts, 1630-1830* considers the maritime influences on community development, but does so by contrasting the fates of young men seeking a livelihood as fishermen with those who sought to inherit or acquire farmland.<sup>32</sup> In both of these works, wage-earning mariners operating vessels engaged in inter-colonial trade are nominally represented as members of the communities studied.

Mariners have also been studied as members of their shipboard communities and in the context of global seagoing communities. Here too, however, their skills acquisition and actual work is often subsumed by depictions of social relationships on board, or political identities in the broader world. Seminal among these works is Marcus Rediker's *Between*

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<sup>31</sup> Christine Leigh Heyrman, *Commerce and Culture: The Maritime Communities of Colonial Massachusetts, 1690-1750* (New York: Norton, 1984).

<sup>32</sup> Daniel Vickers, *Farmers & Fishermen: Two Centuries of Work in Essex County, Massachusetts, 1630-1850* (The University of North Carolina Press, 1994).

*the Devil and the Deep Blue Sea*, which cast American mariners as a labor class.<sup>33</sup>

Rediker and Peter Linebaugh expanded on this notion in *The Many-Headed Hydra*, which lumped together merchant mariners, pirates and slaves as global agents of revolt against capitalist authorities.<sup>34</sup>

In *Black Jacks: African American Seamen in the Age of Sail*, Jeffrey Bolster produced a pivotal work on the role of black seafarers in the late eighteenth and early 19<sup>th</sup> centuries. Bolster depicted a shipboard meritocracy that, while limited, allowed black seaman to rise in respect and reputation above what they may have been likely to achieve on shore. These opportunities were born in part by somewhat less racially driven culture at sea, but also by perceptions among whites that western Africans had a seagoing heritage that made them inherently good boatmen. Either way, Bolster depicted black sailors' struggle with shoreside prejudice, as well as their efforts to use money earned at sea to give themselves better lives ashore.<sup>35</sup>

In addition to being studied as part of their own social communities, mariners have more recently begun to be seen as proxies for the creation of a broader American identity in the wake of the Revolution. In his 2015 volume *Citizen-Sailors*, Nathan Perl-Rosenthal explores the political identity of American merchant mariners between the American revolution and the War of 1812. Though Perl-Rosenthal's study is outside the periodization of this dissertation, his work demonstrates the push and pull of national

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<sup>33</sup> Rediker, *Between the Devil and the Deep Blue Sea*.

<sup>34</sup> Linebaugh and Rediker, *The Many-Headed Hydra*.

<sup>35</sup> Bolster, *Black Jacks*.

identity as a factor in the development of mariners as operatives in an international trade network. Facing prospects of impressment by the British Navy and seizure by French privateers, American merchant mariners clamored for a way to prove their citizenship status, leading to the government's creation of the Seaman's Protection Certificate. Perl-Rosenthal argues that the certificates served as America's first form of national citizenship papers and represented the racially diverse makeup of the ships' crews and cemented a national identity among them while they voyaged to far-flung ports around the world.<sup>36</sup>

Somewhat in parallel to Perl-Rosenthal, in *True Yankees: The South Seas and the Discovery of American Identity*, Dane Morrison argues that an international American identity was established through the shared experiences of American mariners and merchants exploring the Pacific and developing the East Indies and China trade in the early 19<sup>th</sup>-century.<sup>37</sup>

Two notable exceptions to globetrotting characterizations of mariners have been Daniel Vickers' *Young Men and the Sea: Yankee Seafarers in the Age of Sail*, and Barry Levy's *Town Born*.<sup>38</sup> Developing his own database of mariners from Salem, Massachusetts,

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<sup>36</sup> Nathan Perl-Rosenthal, *Citizen Sailors: Becoming American in the Age of Revolution*, 1 edition (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Belknap Press: An Imprint of Harvard University Press, 2015).

<sup>37</sup> Dane A. Morrison, *True Yankees: The South Seas and the Discovery of American Identity* (JHU Press, 2014).

<sup>38</sup> Daniel Vickers and Vince Walsh, *Young Men and the Sea: Yankee Seafarers in the Age of Sail* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005); Barry Levy, *Town Born: The*

Vickers tracked the career arcs of successful coastwise mariners demonstrating their ability to move up the ranks in their field rising to roles as shipmaster and merchant within their community on shore. Barry Levy's *Town Born* looked at mariners from the perspective of the political economy of the towns they came from. Levy argues that in the small coastal New England colonial towns where most coastwise mariners came from, societal controls played a substantial role in the initial opportunities mariners had to find jobs on local vessels. Moreover, those strict controls prevent mariners ashore from being the transient workforce depicted in other work.

Levy and Vickers succeed in characterizing mariners as having a sense of personal career ambitions, built on the development of their professional skills and tied to their roles and status in their communities. This fundamentally distinguishes those mariners from the footloose adventurers of a later period depicted by Gilje, but also separates them from the downtrodden labor class of Rediker. This seems particularly true of coastwise mariners engaged in shorter back-and-forth voyages on smaller, locally owned and operated vessels, including many of those participating in the West Indies trade.

Several historians have approached smuggling in the Americas from the perspective of localized studies of illicit activity in specific regions. Lance Grahn's *The Political Economy Of Smuggling: Regional Informal Economies In Early Bourbon New Granada* looked at the impacts of smuggling in New Granada, the Spanish territory along the Caribbean coast of South America, arguing that while smuggling eroded social order and

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*Political Economy of New England from Its Founding to the Revolution*, Early American Studies (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2009).

government control, it boosted the economy in ways that gave smugglers an authority.<sup>39</sup> Jesse Cromwell's *Smugglers' World* takes a similar look at the Venezuelan coastline in a different period.<sup>40</sup> In *Borderland Smuggling*, Joshua Smith looked at how smuggling continued across Passamaquoddy Bay between Maine and Canada even after the American Revolution, similarly stirring up local conflicts over political order and loyalism vs the economic demands of the local economy. In the remote rural area of the borderland in northern Maine, Smith argued, the practical benefits overrode any distant government authority, even if it was no longer an imperial authority, but that of the new United States.<sup>41</sup>

All these studies have demonstrated at various local levels that the economic impacts of smuggling on local economies dampened perceptions of smuggling as a crime. Smugglers may have eroded the rule of law, but were accepted, particularly when they were already members of the community benefiting from the smuggling. This interaction of economics and local authority tends to be less documented by macro-economic historians relying on official statistics for their assessments of the impacts of smuggling on broader colonial economy. In their otherwise comprehensive work, *Shipping*,

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<sup>39</sup> Lance Grahn, *The Political Economy Of Smuggling: Regional Informal Economies In Early Bourbon New Granada* (Boulder, Colo: Westview Press, 1997).

<sup>40</sup> Jesse Cromwell, *The Smugglers' World: Illicit Trade and Atlantic Communities in Eighteenth-Century Venezuela* (Williamsburg, Virginia : Chapel Hill: Omohundro Institute and University of North Carolina Press, 2018).

<sup>41</sup> Joshua M. Smith, *Borderland Smuggling: Patriots, Loyalists, and Illicit Trade in the Northeast, 1783-1820*, *New Perspectives on Maritime History and Nautical Archaeology* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2006).

*Maritime Trade and the Economic Development of Colonial North America*, James F. Shepherd and Gary M. Walton specifically caution that their calculation of the value of imports to the colonies fails to include smuggled commodities from other nations and colonies, particularly in the West Indies, because it remains an “unknown factor.”<sup>42</sup>

As I’ve reviewed here, the historiography of smuggling has a gaping hole in the middle. It is largely missing the mariners who conducted the smuggling voyages. At the same time, the historiography of mariners in this period has a similar gap at its heart in that it is missing much assessment of the actual work and skills that defined being a mariner. These gaps have dismissed and deflected questions about how smuggling was successfully conducted and who the mariners were that were responsible for that success on board ships carrying contraband cargo. By approaching this topic from a shipboard perspective, this dissertation begins to fill those gaps and create a fuller picture of the mariners operating at the heart of the colonial maritime economy.

### **Summary of Organization**

Chapter 1 of this dissertation, “Why Smuggling?” argues that smuggling was an result of North American and Caribbean colonial economies that did not function effectively in the context of mercantilist protection paradigm, and a social demography that provided the tools to subvert that paradigm through smuggling. In this, I seek to distinguish the coastwise colonial merchant mariners from the other mariners and maritime trades along the waterfront, arguing that the motivations and skills of the mariners doing the

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<sup>42</sup> Shepherd and Walton, *Shipping, Maritime Trade and the Economic Development of Colonial North America*, 206.

smuggling must be differentiated in order to understand how and why smuggling was able to succeed. This chapter also considers that the absence of a consensus within the colonies on the criminality of smuggling eroded the effectiveness of enforcement mechanisms, contributing to community endorsement of smuggling mariners. Chapter 2 places the mariners in the context of a broader historiography of navigation, seamanship and shipbuilding, arguing that these developments of the era were crucial to the development of skills and opportunities that made smuggling successful. Chapter 3 examines the specific tactics used by smuggling mariners to evade authorities and get contraband to market. Chapter 4 considers the career trajectories of several successful smugglers, considering how their participation in the trade affected later pursuits both at sea and on shore.



## CHAPTER 1

### WHY SMUGGLING?

#### Economy of North America

Smuggling was inevitable in the American colonies. Mercantilist notions that colonies would solely benefit their European metropolises constituted an economic management regime that was incompatible with the geography and colonial economies of North America and the Caribbean. The demand for provisions and infrastructure supplies in the West Indies plantations created ideal markets for the bounty of raw materials and agricultural products that could readily be harvested in nearby North America. The strength of this market overwhelmed most definitions of national identity in the colonies of the West Indies, particularly where colonial ownership of islands was regularly changing.<sup>43</sup>

But even in the best of circumstances, an economic market is only as valuable as one's ability to deliver goods to and from it. The geography of North America and the

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<sup>43</sup> This section draws on the following variety of secondary literature for a summary synthesis of the maritime economy and coastal culture of colonial North America and its interactions with the West Indies: Alex Roland, W. Jeffrey Bolster, and Alexander Keyssar, *The Way of the Ship: America's Maritime History Reenvisioned, 1600-2000* (John Wiley & Sons, 2007); Benjamin W. Labaree et al., *America and the Sea: A Maritime History*, First edition (Mystic, Conn.: Mystic Seaport Museum, 1998); Samuel Eliot Morison, *The Maritime History of Massachusetts, 1783-1860* (Boston, New York : Houghton Mifflin Company, 1921); Cathy Matson, *Merchants and Empire: Trading in Colonial New York* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997); Ralph Davis, *The Rise of the Atlantic Economies* (Cornell University Press, 1973); J. H. Elliott, *Empires of the Atlantic World: Britain and Spain in America 1492-1830* (Yale University Press, 2020).

Caribbean amplified the likelihood of inter-imperial trade, but a maritime culture and infrastructure was paramount to making it a reality. The Caribbean trade with the North American colonies, legal or not, could not have come to exist without the rise and support of a vibrant coastwise shipping industry and maritime culture. Americans' relationship to the shore and the sea was the backbone of smuggling that fueled the economy of the West Indies.

All along the American seaboard in the early eighteenth century, colonists were in the business of shipping. In coastal communities from Boston to Charleston, life on the waterfront involved working on the water in some way, shape or form. As the coastal colonies grew during the seventeenth and early eighteenth century, the growing demands for trade and transport required access to vessels and skills in using them. Small rowboats, skiffs and sailboats served as inshore fishing vessels and transport along the shoreline, in bays, sounds and up rivers. Everyone who owned a boat found multiple uses for it. Enterprising boatmen often rented themselves and their vessels out to passengers, but also bought local products in one town and sailed to another to sell them. Milled timber, grains, livestock and fish were among their cargoes. As self-sufficiency gave way to production economies in the colonies, coastwise trade rose in accordance. Inter-colonial trade demanded larger vessels and a more detailed understanding of the vagaries of the coastal geography and weather. Demands on the coastal maritime skillset were rising, but created opportunities that were different from those of the trans-oceanic shippers who were carrying raw materials and goods from the American colonies to Europe and back.

Coastal maritime trade demanded smaller, more maneuverable, shallower draft boats that could navigate the fickle winds along the shore and work their way into the tight approaches to inland waterways. Manning these boats demanded detailed knowledge of local conditions and quick response to changing conditions that was quite different from that needed for the offshore voyages of larger ships riding the tradewinds across the Atlantic.

At the same time, the growth of West Indian colonies in the Caribbean and the rising rancor of conflicts between European nations, particularly Britain and France, began contributing to a demand in trade that required the sophisticated navigation and shiphandling skills of the coastwise mariners. The demand for goods in these colonies clashed with mercantilist notions of colonies exclusively serving their mother countries -- a distinction that was only exacerbated by war. The development of the West Indian colonies into plantation economies dictated that every acre of the precious island land was to be dedicated to growing highly profitable exports. But that business model left those same islands turning toward the bounty of the North American colonies for much else they needed -- including timber, livestock, iron ore, food, and even boats and ships of their own.

For American mariners, voyages to the Caribbean islands were an extension of the coastwise trade already being conducted among the colonies on the eastern seaboard. A trip from Boston to the island of Hispaniola, though still about 1,400 miles in distance, was less precarious and nearly half the length of a voyage from Boston to London. For the New England merchants underwriting those Caribbean voyages, smaller vessels requiring fewer crew for a shorter voyage meant that money was not tied up as long at

sea, and the barriers to entry by ambitious merchants were lower. The culmination of a variety of factors - economic, geographic, political, technological, and social -- caused vessel traffic between the North American British colonies and the West Indies to boom in the first half of the eighteenth century. Much of it, however, was illegal under the imperial trade policies of Britain, France, and Spain. In the decades leading up to the American Revolution, British North American colonial merchants and mariners increasingly flouted the imperial mercantilist policies of their own nation as well as those of the colonies they traded with. In times of war, they continued their voyages, regularly trading with Britain's enemies.

Popular history has generally asserted that merchants succeeded in this illicit trade largely due to the neglect to enforce the British Navigation Acts by British customs officials and naval forces in North America and the Caribbean.<sup>44</sup> Then, following the Seven Years War, duties were raised by the Crown as a revenue generator, enforcement of those duties was ramped up, and the ensuing outrage led to the American Revolution. Colonial American merchants and merchant captains have frequently been viewed as having tended toward anti-colonial sentiment, leading the early revolutionary effort to cast off the yoke of British authority.<sup>45</sup> By extension, working sailors and the maritime

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<sup>44</sup> Jeff Wallenfeldt, "Salutary Neglect," Encyclopedia Britannica, June 25, 2019, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/salutary-neglect>.

<sup>45</sup> Andreas, *Smuggler Nation*, 19.

professions have been cast as fomenters of revolution on the waterfront beginning with the Boston Massacre.<sup>46</sup>

While that narrative gives captains and their crews a degree of political agency, it has also saddled them with an ideological fervor that deprives them of their professional agency. That deprivation has been compounded by separate social narratives that have viewed mariners in general as some combination of unskilled labor collective and self-serving hedonists in need of societal protection.<sup>47</sup> In part, these narratives have persisted because of fundamental misunderstandings about the mariners' skillset and the conflation of diverse maritime roles into singular stereotypes.<sup>48</sup>

In the decades of the eighteenth century leading up to the American Revolution, the coastwise North American mariners who were conducting much of the trade between New England and the Caribbean developed into a maritime profession with unique navigational and vessel handling skillsets which the captains and crew successfully used to evade capture or seizure in both times of war and peace. In myriad ports, they cultivated networks of critical smuggling and trade connections amid the turbulent imperial exchange of Caribbean islands and in the parochial economies of small New

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<sup>46</sup> Gilje, *Liberty on the Waterfront*, 99; Linebaugh and Rediker, *The Many-Headed Hydra*, 211.

<sup>47</sup> Rediker, *Between the Devil and the Deep Blue Sea*, Chapter 2 “The Seaman as Collective Worker”; Gilje, *Liberty on the Waterfront*.

<sup>48</sup> In particular, Gilje in *Liberty on the Waterfront* openly rejects any discrimination among roles, periods, or ship vs. shore work, to “emphasize a larger unified American maritime culture, rather than focus on the differences.”(xii).

England towns. As a result, they were able to and did continue to sail illicit voyages, trading with all nations' colonies in the Caribbean all the way up to the revolution.

While their individual political self-identities may have varied, smugglers were not, as a group, wedded to any particular ideological political outcome. Utilizing a sophisticated professional skillset they worked in a business that deftly maneuvered around a constantly changing political and economic landscape. Mercantilist regulations and wartime hostilities became little different than storms at sea or shallow reefs: they were circumstances and hazards to be navigated around. As a result, the professional pursuits of merchant captains and their crews cannot be seen as hewing to a colonial or anti-colonial mindset. Rather, they had become extra-colonial. They existed within the system, but operated not so much in defiance of it, but with ambivalent dismissal of it.

### **The Volatile Caribbean**

Restrictions on trade imposed by British authorities and those of other European nations changed constantly throughout the long eighteenth century, driven most significantly by the shifting status of war and peace among the primary imperial powers in the Caribbean - English, French, Spanish and Dutch.<sup>49</sup> (See Figure 1) As wars in Europe spilled over to

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<sup>49</sup> There is a vast literature on empire and colonialism in the Caribbean, covering the influences of European politics and economics as well as the massive social history of slavery that contributed to Caribbean culture, demographics and later nation-building. For introductory syntheses, see Eric Williams, *From Columbus to Castro: The History of the Caribbean 1492-1969*, 1st Vintage Books ed (Vintage, 1984); Frank Moya Pons, *History of the Caribbean: Plantations, Trade, and War in the Atlantic World* (Markus Wiener Publishers, 2013); Eric Eustace Williams, *Capitalism & Slavery* (Chapel Hill [u.a.: Univ. of North Carolina Press, 2007]; Andrew Jackson O'Shaughnessy, *An Empire Divided: The American Revolution and the British Caribbean* (University of Pennsylvania Press,

colonies in North America and the Caribbean, colonial governments and naval powers on station in the region sought, with varying degrees of sincerity and effort to thwart trading with the enemy. However, even in times of peace, public support for navigation restrictions on trade and enforcement of those restrictions fluctuated, based on perceptions of where the most lucrative trade opportunities existed.



**Figure 1** Excerpt of “A New and Correct Map of the Trading Part of the West Indies...” published by Henry Overton, London. 1741. Color coded borders indicate the imperial ownership of various colonies.

The Treaty of Utrecht that ended the War of Spanish Succession in 1713 ushered in a new era in Caribbean and North American trade for several reasons. The Spanish granting of the Asiento made it easier for British colonial vessels to ramp up illicit trade

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2000); Franklin W Knight, *The Caribbean: The Genesis of a Fragmented Nationalism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012).

with Spanish colonies in the Caribbean. At the same time, the British Navy shifted its approach to enforcing regulations and protecting commerce. Additionally, the sugar plantation economies of all the European colonies in the West Indies reached an apex of production, increasing demand for provisions, and infrastructure goods from North America.<sup>50</sup> This combination of improved access to new markets, illicit or not, and changes in enforcement attitudes allowed merchants and mariners new opportunities for trade from British North America to the Caribbean.

As part of the Treaty of Utrecht, the granting the Asiento, Spain's license for the transport and sale of enslaved people to Spanish colonies in the West Indies, to England was considered a concession in the wake of the war that would allow England to benefit from the trade. But it created debate in both England and Spain. Spanish colonies were fearful that opening the door to the trade would open up broader avenues of trade that threatened to continue unchecked in the future.<sup>51</sup> The Asiento went specifically to the British South Sea Company and although there are indications that its agents allowed additional contraband trade goods in some ships, it remained within the South Sea Company.<sup>52</sup> Other American merchants involved in the coastwise trade did also participate in the slave trade from West Africa to the Caribbean, but few of the same vessels were used.

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<sup>50</sup> Philip D Curtin and American Council of Learned Societies, *The Rise and Fall of the Plantation Complex: Essays in Atlantic History* (Cambridge, UK; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 76.

<sup>51</sup> Adrian Finucane, *The Temptations of Trade: Britain, Spain, and the Struggle for Empire*, Early Modern Americas (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2016), 29.

<sup>52</sup> Finucane, *Temptations of Trade* 89.



The nature of the voyages from West Africa to the Caribbean was very different from the coastwise trade, and created unique demands on the vessels and crews.

The Treaty of Utrecht and the granting of the Asiento did not end the conflicts between Spain and Britain, but concerns about protecting the British South Sea Company did cause a shift in naval policy and approach. Rather than continuing to seek to seize Spanish silver shipments and send expeditions in Spanish America, the British Navy sought to accommodate the South Sea Company trade with Spanish colonies.<sup>53</sup> Conflicts did continue with the blockade of Porto Bello and Cartagena in 1726-1729, but the presence of British factors in Spanish colonies and the arrival of ships as part of the Asiento also opened trade opportunities throughout the Caribbean basin. Jamaica benefited as a result of trade goods that could be trans-shipped through the island to Spanish America.<sup>54</sup>

British focus on Spanish America and the western Caribbean also served to reduce naval enforcement of the British Navigation Acts for British colonial vessels. At the same time, however, Spanish seizures of English vessels carrying Spanish goods began in the form the *Guarda Costa*, whose seizures gave rise to the War of Jenkins Ear beginning in 1739.

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<sup>53</sup>Shinsuke Satsuma, *Britain and Colonial Maritime War in the Early Eighteenth Century: Silver, Seapower and the Atlantic* (Woodbridge, Suffolk ; Rochester, NY, 2013), 222.

<sup>54</sup>Nuala Zahedieh, "Commerce and Conflict: Jamaica and the War of the Spanish Succession," in *The Caribbean and the Atlantic World Economy: Circuits of Trade, Money and Knowledge, 1650–1914*, ed. A. B. Leonard and David Pretel, Cambridge Imperial and Post-Colonial Studies Series (London: Palgrave Macmillan UK, 2015), 68–86.

Famously named for Robert Jenkins, the British captain who claimed that the *Guarda Costa* had cut off his ear when they seized his ship in 1731, the war with Spain did not end the illicit trade between British and Spanish colonies in the Caribbean and North America. If anything, it was highlighted by the Act of Parliament that specifically only forbid trade with continental Spain, providing an implied permission for ongoing trade among the colonies. English privateers continued to raid both Spanish and English ships that were trading, but in some cases continued to even worked with smugglers to stop Spanish authorities from disrupting trade.<sup>55</sup>

For British-American merchant captains, this overall situation created a murky, shifting set of circumstances to navigate. Merchant captains potentially had to evade both English and Spanish naval forces on station and privateers on cruises patrolling other regions, while at the same time being constrained to certain routes among the islands by the prevailing winds and currents. By virtue of staying far to the east and upwind of the Spanish centers of Cuba and Hispaniola, ships trading with English, French and Dutch in the Antilles were able to avoid much of this conflict, but lost out on the markets created by Spanish trade.

During the period between the end of the war with Spain in 1748 and the beginning of the war with France in 1756, North American merchants were able to leverage the general disregard for navigation acts at home by trading with every country's colonies in the West Indies. The merchant Philip Wilkinson's sailing orders to Captain Richard Penmure for

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<sup>55</sup>Pares, *War and Trade in West Indies, 1739-1763*, 117–19.

the voyage of the *Charming Polly* in 1752 demonstrate the willingness to trade with whomever was able to offer the best deals: Wilkinson instructed to Penmure to sail from Rhode Island to the British island of St. Vincent to unload his cargo. What he could not sell there, he was to take to the island of Dominica, then controlled by the French. Any remaining cargo and any cargo he was forced to accept in payment at those two islands, he was then to take to the Dutch island St. Eustatia. Having been expected to empty his holds in these stops, and be laden with cash of various forms, he was to proceed to French Hispaniola, the exact port not specified, and load up with "good Molasses, best Muscovado sugars and Indigoe." Penmure was paid in a commission on the goods he sold in St. Vincent and Dominica, as well as a monthly wage, and ten hogsheads in privilege (an allowance of space in the ship's hold to carry cargo he could purchase and sell for himself).<sup>56</sup>

As this dissertation explores, Penmure's tactics were among several in use by smugglers both at the receiving end in the West Indies and upon return to the North American colonies that were designed to evade the Molasses Act and other customs fees in the eighteenth century. The choice of tactics used by captains to get contraband cargo into and out of ports may have varied with the state of war, peace and enforcement at either end, but can essentially be categorized as involving plans at the port of departure, evasion

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<sup>56</sup>Sailing Agreement between Philip Wilkinson & Co. and Richard Penmure, Newport, Rhode Island, December 1, 1752, as published in *Commerce of Rhode Island 1726-1800 Vol. 1*, vol. 1; 1726–1774, Collections of the Massachusetts Historical Society, Seventh; vol. IX (Boston: Massachusetts Historical Society, 1914), 60–61.

underway between ports, and some form of deception at the port of arrival. Any or all of these could contribute to a successful voyage.

### **Who Were the Smugglers?**

Efforts to define and characterize colonial mariners have long suffered from some fundamental confusion about who were and were not actually the sailors manning the ships involved in the trade. In both popular imagination and historical studies, a wide variety of very different types of mariners and shore-based maritime laborers have often been conflated. Navy sailors, pirates, privateers and trans-oceanic merchant mariners are often lumped together with coastal mariners to create broad-brush images of who mariners were. But the tasks and work environments of each of these as well as the skills needed to succeed could vary widely. Because the work varied, so too did the types of vessels and social environments on board them.<sup>57</sup>

Compounding this over-simplification of shipboard worlds, a variety of other shoreside maritime industries, dockworkers and waterfront trades, are often conflated with actual sailors in the efforts to explain the political allegiances and activism of the urban waterfronts in towns like Boston, New York and Philadelphia. In *Liberty on the Waterfront*, for example, Paul Gilje seeks to explain the meanings and motivations of

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<sup>57</sup> Authors such as Jesse Lemisch have recognized these differences in explaining why merchant sailors avoided impressment, but Lemisch fails to extend these differences to his modeling of shipboard culture. Jesse Lemisch, "Jack Tar in the Streets: Merchant Seamen in the Politics of Revolutionary America," *The William and Mary Quarterly* 25, no. 3 (July 1, 1968): 371–407.

sailors' search for liberty, but unabashedly expands his tableau to all of American maritime culture, a wildly broad inclusion that fails to recognize mariners' skillsets or even how mariners chose the voyages they participated in.<sup>58</sup>

Coastal life and culture certainly existed within an ecotone that encouraged diverse occupations occurring both on shore and water, and even successful mariners did transition between sea and shore over the course of their careers.<sup>59</sup> But longer voyages between further ports crafted mariners into a skilled group that had its own distinctions based on voyage length, vessel size, and the nature of the waters being transited.

Part of the phenomenon of defining mariners by their activities on shore is due to the reliance on written records created on shore. Broader society only saw the mariner when he was ashore. Consequently, it was there that much of the written record and public perception of him was born. But it was also there that mariners were most likely to be lumped in with other social and labor groups along the urban waterfront.

Mariners were known to cross over to related shoreside professions as necessary or when other circumstances such as age prevented their continued sailing.<sup>60</sup> But as previously

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<sup>58</sup> See Gilje, *Liberty on the Waterfront*, xii.

<sup>59</sup> For a study of the coast as a cultural ecotone transitioning sea and shore, see John R. Gillis, *The Human Shore: Seacoasts in History* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2012). For a look at mariners transitioning to shoreside life and activities, see Daniel Vickers and Vince Walsh, *Young Men and the Sea: Yankee Seafarers in the Age of Sail* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005), chapter 5: "Maritime Society Ashore".

<sup>60</sup> Vickers' detailed tracking of mariners from Salem, Massachusetts suggests that those who failed to rise up in the ranks either left the field early or died in the process. Vickers and Walsh, *Young Men and the Sea*, 118.

noted, even in these cases, mariners with a background in coastwise commercial work likely had accrued specific skills and expertise that they were able to leverage to their advantage ashore. Ashley Bowen, an active sailor and ship captain in the early part of his life, turned to doing sail repairs and making rigging when jobs were scarce. These highly specialized skills were honed during his time doing regular ship's maintenance at sea. He went full-time to those jobs later in life, working as an independent contractor for shipowners that needed specific projects done.<sup>61</sup> Bowen's career trajectory and work experience indicate that he was not unskilled labor.

### **Mariners' Accounts**

By definition, mariners were the people on board when their vessels left port. It is in their roles on board at sea that they are defined. But unlike life on shore, when a vessel left port, there was rarely anyone else present to observe or record the activities and lives of the crew. Official records of commercial shipboard activities are particularly sparse compared to the wealth of government and business documents recording the minutiae of life and society on shore. For most ships, both commercial and naval, the deck logbook is the primary if not only official daily account, and it is sparse in its own right. Standards for logkeeping varied widely from captain to captain, depending on the nature of a given voyage, the navigational methods being used, and the expectations of where the logbook may have ended up.

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<sup>61</sup>See Chapters VIII and IX Philip Chadwick Smith, ed., *The Journals of Ashley Bowen (1728-1813) of Marblehead* (Salem, Mass.: Peabody Museum of Salem, 1973).

The two primary roles of the commercial ship's log were to record weather and position. Regular observations of the wind speed, direction and strength allowed the crew to crudely predict local weather based on recent patterns. The logbook similarly allowed position to be determined, recreated, and predicted as a product of deduced reckoning when sailing out of sight of land. Dead reckoning used time, speed and compass heading to determine distance and direction traveled, allowing an ongoing track of the vessel's movement to be plotted on a navigational chart. On vessels piloting along the coast, the captain would note the times of sighting various landmarks and an estimation of the distance off of them, which served to confirm his position and progress against his own established knowledge of the region.<sup>62</sup>

Notes about other occurrences were also recorded in the log, but the standards for what justified entry vary widely. For many captains, notes about occurrences served to validate decisions the captain made, or describe hardships that he deemed out of his control, both of which could serve as a source of reporting back to the ship's merchant owners in the event of any incidents that damaged the ship or cargo, or delayed the voyage. In the Caribbean, it could also serve as evidence of his route and actions for the benefit of insurance agents, whose premiums were often set based on specific voyage criteria that

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<sup>62</sup>For an example of this form of coastwise tracking, see John Morke, "Log of the Sloop Albany, 1729-1733" (Massachusetts Historical Society.), Microfilm record P-363, Reel 12. Vol. 12.4, Pre-Revolutionary Diaries at the Massachusetts Historical Society, 1635-1790 for his passage from Boston to Albany, NY via Long Island Sound and back with stops in New York City, from August to October, 1729.

occasionally included rebates if certain conditions were met. The log could be backed up by affidavits collected from ship's officers after the voyage.<sup>63</sup>

As narrative historical records, however, even the most thorough accountings tend to be written in very matter-of-fact styles, bereft of emotion or excessive description -- even when it is clear that the events being described must have been quite dramatic. Fires, dismastings, groundings and flooding are all among the events that would have threatened the ship and lives of the crew and can be found in the extant logbooks of commercial mariners.<sup>64</sup> The ephemeral nature of their purpose contributes to the reason

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<sup>63</sup> The Ezekiel Price insurance policies include numerous examples of this. The sloop *Fox*, sailing from Surinam to Boston in March, 1760, was insured by Price with the provision that eight percent of the premium would be returned if the vessel stayed to leeward of the islands. Upon his arrival in Boston on April 25, 1761, Captain John Phillips provided an affidavit to the company that he had passed to the west of Puerto Rico, indicating that he had sailed through the Caribbean basin rather than to windward or east of the Lesser Antilles (policy No. 675). The brig *Maria*, sailing from Jamaica to London in September, 1763, was insured by the Ezekiel Price company under two separate premiums; one that covered the ship's departure from the Caribbean and one that covered the ship in a trans-Atlantic convoy to England. An affidavit from the captain of an accompanying vessel testified that the *Maria* safely joined the convoy north of the Bahamas for the transit (policy No. 1174). The sloop *Batchelder*, transiting from Surinam to Newport, Rhode Island in October, 1759, was insured with the provision that three percent of the premium would be returned as long as the captain stayed to leeward of the islands. Unfortunately, *Batchelder* was seized by the French within sight of St. Eustatia, and Price had to pay the policy. (policy No. 1125). The Schooner *Friendship*, sailing from Boston to St. Kitts or St. Eustatia was insured with the provision that if the vessel was leeward (west) of Antigua when it reached latitude 20° and stayed to leeward, 11 percent of the premium would be returned. A note on the policy indicates the vessel arrived safely and the premium returned (policy No. 677). All policies records and accompanying affidavits are bound in Ezekiel Price, "Marine Insurance Policies, 1756-1781", Boston Athenaeum.

<sup>64</sup> See for example, the single logbook of the brig *William*, which sailed from Barbados to Plymouth, Massachusetts and back to the West Indies in the fall of 1769 and the spring



that relatively few commercial logbooks, especially those of coastwise ships regularly retreading the same route, do still exist today. Those that have survived tend to have been bound in notebooks kept by individual captains over numerous voyages and co-mingled with copies of business correspondence.<sup>65</sup>

In contrast to the sparse commercial logs, whaling and naval logbooks tended to include much more other data relevant to their unique missions. Locations of whale sightings and captures helped whalers return to fruitful grounds.<sup>66</sup> For naval vessels, detailed accounts of encounters with other ships could provide intelligence useful to broader war efforts and could improve tactical approaches. Accounts of seizures were necessary to later prove rightful claims to prizes in an admiralty court, while accounts of battles celebrated crews' successes and justified their failures. As a result of these broader, durable functions, far more whaling and naval logbooks were archived after a voyage, and have

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of 1770. In two to four sentences for each event, Captain Thomas Nicolson provided accounts of the main topmast breaking in a squall off Block Island, Rhode Island (October 23, 1769); a crew member mistakenly casting off the wrong line and causing the ship's main boom to fall to the deck destroying the railing (June 1, 1770); and an account of a pot of tar being boiled down to pitch for sealing deck seams catching fire and splattering on the deck, setting the ship on fire "which by good luck we extinguished." (April 17, 1770). Thomas Nicolson, "Log of Brig *William*," 1769-1770. Rhode Island Historical Society.

<sup>65</sup> See, for example, Christopher Pinkham, "Log of Various Voyages, 1754-1763", Pre-Revolutionary Diaries at the Massachusetts Historical Society, 1635-1790.

<sup>66</sup> Whaling logbooks included detailed documentation of times and places where whales were caught, often including illustrations. For examples, see Michael P. Dyer, *O'er the Wide and Tractless Sea: Original Art of the Yankee Whale Hunt*, 1st edition (New Bedford Whaling Museum, 2017).

survived than merchant ship logs.<sup>67</sup> But the size of the ships, the size of the crews, the routes traveled, and the challenges faced were very different for commercial mariners, and especially so for those along the coast and islands.

### **Coastwise Characteristics**

Trade going on along the North American East Coast was largely the province of coastwise mariners operating in smaller, predominantly fore-and-aft rigged craft, whose greater maneuverability was critical among shoreline hazards. For inter-colonial mariners used to sailing along the East Coast of North America, voyages to the Caribbean islands were considered an extension of the coastal trade. The trips were shorter and manageable in smaller vessels with fewer crew. Consequently, coastwise and Caribbean trade meant less cost and overhead which in turn led to fewer barriers to entry. Shorter trips with less exposure to weather over distance meant lower risk as well.

But smaller crews meant that each member of the crew played an outsized role in terms of teamwork and the skillset required to sail the vessel. There was no room for landlubbers-in-training on a boat whose crew frequently consisted of fewer than a dozen crew navigating along hazardous reefs, shoals, and through tropical weather. Every person on board needed to at least be familiar with the basics of seamanship and sailing. A navy ship's crew, by contrast, included dozens of crew members in ancillary

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<sup>67</sup> For a survey of the available British Royal Navy logbooks, see Clive Wilkinson, *British Logbooks in UK Archives 17th-19th Centuries*, 2009 These are now also finding new interest among researchers seeking to use historical weather observations from ships to document historical trends in climate change.

responsibilities that didn't require a knowledge of the ship's operation, and included a level of redundancy in other tasks to account for losses in battle.<sup>68</sup>

Because of this standard, it appears that many mariners engaged in coastwise trade may have already served in lower responsibility positions on board oceanic transports with larger crews, or had developed their seamanship skills in other maritime industries and pursuits -- which were common among coastal communities. Ashley Bowen, for example, grew up along the coast, but first went to sea in a trans-Atlantic trading ship. He shifted to coastwise voyages, where he had a chance at command, and later declared at one point that he was specifically looking for a smuggler to work with.<sup>69</sup>

Though he was not known to have been involved in the smuggling trade, Joshua Hempstead of New London, Connecticut, recorded extensive use of small sailing craft for transporting cargo and goods among the small towns along the Connecticut and Long Island shorelines of Long Island Sound. Among the many boats he reported owning during his life, Hempstead acquired a whaleboat in 1717, which he used to extend his trade in rum to nearby communities. With the comparatively stable craft, he was able to negotiate the rough waters of the Race (the eastern entrance to Long Island Sound), carrying barrels of rum to Easthampton by himself.<sup>70</sup> In July, 1717, Hempstead loaded up

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<sup>68</sup> For survey of British navy crew organization, see Brian Lavery, *Nelson's Navy, Revised and Updated: The Ships, Men, and Organization, 1793-1815*, Revised and Updated edition (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 2012), Part IX, Shipboard Life.

<sup>69</sup> Smith, *The Journals of Ashley Bowen (1728-1813) of Marblehead*, 29.

<sup>70</sup> Joshua Hempstead, *Diary of Joshua Hempstead of New London, Connecticut: Covering a Period of Forty-Seven Years, from September 1711, to November, 1758; Containing*

the sloop *Plainfield*, in which he owned an interest, with 16,260 feet of planks from the mill at 4 Mile River and sailed for New York via Long Island Sound and through the treacherous Hell Gate – the confluence of the East River, Harlem River and Long Island Sound. Still considered treacherous today, Hell Gate was particularly dangerous in Hempstead's time when tidal waters still rushed over and around extensive rocky shoals that were not cleared from the passage until the mid-nineteenth century. In the city, Hempstead reported selling the timber and the sloop, and returned to New London in a pirogue – a small flat-bottomed sailing canoe presumably purchased in New York. Hempstead's small boat voyages are indicative of the nearshore seamanship skills and intimate knowledge of local conditions that were required of boatmen in the New England colonies. It is this type of skillset that merchants sought out and valued when attempted to surreptitiously land illicit cargo at unoccupied islands and up small rivers beyond the reach of customs or naval authorities.

The inter-colonial trader's smaller crew with a broader skillset also created changes in the shipboard culture. Although a clear-cut hierarchy still existed between captain, mate and crew, there were far fewer levels of command and less formal social structure than on any comparably sized naval ship. Crew of different ranks on a small ship were frequently forced to work together in comparable capacities through difficult circumstances in order to assure their mutual survival. On March 8, 1761, following an arduous voyage from

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*Valuable Genealogical Data Relating to Many New London Families, References to the Colonial Wars, to the Shipping and Other Matters of Interest Pertaining to the Town and the Times, with an Account of a Journey Made by the Writer from New London to Maryland* (New London County Historical Society, 1901), 67.

Rhode Island to Monte Christi on Hispaniola, Captain George Crosswall wrote a frustrated note to his vessel's owners, Redwood and Champlin, describing one such experience. After departing, Crosswall and his crew had found the ship's sails to be in abysmal shape, in need of constant repair throughout the voyage. At the height of a bad squall halfway through the trip, their mainsail split, leaving the vessel unable to maneuver in the rolling seas. Unlike a naval ship that would have had both replacement sails and a dedicated sailmaker with sailmaker's mates to conduct such repair work, Crosswall and his entire crew huddled together on the ship's quarterdeck in the pouring rain and wind to repair the tattered sail. While they were doing so, a large wave crashed over the middle section of the ship's deck, washing away the ship's boat and stove. Crosswall wrote to the ship's merchant owners that, "had that same sea broke in on the Quarter Deck where every soull of us wase att work on the mainsaill we must have all gone as our boatt went."<sup>71</sup>

Crosswall's experience demonstrates his reliance on the skills of his crew, the flattening of the heirarchy of the crew, and the importance of the condition of the vessel to the success of the voyage. His letter continues to note that, "So Gentlemen you see the bad consequence in send'g a vesell to sea without sails sufficient for when others wase crouding for a merket I wase lying rouling in the trough of the sea, amending our shaterd

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<sup>71</sup>George Crosswall to Redwood and Champlin, Monte Christo, March 8, 1761 as published in *Commerce of Rhode Island 1726-1800 Vol. 1*, 1; 1726–1774:87.

raggs. I shall gett some Canvass and putt my sails in good order before I leave this place."<sup>72</sup>

Mariners on smaller coastwise vessels did not necessarily see themselves in opposition to the ship's merchant owners or the ship's master. To the extent that they shared in profits of the journey, it was frequently via "privilege", the dedication of some amount of space in the hold for an amount of personal cargo they were free to sell. The brig *George*, sailing from Providence, Rhode Island to Surinam in the fall of 1764 had a crew of only eight: the captain, a mate, a cooper, and five seamen (noted in the portage bill as "sailers"). All of them had some privilege, ranging from 10 hogsheads for the captain to 2 barrels for seaman Ezekiel Durfey. However, Durfey's four fellow seamen were all getting twice as much or more than him. William Field(s) got 7 barrels; Richard Carson got 5 barrels, and William Pearce and Ruben Brown each got 4 barrels.<sup>73</sup> This disparity suggests that each "sailer", though uniform in rank, brought a different level of skill, experience or value to the vessel, and was recognized differently through this bonus system.

The profits derived from privilege depended on the cargo bought and sold by the individual crew member to fill his space. Privilege was not a share of cargo being bought or sold by the merchant or the captain. It was an individual opportunity, but success relied on the individual mariner's initiative in purchasing, securing and later selling his

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<sup>72</sup>George Crosswall to Redwood and Champlin, Monte Christo, March 8, 1761 as published in *Commerce of Rhode Island 1726-1800 Vol. 1*, 1; 1726–1774:88.

<sup>73</sup>Nicholas Brown, "Portage Bill Brig George" (March 1765), Box 469 Folder 1, Nicholas and John Brown Co. Archive, John Carter Brown Library.

own cargo. Privilege was also not the primary compensation for service. All mariners still received a wage, although some sailors were paid partially in kind in commodities. John Bannister recorded payments to his mariners that were in combinations of both cash and rum.<sup>74</sup> Crew were still beholden to the ship's captain, and captains were beholden to the ship's merchant owners in the cases where the vessel was not being captained by its merchant owner. As Crosswall discovered, the success of a voyage depended on the competent management of the vessel's ownership. As such, mariners frequently stuck with a ship's master or owners over numerous voyages, if they were appropriately compensated and had good working conditions.

Working for a merchant who owned several ships, some captains attained their position by rising up through the ranks within the organization, and the organization saw value in that. The Nicholas Brown company of Rhode Island owned several vessels engaged in the West Indies trade, and there are indications of several crew members who started as mates or deckhands then rose to the rank of captain. Peter Ritto, for example, worked for the Nicholas Brown company through several trips between Dutch Surinam and Boston, largely smuggling molasses. After serving as a mate on the sloop *Nancy*, Ritto was assigned as Master of the the *Flying Fish*, returning to Surinam. On that voyage he had been ordered to make contact with Abraham Whipple, a longtime captain and partner with the Browns. Ritto was already developing a familiarity with the Surinam trading partners, and with Whipple's help, he was able to continue gaining more experience with

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<sup>74</sup>Marian Mathison Desrosiers, *John Banister of Newport: The Life and Accounts of a Colonial Merchant* (Jefferson, North Carolina: McFarland & Company, Inc., Publishers, 2017), 129–30.

illicit trading partners that was valuable to the firm. Brown's captains often acted largely on their own accord in terms of making buying and selling decisions abroad on behalf of the firm, making Ritto's rise a significant indication of trust.<sup>75</sup>

Others carried their reputation with them from merchant to merchant, and merchants sought out successful masters. Masters in turn sought out competent crew, particularly those serving as mates. Assigned to different watches over a 24-hour period, the mates were relied upon by the captain for safe navigation and operation of the vessel while he was sleeping or engaged in other tasks. Good mates were highly valued, but also moved around within a merchant's fleet. Merchants and captains who hired incompetent or unruly mates suffered for it.

The loss of any crew members underway, either from disease, injury or falling overboard, could mean losing a critical component to the voyage's success and left the captain trying to replace crew in foreign ports. Benjamin Wright, the long-time associate and Jamaica agent for Newport, Rhode Island, merchant Aaron Lopez, appeared to have had a particularly difficult time with crewing of Lopez's ships in the West Indies in 1771.<sup>76</sup> Writing to Lopez, Wright described a crewing dispute and hiring decisions that were having a disastrous trickle-down effect on the voyage's success. The first mate left the ship, apparently following a dispute with the captain, and took two sailors with him. In

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<sup>75</sup>James Blaine Hedges, *The Browns of Providence Plantations*, vol. 1 (Providence: Brown University Press, 1968), 28.

<sup>76</sup>For more on the relationship between Wright and Lopez, see Stanley F. Chyet, "Aaron Lopez: A Study in Buenafama," *American Jewish Historical Quarterly* 52, no. 4 (1963): 301.



other circumstances, this may have been an opportunity for the second mate to rise up into the role, however, as Wright wrote, "I can but express my Surprize that you and Capt. Buckly should ship a Second Mate which doth not understand Navigation, which is the case as I am inform'd, and how I shall provide a Mate is more than I can at present advise you as yet." Wright predicament was further compounded by that fact that, "London Ships offer Sixteen Guineas for Seamen for the Run. Should I be drove to that Extremity it will reduce the freight Bill much."<sup>77</sup>

Wright's predicament illuminates the control mariners were able to exert over their professional fates. It is likely that Wright's departing first mate, who was never referred to by name, had already secured a position on another vessel departing Jamaica -- possibly earning the higher pay rate that Wright referenced for joining the voyage to London instead of returning to North America. There certainly may have been disadvantages to such an approach depending on his personal situation. He'd have a longer voyage to undertake, and the need to find a berth on a return voyage, if he, in fact, had reason or desire to return to Rhode Island. Regardless of his choice, that fact that he had a choice - that he was able to jump ship in Jamaica and presumably find other work (based on the two others that joined him) - suggests that while company men existed, when it wasn't working out, there was an open market for seeking alternative employment. The mariner was a professional for hire, willing and able to leverage the competition for his services. The ability to dictate terms would have been even more

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<sup>77</sup> Benjamin Wright to Aaron Lopez, April 28, 1771, as published in *Commerce of Rhode Island 1726-1800 Vol. 1*, 1; 1726-1774:365.

valuable to mariners participating in illicit trades, if they knew they could slide in and out of those opportunities as necessity or circumstances dictated.

Thus, it was incumbent on the vessel's management to create dependable crew relationships and demonstrate the value of service, competence and loyalty. For Wright, replacing Captain Buckley's first mate, meant doing a crew shuffle among company vessels, while still defending his hiring decisions to Lopez back in Newport. After the mate on the schooner departed, Wright transferred the mate from a company brig under the command of a Captain Ambrose, to the schooner and advanced payment to another mate, William Keen, to become a mate on the company's brig. Keen, who was from Newport, Rhode Island, where the brig was bound, appears to have recognized Wright's dire, immediate need and leveraged it to his advantage, securing 16 pounds 2 shilling Jamaican currency as an advance for taking the position. In writing to Lopez on June 2, 1770, to explain the circumstances, Wright bemoaned, "I have been under the disagreeable necessity of advancing considerable... ", however he assured Lopez that Keen would remain in Lopez' employ once the brig reached Newport, in order to work off the advance. Why Wright chose to take Ambrose's mate rather than simply taking Keen as his own remains unexplained in Wright's correspondence, though Wright implied a lack of confidence in Ambrose's abilities to handle the return trip without the backup of a solid mate. "I did not think it safe to send the Brig home with Ambrose alone for reasons best none (known) to myself," Wright wrote. In the same letter, Wright also reported showing care for other employees, advancing a dollar to a seaman named Ephraim Smith, and giving a hogshead of molasses to the carpenter, "he being a faithful

servant", who had been too busy working throughout the port stop to secure his own allowance of cargo that would fulfill his privilege.<sup>78</sup>

Wright's various efforts to stabilize the crews of both vessels, indicate the complex employer-employee relationships that were at play on even small coastwise brigs and schooners in the West Indies, and the importance of service and competence. Wright's negotiations with both Keen, Smith and the carpenter point to a value system in which professionalism and loyalty to the firm's vessels was prized by the owners, and that working relationships and pay mattered to the mariner. This shared space of negotiation indicates the degree to which mariners were able to exert individual professional agency. Wright was clearly aware of the possibility of losing crew and recognized that the circumstances of the Jamaican market for mariners heading to London could put him in a tight situation. Similarly, it is clear that mariners like Keen and the departing mate recognized their own negotiating power and sought to leverage their position to get the pay and other benefits they wanted.

These mariners were not acting as a collective to obtain these results, however. Each mariner in this negotiation had a different value to offer and made a unique individual choice to seek out compensation and benefits based on his personal professional value on a stage of global options. Wright and Lopez, in turn, made individual arrangements and suffered when the partnership chose or acted poorly. Wright's predicament may have been quite simplified if Buckley had managed to mollify the outgoing crew, or if

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<sup>78</sup>Benjamin Wright to Aaron Lopez, June 2, 1770, as published in *Commerce of Rhode Island 1726-1800 Vol. 1*, 1; 1726–1774:330–31.

Ambrose's second mate knew navigation, or if Ambrose himself had been competent to sail with a reduced crew. Had the carpenter felt neglected and chose to leave as well, Wright's predicament could have been even worse.

The contingencies in Wright's predicament reflect professional decisions involving his negotiations with skilled individuals on whom he was dependent for the safety and success of his business. And it is clear from the mariners' decisions and negotiating stances that those with skills recognized their value and counted it in their negotiations. That Wright was having these conversations in Jamaica also indicates the degree to which mariners as professionals realized the portability of their skillset. In contrast with waterfront workers whose livelihood depended on demand at a fixed location, mariners could and did transfer jobs at various locations -- including the ports of the West Indies. Also notable from this and other hiring examples in the islands is that it defies the popular perceptions of strict enforcement of ship's articles as a contract backed up by corporal punishment. As noted previously, the necessary hierarchy and enforcement mechanisms for such a system were not feasible on the smaller coastwise vessels of the Caribbean-North American trade.

### **Merchant-Mariner Relationships**

Opportunities for individual professional autonomy like that displayed by Wright's crew did not however discount the possibility of crew dedication to one captain or merchant firm. Loyalty to the firm and the expectation of longer term reward becomes more significant when crew are carrying contraband, seeking to avoid authorities, or defending against threats to their employment situation. This became the case in the summer of

1772, when the British schooner HMS *Gaspee* arrived in Narragansett Bay to enforce the British Navigation Acts by intercepting colonial merchant ships suspected of smuggling.

When the *Gaspee* attempted to stop the packet sloop *Hannah*, sailing from Newport to Providence, the *Hannah's* captain, Benjamin Lindsey, refused to be boarded. Instead, Lindsey laid on sail and made for Providence. The *Gaspee* gave chase, but Lindsey was intimately familiar with Narragansett Bay and the Providence River. Feigning a change in course, Lindsey maneuvered around a shoal off Namquid Point and lured the pursuing *Gaspee* up onto the shallow bank where she promptly ran aground.<sup>79</sup> When the *Hannah* reached Providence, word spread about the grounded British vessel and a group of locals quickly organized to raid the ship before it could free itself from the shoal with the incoming tide. While still aground on the shoal, the *Gaspee* was burned to the waterline during the night by a group of colonists that had rowed out in longboats.

Historiography of this incident has tended to focus on its meaning in the context of events leading up to the Revolution. That meaning has shifted in more recent studies from depictions of an outright revolt against oppressive colonial authorities toward an interpretations that see the incident and its aftermath as an imperial intrusion on the negotiated authority between colonists and customs agents – an interpretation that Peter

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<sup>79</sup> Firsthand account of Col. Ephraim Bowen of the *Gaspee's* crew, August 29. 1839. As published in William Read Staples, *The Documentary History of the Destruction of the Gaspee* (Knowles, Vose, and Anthony, 1845), 8.

Messer has referred to as a “vernacular vision of empire.”<sup>80</sup> In concert with this shift, earlier historical interpretation of the event that tended to frame the colonial arsonists as a populist mob mobilized in anger from the taverns of Providence has given way to the recognition that invested merchants were among the group that set out to sink the *Gaspee*.<sup>81</sup> Leading the attack was Abraham Whipple, a West Indies and coastal ship captain who had been the lead captain for Providence merchant John Brown and his family. Brown himself was also on board. The Browns were notorious as merchants engaged in the smuggling trade and Whipple was the captain who had brought much of the Browns' contraband into Rhode Island in 1760s. With him was Paul Allen, another captain in the employ of the Browns. Leading another longboat from Bristol was Simeon Potter, a captain with a reputation for violence who was actively involved in the slave trade.<sup>82</sup>

The *Gaspee* raiders included these and other maritime men who made their living on the water, knew the region's coastline intimately and had made regular use of that knowledge to surreptitiously land contraband cargoes on behalf of the merchants they worked for. Their decision to row out and rid themselves of the *Gaspee* was a defense of their income earned as smugglers, and a defense of the merchant employers who provided those opportunities.

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<sup>80</sup> Peter C. Messer, “A Most Insulting Violation: The Burning of the HMS ‘Gaspee’ and the Delaying of the American Revolution,” *The New England Quarterly* 88, no. 4 (2015): 584.

<sup>81</sup> Messer, 591.

<sup>82</sup> William Read Staples, *The Documentary History of the Destruction of the Gaspee*, 17.

In the process, mariners like those involved in the *Gaspee* burning were demonstrating a form of loyalty that was not bound to national, imperial or monarchical identity, but was also not a form of ideological opposition. Their actions as professional mariners reflected a trans-national attitude that valued the professional opportunity over mercantilist patriotism. This is not to say that mariners did not also see themselves through the lens of country, but they clearly were able to divorce that aspect of their identity from their roles as mariners engaged in trade. They were willing to support governments where it supported their interests, and willing to overlook any philosophical conflict in defying national governments where it did not support their interests. North America's commercial mariners were as a group neither ideological activists nor hedonists in pursuit of freedom from society's dictates. In particular, the coastwise mariners trading in the Caribbean were part of a profession whose actual work occurred largely outside the view of the general public.

### **Perceptions of Criminality**

Smuggling in violation of the navigation acts was, by definition, a violation of the law, and much of the history of the coastwise trade in the British colonies has been viewed through the lens of legal authority and its opposition. But neither colonial communities in North America, nor the mariners working in the trade necessarily viewed the activity as criminal.

Perceptions of criminality by both the individual and the society shaped the mariners' view of themselves as well as their communities' views of them and their business. As discussed, the economic and operational dynamics of the American and West Indian

colonies made the trade a viable and beneficial pursuit for both smugglers and consumers and consequently was often widely supported.<sup>83</sup> Social acceptance of smuggling went beyond a begrudging acceptance of economic necessity. Smuggling may have been illegal, but it didn't make you a criminal.

Nor, however, was it necessarily perceived as an overt and intentional rejection of imperial authority. This proposition is reinforced by the fact that smuggling did not end with the American Revolution, but continued to be extensive among American merchants and mariners through the War of 1812.<sup>84</sup>

The challenges of criminalizing trade laws may have been further compounded by a deeper sense that, as a maritime pursuit, ocean trade was by its nature and tradition beyond the reach of government and society's social frameworks for law and order. Guy Chet has argued that piracy as well as smuggling were not violations of accepted social norms, but rather that government's attempt to impose a new legal regime over older customs and traditions of seagoing trade was itself the violation of accepted norms.<sup>85</sup>

That argument provides a framework for Chet's explanations of public opposition to the

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<sup>83</sup> Thomas Truxes takes up this theme, pointing out that long established patterns of neglect by the British to enforce the law left merchants and mariners feeling as if they were “play[ing] by the rules as they understood them.” Truxes, *Defying Empire*, 204.

<sup>84</sup> Enforcement of Thomas Jefferson's embargo was a challenge for the early U.S. customs authorities, but smuggling that benefitted specific local economies, such as that along the Maine-Canada border continued as well. See Gautham Rao, *National Duties* (Chicago: University Of Chicago Press, 2016), Chapter Five; Smith, *Borderland Smuggling*.

<sup>85</sup> Guy Chet, *The Ocean Is a Wilderness: Atlantic Piracy and the Limits of State Authority, 1688-1856* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2014), xii.



enforcement authorities, but it also resonates with the depiction of mariners as internationally operating professionals, who were able to divorce their activities at sea from their loyalties ashore.

Moreover, neither the British nor the later U.S. customs service and customs houses, were exerting a unilateral authority over trade. Despite the establishment of the British customs service and the vice-admiralty courts, customs officials were not able to rigidly enforce rules and assert authority in an environment where that authority could not be backed up with force and where the rules failed to serve the community they were being enforced upon. Smugglers benefited from the fact that in many districts, customs enforcement cases were heard by local common-law courts rather than vice-admiralty courts. The result was that even if a collector attempted to pursue a case, it would be heard by a jury of local, like-minded traders who were highly unlikely to decide against smugglers. Even if the case went to a vice-admiralty court, colonial authorities were frequently preventing fines and fees from being collected by the admiralty courts and were even authorizing fines against collectors who took shipmasters to the admiralty court.<sup>86</sup>

Seemingly spontaneous mobs of people acting in opposition to enforcement efforts are reported in some cases, but details of the accounts suggest that at least some of them were the organized responses of captains who could quickly call upon a network of labor to dispense of a cargo before customs collectors could condemn it. In October, 1724, for

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<sup>86</sup>Barrow, *Trade and Empire*, 88.

instance, the ship *Fame* arrived in Philadelphia from Holland, ostensibly to bring in several families who planned to settle in the area. But the ship also had a large mixed load of cargo from Holland, East Indies goods, and European manufactured items totaling £20,000. The local customs collector seized the ship and placed four men on it as guards. During the night, however, an organized group overpowered the guards, cut the ship loose and floated it downriver from the city to the village of Newcastle, where the contraband cargo was unloaded.<sup>87</sup> The collector notified the lieutenant governor of the action; when the lieutenant governor arrived there two days later, the merchant was on board and asserted politely that his paperwork was in order. This particular incident later led to a fierce political debate between the Lt. Governor and the collector over how the case was handled, but more significantly, it raised questions about the supposed mob response. The complicit involvement of the merchant and the crisp manner in which contraband cargo was neatly disposed of suggests it was not some randomly assembled rabble-rousing crowd that rescued the *Fame*, but rather a group of professional mariners and longshoremen experienced with just such operations and working in the employ of the ship's merchant owner.

Although, by its very nature, mariners' work took them from their towns for extended periods, the communities still had a vested interest in locals engaged in the trade. As Barry Levy argues in *Town Born*, this was often a codified aspect of the political economy of the town, with constraints on both shipbuilding and crews as local labor.<sup>88</sup>

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<sup>87</sup>Barrow, *Trade and Empire* 91–92.

<sup>88</sup>Levy, *Town Born*, chap. 2.

These depictions begin to help erode the stereotype of the mariner as an outsider, and simultaneously give rise to the perception of the mariner as a member of the community with at least some concern and vested interest in community perceptions of law and criminality. As Daniel Vickers noted in *Young Men and the Sea*, connections to community were stronger among mariners in the seventeenth and eighteenth century than the more stereotypically depicted nineteenth century of Melville and Dana, when urbanization and industrialization had diluted the sense of community on the working waterfront of the coastal towns, and most sailors were outsiders from elsewhere.<sup>89</sup>

Thus, local mariners working on coastwise trading vessels leveraged a dual identity as both international trader as well as rooted local resident. Their knowledge of specific routes and reliability as a local quantity allowed them to develop long-term employment relationships with specific merchants/shipowners in which they could move up the ranks into higher positions of greater authority. As they did so, their employers became more and more reliant on the mariners' skills and knowledge to successfully prosecute the smuggling trade. The mariners, in turn, trusted that merchants would not only provide a wage, but offer individual opportunities to participate in the success of the trade through "privilege" shares of cargo, and generally assured the mariners that in the event they were caught, the merchant would do his best to secure the release of the ship and cargo, hopefully insuring the future of the mariners themselves in the process. In this light, it is possible to consider these relationships in the context of traditional patronage. In *King and People of Massachusetts*, Richard Bushman argues that one reason for the

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<sup>89</sup>Vickers and Walsh, *Young Men and the Sea*, 247.

Revolution was the collapse of the traditional systems of patronage that had marked the monarchical society. The North American colonies, Bushman wrote, were a monarchical culture without the underpinnings of a monarchical society in which there was an hierarchy of dependencies.<sup>90</sup> Bushman argued that the pursuit of free trade and the willful defiance of customs authorities represented a rejection of traditional monarchical arrangements.

While many captains and mariners demonstrated a professional agency in the pursuit of free trade, the mariners who stuck with one firm developed a form of micro patronage in which they came to rely on the merchant and his profile in the community for their own continued social and economic status. Patronage still existed, but was evolving into a new trade-centric model in which the merchants themselves were becoming the social authority whom their steady employees relied on. That relationship reinforced the motivation to support the merchants' interests when called upon to do so as in the cases of *Gaspee* and *Fame*.

The paradox of mariners as internationally operating professionals who were still connected to their communities is likewise reflected in the broader relationships mariners and the communities had with imperial authority over international and intercolonial trade. In essence, these merchants advocated for and practiced (legally or not) a form of free trade across international borders, while the mariners working for them pursued these voyages with a professional duty to their often-local employers that also

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<sup>90</sup>Richard L. Bushman, *King and People in Provincial Massachusetts* (Univ of North Carolina Pr, 1992), 85.

transcended a sense of duty to the crown. Not only would those mariners have been unlikely to consider themselves criminals; both they and their communities were more likely to consider strong enforcement authorities to be criminal. Guy Chet began to examine the social stature of smuggling in *The Ocean is a Wilderness*, although his primary focus was on the limits of state authority at sea. Chet argued that efforts to create and enforce smuggling and piracy laws represented a shift away from traditional attitudes about commerce at sea toward the development of the new concept of a nation-state. Chet argues that in this context, smuggling enforcement authorities could be seen as a form of state-sponsored piracy infringing on traditional trade.<sup>91</sup> This position is backed up by Thomas Truxes, whose central theme in *Defying Empire* is the citywide conspiracy to derail smuggling enforcement in New York.<sup>92</sup> To illustrate the conviction of the public support for this conspiracy, Truxes showcases the dismal fate of George Spencer, the merchant who unsuccessfully sought to inform on the smuggling merchants he was competing with in New York, but found himself imprisoned instead.

If this was the sentiment toward merchants, who, as indicated, were considered the most responsible for their vessels' conduct, then certainly the ships' crews were also not considered criminals by the members of the communities. Like Spencer, in at least one case, a ship's crew were beaten by a public mob after testifying against their smuggling employer in court.<sup>93</sup>

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<sup>91</sup> Chet, *The Ocean Is a Wilderness*, 42.

<sup>92</sup>Truxes, *Defying Empire*, 2.

<sup>93</sup>Barrow, *Trade and Empire*, 89.

## CHAPTER 3

### SKILLS AND TOOLS OF THE SMUGGLING MARINER

In order to position smuggling mariners as uniquely qualified and skilled professionals, we must assess the nature of the skills and tools used by them. In doing so, this dissertation situates the history of illicit colonial trade alongside the histories of advances in marine navigation, vessel and rig design, and the rise of shipbuilding in British North America.

Smugglers navigating along the North American coast and the Caribbean uniquely benefitted from a combination of advances and developments in navigation.

Improvement in methods, education, and information distribution provided mariners with access to the knowledge needed to reach diverse destinations. At the same time, the evolution of naval architecture and rig design, and the rise of shipbuilding in the North American colonies provided coastwise mariners with more maneuverable vessels that were capable of safely operating with fewer crew. This combination of skills, information and equipment formed the smuggler's toolkit, the application of which is the definition of seamanship.

Unfortunately, the role of seamanship tends to be neglected in broader maritime historiography, or glossed over in a flat periodization of "the age of sail".<sup>94</sup> The histories

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<sup>94</sup> Although references to the "Age of Sail" are myriad throughout literature, popular culture, historical study and social sciences, the term is rarely given any clear definition or boundary beyond being used to evoke a sense of a more discrete period. See for example, the diverse periods considered in the essays collected in *The Market for Seamen*

of vessel and rigging evolution and the concurrent development of navigation methods have broadly focused on underpinning theoretical advances, while neglecting the trickle-down impacts of that progress on ships and sailors. Helped by Enlightenment-era advances in science and astronomy, improvements in navigation and cartography contributed to better navigational tools and methods that helped improve the success levels of individual voyages. Improved application of hydrodynamic principles created sleeker hulls with improved performance and reliability. At the same time, mariners' skillsets were becoming more sophisticated and professional, driven by adaptation to these newer tools and methods. But just because something was possible didn't necessarily make it practical in all situations. Sailors selectively adopted new technology and methods over time, based on the individual demands of their geographical operating areas.<sup>95</sup> Myriad political and economic factors contribute to the desire for international

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*in the Age of Sail* (Liverpool University Press, 1994). However, considered through a military lens, it may be bounded by the Battle of Lepanto in 1571, the last major conflict of oared galleys, and the Battle of Hampton Roads in 1862 when a steam-powered ironclad defeated two sailing ships, or as the beginning of fleet line tactics in 1650 to the end of sailing fleet warfare in 1815. See John Harland, *Seamanship in the Age of Sail: An Account of the Shiphandling of the Sailing Man-of-War 1600-1860, Based on Contemporary Sources* (Annapolis, Md: Naval Institute Press, 2016); or Brian Tunstall, *Naval Warfare in the Age of Sail: The Evolution of Fighting Tactics, 1650-1815*, ed. Nicholas Tracy (Edison, N.J.: Wellfleet Press, 2001).

<sup>95</sup> For example, despite the creation of means of determining longitude in the 1760s, logbooks and correspondence suggest that coastwise and Caribbean traders still relied on estimates of longitude derived from dead reckoning into the 19th century. Matthew MacKenzie argues that it was not until trade moved more aggressively into the Pacific that widespread use of astronomical determinations of longitude were adopted. Matthew McKenzie, "Vocational Science And The Politics of Independence: The Boston Marine Society, 1754-1812" (PhD diss., University of New Hampshire, 2003), 207.

trade, but throughout the long eighteenth century, trade was made possible by the capability of mariners and their vessels to deliver on these desires.

Mariners' growing sophistication, however, was not reflected in the public perception of the mariner. Rather than developing a reputation as a profession or a craft, mariners and their occupation became both infantilized and romanticized.<sup>96</sup> This is, in part, the caricature of Jolly Jack Tar, the carefree, globetrotting sailor who was always drunk in port and unable to adapt to life ashore. The social historiography of mariners leans on these contemporary public perceptions of the mariner in port for its analysis.<sup>97</sup> As noted in Chapter 2, this is an understandable constraint, in that, once the commercial mariner actually went to sea, there were far fewer records created underway to account for his nature, performance or ability. But in the process, the merchant mariner has become confused with other waterfront workers, or with naval sailors -- neither of whom serve as adequate proxies for commercial mariners, particularly the coastwise commercial mariners who conducted the bulk of the smuggling between the North American colonies

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<sup>96</sup> For an assessment of contemporary popular depictions of American mariners, see Paul A. Gilje, *To Swear like a Sailor: Maritime Culture in America, 1750-1850*, Reprint edition (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2016), Chapter 7, Tar Stained Images; For an analysis of popular British depictions of British mariners, see Juliann Reineke, "Three Sheets to the Wind: The Jolly Jack Tar and Eighteenth-Century British Masculinity" (Dissertation, Carnegie Mellon University, 2018).

<sup>97</sup> Gilje, *Liberty on the Waterfront*, Chapter 1, "The Sweets of Liberty"; Jesse Lemisch, *Jack Tar vs. John Bull: The Role of New York's Seamen in Precipitating the Revolution*, 1 edition (New York: Routledge, 1997), Chapter 3, "Jack Tar on the Beach: The Birth of the Mob."



and the West Indies in the mid-eighteenth century.<sup>98</sup> While commercial mariners occasionally shifted in and out of the navy, the nature of the work underway as well as the shipboard culture and hierarchy were very different. Merchants staffing a commercial ship had fewer resources or need to man large numbers of guns and had an interest in keeping operating costs low by manning ships with the minimum number of crew needed. In contrast, naval vessels needed to man guns while still swiftly adjusting sails underway to maneuver in battle, as well as provide a level of redundancy for possible losses - all of which meant manning ships with much larger crews.<sup>99</sup> As previously noted, commercial reliance on fewer men meant that it was more important for each one of them to have a well-rounded seamanship skill set. In contrast, the discrete divisions of labor and more focused task assignments of the navy allowed for less individually proficient workers to find a role.

These distinctions are dramatically amplified when one begins to compare these other maritime jobs with the coastwise colonial mariner. Sailing smaller vessels through more hazardous terrain with a barebones crew, these captains and sailors benefited from improvements in cartography and naval architecture, spread through networks of

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<sup>98</sup> On waterfront workers and the revolution, see Benjamin L Carp, *Rebels Rising: Cities and the American Revolution* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2007); Carl Bridenbaugh, *Cities in Revolt* (Alfred a Knopf Inc, 1955).

<sup>99</sup> On navy crews, see N. A. M Rodger, *The Wooden World: An Anatomy of the Georgian Navy* (New York: Norton, 1996); Lavery, *Nelson's Navy, Revised and Updated*.

vocational knowledge like marine societies which bridged the gap between individual training relationships and elite institutions of academic knowledge.<sup>100</sup>

This knowledge and the path to acquiring it gave the merchant mariner an agency more commonly associated with a professional class. As we have seen, contrary to depictions of being at the mercy of shipowners, competent mariners set their own conditions, negotiating for pay, seeking better opportunities when they were unhappy and making individual decisions about the voyages and vessels they were willing to work with. From the smuggling perspective, this characterization is an important recognition that mariners working on vessels that were engaged in smuggling operations knew what they were getting into and made conscious decisions to participate. Bolstered by an increasingly sophisticated set of skills and tools, these mariners and their choices were the final expression of a much larger history of scientific development in navigation and naval architecture.

### **Navigational Methods: Coastal Piloting and Ocean Navigation**

Navigation was one of the most significant areas for technological advancement in the maritime industry in the eighteenth century. Both techniques and tools improved dramatically in two separate areas of navigation: method-based offshore navigation, and empirically based coastal piloting. By necessity, the merchant mariners of British North

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<sup>100</sup> The Boston Marine Society was particularly active in this. William A. Baker, *A History of the Boston Marine Society, 1742-1967*, First Edition edition (Boston Marine Society, 1968); McKenzie, “Vocational Science And The Politics of Independence: The Boston Marine Society, 1754-1812.”

America engaging in coastwise inter-colonial trade and trade with the West Indies merged these two techniques and made particular use of that merger in the pursuit of smuggling. Methodological navigation was critical to long passages offshore out of sight of land, while coastal piloting was required to maneuver inshore. Piloting in a broad array of coastlines along North America and the Caribbean demanded a specific knowledge of the coastline that mariners developed through experience and through the use of charts and coast pilots, whose publication accelerated in the eighteenth century.

Navigational methods and technology advanced dramatically during the long eighteenth century, but in many ways served as a culmination of imperial patterns that began in the late-fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries. These origins are significant in that they mark the division between offshore navigation methods and coastal piloting knowledge – two branches necessarily recombined by smuggling coastwise mariners. The European discovery of the Americas as well as the discovery of a maritime route eastward around Africa and across the Indian Ocean allowed the establishment of regular trans-oceanic trading routes by Europeans in the Atlantic and Indian Oceans. For these to become viable ongoing enterprises however, new improvements were required in a navigational science that was quite different from the skills that had dominated navigation within the Mediterranean and along the coastlines of Europe for thousands of years before that. There, intimate knowledge of local landmarks and the hazards between them had allowed relatively reliable point-to-point travel in good visibility. That largely memorized knowledge of specific areas was accrued through extensive experience, beginning under

the guidance of someone else who also knew the region.<sup>101</sup> For short distances beyond the sight of land or in poor visibility, a ship's course could be maintained with a magnetic compass, first invented in the twelfth century, and a general sense of how long and how fast the vessel had been sailing relative to an expected landfall.<sup>102</sup> But reliable voyaging over long distances of open ocean demanded a means of tracking position and progress in the absence of visible landmarks.

The solution was to track one's position and progress relative to an artificial grid of latitude and longitude imposed upon a nautical chart or map of the ocean. Concepts of latitude and longitude had long been understood, but practical application of them by mariners on the difficult platform of a rolling ship at sea was another matter. Several iterations of tools were developed in the second half of the sixteenth century to determine latitude at sea by measuring the height of either Polaris or the sun above the horizon. Determination of latitude could provide the mariner with a rough estimate of his position north and south, but determining position east or west continued to be a challenge into the eighteenth century. The log and line, or chip log, developed in the late-sixteenth century provided mariners with a speedometer that could be used to gauge how far a ship had

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<sup>101</sup> See Gillian Hutchinson, *Medieval Ships and Shipping* (Rutherford: Fairleigh Dickinson Univ Press, 1994), Chapter 10: "Pilotage and Navigation"; George F. Hourani and John Carswell, *Arab Seafaring: In the Indian Ocean in Ancient and Early Medieval Times*, Expanded edition with a New introduction, notes, and bibliography by John Carswell edition (Princeton, N.J: Princeton University Press, 1995), Chapter 1: "Trade Routes in the Pre-Islamic Era".

<sup>102</sup> W. E May, "The History of the Magnetic Compass," *Mariner's Mirror* 38, no. 3 (August 1952); Gillian Hutchinson, *Medieval Ships and Shipping* (Rutherford: Fairleigh Dickinson Univ Press, 1994), Chapter 10: "Pilotage and Navigation".

traveled over a given period of time, allowing sailors to track their progress in any direction, based on the compass course being steered.<sup>103</sup>

Deduced reckoning--the method of tracking position through calculations of distance traveled based on speed over time and direction traveled by compass--remains a fundamental technique for navigation even today, but it has limitations. It fails to account for the impacts of ocean currents on either the direction or distance traveled. Similarly, it fails to account for leeway, the sideways slipping of a vessel sailing across the wind. These factors cause errors in the final position as determined by dead reckoning, and those errors continue to accrue the longer that a vessel relies on the method without being able to correct it through another source of information. Over the course of a couple days, this may not be very much, but over the weeks of a trans-oceanic voyage, the difference between one's plotted position and actual location could easily be tens or hundreds of miles.<sup>104</sup>

To mitigate the impacts of this built-in error, offshore mariners resorted to a navigational technique known as "plane sailing", which used a simple trigonometric calculation to estimate latitude and longitude based on the direction and distance traveled according to the log.<sup>105</sup> By using the daily ability to determine latitude at local noon, a ship's captain could generally calculate how far north or south he had had gone over the previous day,

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<sup>103</sup> Nathaniel Bowditch, *American Practical Navigator*, vol. 1 (Defense Mapping Agency, 1984), 11.

<sup>104</sup> Bowditch, 1:260–69.

<sup>105</sup> D. W. Waters, *The Art of Navigation in England in Elizabethan and Early Stuart Times* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1958), 350–52.

and refine his estimated location. The ability to determine latitude more accurately than longitude made it possible for a ship approaching shore or rounding a point of land to hold to a known line of latitude that was free of hazards and had a landfall whose characteristics the mariner would recognize. This was obviously inefficient, however, and still rife with disastrous room for error. In 1707, Sir Clowdisley Shovel's Royal Navy fleet was decimated when, returning from Gibraltar, they failed to accurately estimate the approach to the English Channel and were run up on the Scilly Rocks at the south end of England. Four ships sank with a loss of nearly 2,000 men, including Shovel. Modern analysis of the 35 different logs being kept by midshipmen and officers in the fleet indicated that not only did they vary widely in their estimate of the fleet's longitude but also its latitude, suggesting that there were significant errors in both their observations and their dead reckoning.<sup>106</sup>

It is into this operational environment that both North American and European ships were beginning to dramatically ramp up their trade with and within the West Indies. While a voyage across the Atlantic or from North America to the Caribbean was perhaps not as potentially hazardous or long as a voyage from western Europe to the East Indies, the exponentially rising number of these Atlantic voyages being undertaken drove up the likelihood of losses, and contributed to the need for better navigational knowledge.

Spurred on by prize money from the British Crown, the quest to invent a means of calculating longitude reliably at sea has been celebrated as one of the central scientific

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<sup>106</sup>W. E May, "The Last Voyage of Sir Clowdisley Shovel," *Journal of the Institute of Navigation* 13, no. 3 (July 1960): 324–32.

pursuits of the eighteenth century, but it did not occur in a vacuum.<sup>107</sup> Demands of imperial trade drove the need for better navigation, among other things, but the ensuing possible solutions occurred in the context of Enlightenment approaches to science and nature. The ongoing discoveries of new lands and peoples had exposed natural philosophers to a broader world that was difficult or impossible to reconcile within prevailing Christian paradigms of creation and they challenged existing theories of natural science. At the same time, the desire to capitalize on new resources in newly discovered areas propelled research around the globe.<sup>108</sup>

Together these factors contributed to more detailed understanding of navigational astronomy and the development of improved methods of determining latitude as well as advances in oceanographic research and understanding. Many of the most well-known exploring missions and expeditions had diverse objectives that were, at once, scientific, political, and economic. James Cook's voyages to the South Pacific, for example, served a means of laying claim to new territory, and discovering the value of that territory, while also pursuing scientific projects, that had both pure research goals and practical implications for maritime trade and naval operations.<sup>109</sup> On his voyage, in 1769, Cook

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<sup>107</sup> See Richard Dunn and Rebekah Higgitt, *Ships, Clocks, and Stars: The Quest for Longitude* (Harper Collins, 2014); Eric G. Forbes, *The Birth Of Scientific Navigation: The Solving In The 18th Century Of The Problem Of Finding Longitude At Sea* (Greenwich, London: National Maritime Museum, 1974).

<sup>108</sup>For relationships between scientific development and imperial expansion and the shifting historiography of this phenomenon, see James Delbourgo and Nicholas Dew, *Science and Empire in the Atlantic World* (New York: Routledge, 2008).

<sup>109</sup> For the relationship between Cook's voyages and imperial expansion, see Brian Richardson, *Longitude and Empire: How Captain Cook's Voyages Changed the World*,

went to Tahiti to observe the transit of Venus across the face of the sun. Measuring and timing this astronomical phenomenon was considered a possible means of establishing the astronomical unit as a measurement of distance in astronomy, but also served the dual ambition of serving as a means of determining longitude.<sup>110</sup>

Like many similar proposals, this one proved to be too delicate for practical application on ships. Eventually two solutions to determining longitude at sea presented themselves, but both had substantive drawbacks that prevented immediate or widespread adoption.

The seagoing chronometer was a mechanical clock that was specifically designed to keep accurate time over long periods despite the debilitating motion of a ship, and the extreme changes in temperature, humidity and atmospheric pressure that were a hallmark of life on board. But it remained prohibitively expensive, especially for the commercial fleet.<sup>111</sup>

The second method, lunar distances, essentially used the moon's relationship to the sun as a clock, but to produce a viable result, it required particularly adept and accurate measurements with a sextant, as well as extensive mathematical calculations in which minor arithmetic errors could invalidate the entire process.<sup>112</sup>

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Paperback edition (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2006); Andrew Martin, "Dangerous Liaisons in the South Pacific Surfing the Revolution: The Fatal Impact of the Pacific on Europe," *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 41, no. 2 (2007): 141–47.

<sup>110</sup> Charles E. Herdendorf, "Captain James Cook and the Transits of Mercury and Venus," *The Journal of Pacific History* 21, no. 1 (1986): 39–55.

<sup>111</sup> Bowditch, *American Practical Navigator*, 1:34–37.

<sup>112</sup> Squire Thonton Stratford Lecky, *Wrinkles In Practical Navigation* (London: George Philip & Son, 1881), 127.



As a result of this timing of the longitude advance, as well as the practical disadvantages of the techniques, adoption of these methods was not as widespread, nor their impact as immediate, as the history of their creation would imply. Use of a method for determining longitude, other than deduced reckoning, became critical to expansion into the Pacific, where the distances between landfalls were much farther, but the methods took longer to be adopted in the shorter distances along the American Atlantic coastline and Caribbean.

Rather than determinations of longitude by celestial means, logs and correspondence suggest that mariners relied on dead reckoning as the core of their data.<sup>113</sup> The tools, training and skill required to do this were not egregious, but had to be combined with a clear understanding of the coastline and the islands. When land came into view, dead reckoning and noon sights for latitude took a back seat to visual observations of the shoreline and measurements of water depth. The coast pilots provided detailed descriptions of the shoreline, telling mariners what to expect to see when they arrived at a

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<sup>113</sup> Original logbooks of American coastwise mariners consulted for this study ranged from 1707 to 1781. Despite publication of the Nautical Almanac in 1767 providing a means of determining longitude by celestial observation, none of the logs consulted demonstrated use of that technique. Even as late as the War of 1812, logbooks of the United States Navy frigate *Constitution*, patrolling the Atlantic from Nova Scotia to Brazil, show no indication of celestial determination of longitude. A list of coastal trade logbooks consulted for this work is included in the bibliography. For more on the development of the Nautical Almanac, see National Maritime Museum (Great Britain), *Man Is Not Lost: Record of Two Hundred Years of Astronomical Navigation with the "Nautical Almanac", 1767-1967* (London: The Stationery Office Books, 1968). For transcriptions of the logbooks of USS *Constitution* during the War of 1812, see "1812 Cruises", USS Constitution Museum, <https://ussconstitutionmuseum.org/discover-learn/history/1812-cruises/>

given approach to the shoreline.<sup>114</sup> Prior the spread of accurate published coast pilots, this knowledge had to be obtained solely through extended experience.

This is not to suggest, however, that coastwise mariners like those involved in the colonial smuggling trade did not benefit from the innovations in longitude determination, which also contributed to advances in cartography. The success of plane sailing and many other navigation and piloting techniques depended on the mariners' ability to rely on accurate navigational charts of the land he expected to see when he thought he had gotten close enough. If the coastline was poorly charted, either in terms of the details of its features or in terms of how those details aligned with the latitude and longitude markings on the chart, a navigator could have a tough time identifying the land they were seeing. When Goveurnor Morris traveled across the Atlantic from England to Newport, Rhode Island in 1793, he kept his own track of the voyage.<sup>115</sup> The ship was supposed to arrive in New York, but adverse weather appears to have pushed them much further to the east than they realized. Based on a reconstruction of the voyage's course, it appears there was also an issue with the sextant being for observations of latitude, and the ship's determination of distance traveled according to the log.<sup>116</sup> As they were approaching the

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<sup>114</sup> See, for example, the coast descriptions and piloting advice in Cyprian Southack, *The New England Coasting Pilot*, 1734; John Seller, *English Pilot, Fourth Book*, 1767; William Gerard De Brahm, *The Atlantic Pilot*, 1772.

<sup>115</sup> Carl Herzog, Mary Malloy, and Stephen Tarrant, "The Voyage Home," in *The Diaries of Gouverneur Morris: European Travels, 1794-1798*, by Gouverneur Morris, ed. Melanie Randolph Miller, annotated edition (University of Virginia Press, 2011), xxxiii–xxxvi.

<sup>116</sup> In this context, "log" refers not to the logbook, but to the "common log" or "chip log", a tool used to measure vessel speed through the water.

American coast, Morris's own estimates of longitude by dead reckoning, combined with the mate's observations for latitude would have placed the ship in the vicinity of Pittsburgh if accurate.<sup>117</sup> But the measurement is meaningless without any context on a navigational chart that accurately plots the details of the coastline in reference to an accurate longitude grid. When the ship first sighted land, the captain and Morris thought they were approaching Montauk Point at the end of Long Island. However, they would soon realized they were actually east of there, seeing the entrance to Narragansett Bay in Rhode Island. Once the confused crew confirmed the ship's actual location, they were able to make their way into Newport. The modern difference in longitude between Montauk and Newport is within the margin of error for determinations made underway at the time.<sup>118</sup> The ability to confirm details in the visible coastline, including expected water depths, would have been an additional source of information that mariners looked to in order to confirm their suspicions about their perceived location.

Improvements in the accuracy of celestial navigation, therefore, depended on accurate navigational charts. Fortunately, the development of navigation went hand-in-hand with the development of hydrography and cartography, which benefited every mariner sailing offshore. Better methods of determining location obviously contributed to better mapping of the relationships between locations. Ship captains were better able to employ

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<sup>117</sup> See the graphical reconstruction of Morris' calculated path in Figure 15 of Gouverneur Morris, *The Diaries of Gouverneur Morris: European Travels, 1794-1798*, ed. Melanie Randolph Miller, annotated edition (University of Virginia Press, 2011), 646.

<sup>118</sup> The modern difference in longitude between the two passes is 31.5 minutes, or about 23.5 nautical miles. In addition, the entrance to Narragansett Bay is 10 minutes of latitude, or 10 nautical miles, north of the entrance to Long Island Sound.

surveying methods that had been built on the backs of newly learned skills in celestial navigation and coastal piloting.

### **The Chart and the Pilot Book**

To find their way in areas they were not already intimately familiar with, mariners over the course of the eighteenth century increasingly came to rely on two primary sources of information: the pilot book, and the navigational chart.<sup>119</sup> Benefiting from the science mentioned above, the ability to produce these tools improved dramatically over the long eighteenth century, but they continued to depend on private publication, and regular releases remained spotty.<sup>120</sup> Broad government sponsorship of navigational data as a function of supporting commerce did not substantively develop until the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries.<sup>121</sup> Analogous to the options in today's point-to-point internet mapping services, the pilot book was a set of written sailing directions that described the coastline's features and outlined the recommended routes into various primary ports of call. In essence, it provided step-by-step directions. The navigational

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<sup>119</sup> For a survey of these in New England, see William P. Cumming, "The Colonial Charting of the Massachusetts Coast," in *Seafaring in Colonial Massachusetts* (Boston: The Colonial Society of Massachusetts, 1980).

<sup>120</sup> These are reviewed in Harold L. Burstyn, *At the Sign of the Quadrant: An Account of the Contributions to American Hydrography Made by Edmund March Blunt and His Sons*, Marine Historical Association Publication, no. 32 (Mystic, Conn: Marine Historical Association, 1957), 14–15.

<sup>121</sup> See G. S. Ritchie, *The Admiralty Chart; British Naval Hydrography in the Nineteenth Century* (New York: American Elsevier Pub. Co, 1967).

chart was the map of the surrounding area that provided a visual array of landmarks and features while placing them all in context to each other and to the latitude/longitude grid.

Navigational resources, like navigational techniques, had been in development since the sixteenth century, when the Spanish Casa de la Contratación had begun cultivating, as well as attempting to control, information in the early Spanish Atlantic empire. The distinctions discussed above between piloting and ocean navigation influenced the information that Spain and other governments were either willing to share or attempting to keep secret. Small scale mapping and charting of places relative to latitude and longitude they were willing to share because this knowledge helped governments assert dominion over territories. But large scale, more detailed charting of approaches and passages along the coastlines and inshore were the province of pilots whose local knowledge the Spanish in particular wanted to keep secret. This was a measure advocated by pilots themselves as a means of protecting proprietary knowledge, but it was pursued by the state as a means of restricting commerce from intrusion by smugglers, and protecting port and harbor details from falling into the hands of antagonist navies. These goals did not prevent information from being generated, but it did dictate who the information could be shared with and how.<sup>122</sup>

As a result of the differences in the nature of the information as well as how it was being used and disseminated, detailed piloting information developed predominately in the

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<sup>122</sup>Alison Sandman, "Controlling Knowledge: Navigation, Cartography and Secrecy in the Early Modern Spanish Atlantic," in *Science and Empire in the Atlantic World* (New York: Routledge, Taylor and Francis Group, 2008).

form of written directions rather than graphical charts. Text pilot books could be easily copied from one mariner to another and understood by coastal captains regardless of whether they had learned to navigate offshore. They also disseminated this vocational knowledge through organized professional associations and institutions like the marine societies. Teaching new knowledge and methods in order to assure safer passages was a task assumed in Massachusetts by the Boston Marine Society. Though largely recognized for its philanthropic goals in helping families of mariners lost at sea, the Boston Marine Society also served as clearinghouse for charts, pilot books and the exchange of information critical to safe navigation.<sup>123</sup> In doing so, the society was creating a storehouse of exactly the knowledge needed for successfully smuggling, and, whether knowingly or no, provided a guise for the dissemination of that information to the society's members.

The simplicity of textual descriptions also allowed for-profit publishers to expand distribution of navigational knowledge more readily than they could with graphical nautical charts, which had more complex production and printing requirements. Private publishers provided most navigational data, and with little in the way of intellectual property rights law, information was frequently cribbed from one book to another with little in the way of repercussions and even less in the way of assuring data integrity. For the North American coast and the Caribbean, a long lineage of pilot books appeared over the course of the eighteenth century, each showing evidence of having stolen information

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<sup>123</sup> McKenzie, "Vocational Science And The Politics of Independence: The Boston Marine Society, 1754-1812," 13–15.

from one another, presumably without any verification for accuracy, since text was being copied and often reprinted by publishers in England.<sup>124</sup> However, the mere presence of these proliferating volumes also suggests methods of sharing information were changing in conjunction with the development of navigational techniques that favored methodology over pre-existing local knowledge gained through personal experience.

Competing interests in acquiring and disseminating knowledge posed a paradox for mariners seeking a competitive advantage over other traders, as well as the means to evade enemy privateers, and, in the case of smugglers, customs authorities. On one hand, mariners had a vested interest in protecting information and keeping things secret, but at the same time, there was a desire to increase and leverage one's own knowledge. John Maher was the mate of the sloop *Mary* in 1701, when the ship, under the command of John Cox, made an illicit voyage from Quebec to Boston via the St. Lawrence. Maher kept a private log of the voyage, making detailed observations of the distances traveled between significant islands and headlands, issues of tides, and anchoring locations – all of which suggests that he was developing his own knowledge of the route for use in future ventures.<sup>125</sup>

Unfortunately for him and the sloop's merchant owner, Samuel Vetch, not only did *Mary* fail to reach her destination, but Maher's personal log exposed their plan. In Quebec, the

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<sup>124</sup>Burstyn, *At the Sign of the Quadrant*.

<sup>125</sup> John Maher and E. B. (Edmund Bailey) O'Callaghan, *Journal of the Voyage of the Sloop Mary, from Quebec: Together with an Account of Her Wreck off Montauk Point, L.I., Anno 1701* (Albany, N.Y.: J. Munsell, 1866).

*Mary* loaded up with a diverse cargo of French goods and set out for the return voyage to New York, with Vetch on board. After clawing through treacherous fall weather across the Gulf of St. Lawrence and through the Strait of Canso, the *Mary* made numerous stops at anchorages along the New England coast before arriving at Block Island, where the crew was forced to abandon ship in a gale. The ship, however, drifted away intact, eventually beaching itself on Montauk, Long Island, where its cargo was seized by officials. Maher's log was found in a chest of his personal belongings when the ship was salvaged by customs officials, who were then able to use the evidence against Vetch since Maher's descriptions of the French cargo taken on Quebec matched that found on the grounded *Mary*.<sup>126</sup>

### **The Smugglers' Use of a Combined Approach**

The distinct navigational paradigms observed on the open ocean and along the coastline come together in the smuggling arena. For short distances along the coastline, mariners relied extensively on local knowledge to track to their progress along the coastline - whether via a memorized familiarity with a given area, or one learned through coast pilot publications. This skillset allowed small boatmen to conduct operations within sight of land while maintaining pretty high confidence in the knowledge of where they were. But travel over longer distances, particularly offshore, out of sight of land, relied on a methodology for determining location relative to a manufactured grid (latitude and longitude) on a nautical chart with no discernible characteristics. Trans-oceanic sailing,

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<sup>126</sup> Maher and O'Callaghan, 7–8, 30–32.



therefore, while requiring some similar basic seamanship skills, leaned on a different method of navigation than that of the inshore mariner. As Morris's account demonstrates, the trans-oceanic ship could make a mistaken landfall and still manage to find its way to safe harbor, but such a ship was not expected to transit along extended portions of the coastline in close quarters.

Frequently, unfamiliarity with a coastline or uncertainty about position, often compounded by weather, could force a captain to delay an arrival in port, or shift their port of call altogether in order to avoid the prospect of wrecking the ship among unknown shoals or shore. On January 11, 1775, Charles Lyell wrote to his business associate, Christopher Champlin in Rhode Island, pleading for help in cleaning up the consequences of one such uncertain voyage. "I left London the 13 November in a Brig belonging to Providence bound to Salem.," Lyell wrote. "The Master was not acquainted to the Eastward which occasioned our tumbling about in the Bay a fortnight and were at last obliged to put into Nantucket last Saturday Evening where I left her."<sup>127</sup> The ship's captain may have been quite familiar with the approach to Narragansett Bay, at the head of which is Providence, Rhode Island, but lacking previous orders or reason to sail into Salem, located at the north end of Massachusetts Bay, he did not have the local knowledge needed to get there. Though the distance between these ports is only about 50 miles over land, sailing between them was a voyage of more than 250 miles around Cape Cod. If the captain was not familiar with the shifting shoals of Nantucket Sound, the

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<sup>127</sup> Charles Lyell to Christopher Champlin, January 11, 1775 as published in *Commerce of Rhode Island, 1726-1800 Vol. 2* (The Society, 1915), 1.

voyage could easily exceed 300 miles by going south offshore around Nantucket. Lyell does not describe the weather conditions, but to have spent two weeks "tumbling about" in Massachusetts Bay suggests that heavy weather may have further eroded the captain's confidence about making a successful landfall, and he was waiting for it to pass before approaching the shoreline. Lyell's experience demonstrates the operational constraints of trans-oceanic captains with limited local knowledge. Lyell's ship and its captain were capable of navigating across thousands of miles of open Atlantic Ocean but were thwarted from reaching their final destination by ignorance of the last 30 miles to port.

Once the captain decided to sail into Nantucket, which he was presumably more familiar with, Lyell had gotten a Nantucket schooner to carry him to Martha's Vineyard, from where he wrote the letter. There, he wrote, he had found a small local boat belonging to a "Capt. Ayscough", who was willing to take him across Vineyard Sound to Falmouth on Cape Cod. From there, he planned to continue on land to Boston, but he had had his and his servant's belongings ("three Trunks and two Boxes and a large painted canvas bag with Bedding") sent with Coffin's schooner from the Vineyard to Providence, Rhode Island, where he hoped Champlin would forward them to Boston.<sup>128</sup> That he chose to ship his baggage separately through a longer path suggests that Capt. Ayscough's boat may have been too small to carry everything. Lyell's solution to his conundrum demonstrates the value and role of local maritime connections. Coastwise vessel captains and inshore small boat owners developed a more intimate and consequently reliable

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<sup>128</sup> Charles Lyell to Christopher Champlin, January 11, 1775 as published in *Commerce of Rhode Island, 1726-1800 Vol. 2, 3*.

knowledge of the coastline's intricacies. At the same time, their smaller, more maneuverable vessels were better suited to the task of navigating in tighter waterways among the shoreline's hazards.

Successful smuggling mariners often mastered a distinct merger of local knowledge, coastal piloting techniques and offshore methodology. This skillset allowed them to carry illicit cargo from the open ocean through relatively narrow sounds and bays into smaller coastal towns, where contraband could be offloaded with the help of complicit or absent customs agents. Once this occurred, the crew carried on toward the main urban wharves where larger naval enforcement and less forgiving customs officers may have been waiting. When naval and customs enforcement rose, it became even more important for captains and crew to be comfortable and knowledgeable in a variety of approaches to patrolled areas as well as passage past them.

On June 14, 1756, for instance, Waddell Cunningham of New York City was forced to pass on bad news to Isaac and Zachary Hope, merchants in Rotterdam whose goods Cunningham was to have received. The goods, all illegal imports under British law, had been seized by customs officers in New York. Cunningham was apologetic but did not personally take the blame for the loss. At issue, Cunningham wrote the Rotterdam merchants, was the small boat captain whom they had charged with sneaking the goods into the port of Philadelphia, where Cunningham had expected to be able to find more accommodating customs officials. The Hopes' ships had been offloaded in Stamford, Connecticut to a small boat run by Captain Daniel O'Brien. O'Brien was to sail around the outside of Long Island and deliver the goods to Philadelphia. "But like a madman, he

came down the Sound to pass this place (New York City), by which means he got our goods Seized, his boat and himself ruined," wrote Cunningham.<sup>129</sup>

The specific rationale for O'Brien's decision remains a mystery, but his options and result reflect the mix of skills and knowledge required. The passage down the Sound through New York required a substantive degree of local knowledge, but cut the offshore portion of a trip to Philadelphia in half compared to exiting back out the eastern end of Long Sound and making the offshore passage straight to the entrance to Delaware Bay (the maritime approach to Philadelphia). With very few safe harbors along the south shore of Long Island or along the coast of New Jersey, O'Brien would have been committed once he departed the Sound. However, that routing rationale had to be balanced with the risk to being seized in New York. (See Figure 2)

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<sup>129</sup> Wadell Cunningham to Isaac and Zachary Hope, June 14, 1756, as published in Thomas M. Truxes, ed., *Letterbook of Greg & Cunningham, 1756-57: Merchants of New York and Belfast* (New York: Oxford University Press, USA, 2001), 110.



**Figure 2** Modern nautical charts of the coastline between Long Island Sound and Delaware Bay. U.S. Office of Coast Survey, NOAA RNC Viewer.  
<https://nauticalcharts.noaa.gov/rnconline/rnconline.html>

Whether he was aware of the greater risk of seizure at the time or not, it is clear that O'Brien was familiar with the inshore route, which he had transited numerous times. In a newspaper advertisement he posted soliciting cargo and passengers in March, 1751, O'Brien had boasted of his regular schedule and shorter route for taking cargo and people

from New York to Philadelphia.<sup>130</sup> He may have been unaware of the greater risk of seizure passing through New York harbor, or he may have made a conscious decision to balance that risk against the risk of possibly less familiar offshore route. Either way, he had clearly not communicated his plan to Cunningham. There is no further reference to O'Brien in newspaper advertising or shipping news, suggesting that he did lose his business. It is clear that success or failure was not only pivotal to merchants like Cunningham, but also the captains themselves if they were the vessel owner.

Although individual mariners may have developed both piloting and offshore navigation skillsets over the course of different seagoing jobs, few if any other maritime tasks demanded the unique application of both skills in a single passage. In the absence of such a skilled captain on board, merchants like Cunningham were forced to tap into networks of small boatmen and coastal craft in the same way that Lyell did, only with boatmen willing to take on contraband. As discussed, this was easily done, though not so necessary, in the period's limited times of total peace. However, during periods of war and when British enforcement tightened up after 1763, it became more important for merchants to be able to find such networks or employ mariners and vessels that could do the whole job.

### **Shipbuilding and Rigging Design**

Coastwise traders and smugglers relied on some distinct vessel designs and vessel availability that were products of advances in naval architecture and the rise of a robust

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<sup>130</sup> "Advertisement." New-York Gazette, or Weekly Post-Boy (New York, New York), no. 427, March 25, 1751.

shipbuilding industry along the American coast. At the turn of the eighteenth century, shipbuilding began to blossom in the North American colonies.<sup>131</sup> The wealth of timber in the American hinterland combined with a growing expertise in design and construction in shipyards along the coast. The rising number of vessels being built was both fueled by the demand for and contributed to the creation of new opportunities for inter-colonial trade along the eastern seaboard and with the colonies of the Caribbean. Larger ships capable of trans-Atlantic voyages to Europe and Africa also began being produced, particularly in larger cities. However, far more sloops, schooners and brigs were being built than the larger tonnage snows and ships. At the same time, these fore-and-aft rigged coastal trading vessels experienced a more substantial evolution of rig and hull design that contributed to improvement in performance and safety while still needing fewer crew.

The burgeoning colonial shipbuilding industry provided the hulls that conveyed the trade between the British North American colonies and the West Indies, but merchants wove the shipbuilding industry into their trade operations with a broad array of Caribbean island colonies. Vessels built in the colonies by New England merchants were not only the method of transit for trade, but became themselves objects of trade, both fueling and fueled by contraband from other nations' colonies.

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<sup>131</sup> For data on the rise in construction at the beginning of the 18th century, see Bernard Bailyn and Lotte Bailyn, *Massachusetts Shipping, 1697-1714: a Statistical Study* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1959); The most comprehensive review of construction, vessel types being built and the markets for them is Joseph A. Goldenberg, *Shipbuilding in Colonial America*, 1st Edition (Charlottesville, Va.: University of Virginia Press, 1976).

## Vessel Supply

Rising demand for cargo vessels, particularly for the intercolonial trade along the North American coast and the Caribbean, drove the surge in shipbuilding that began in colonial North America in the early eighteenth century.<sup>132</sup> Massachusetts quickly became the center of the industry producing the most vessels and the most tonnage.<sup>133</sup> That growth was fueled by the demands of merchants, particularly in Boston. While many of the vessels being built were going directly into service under the ownership of colonial merchants who commissioned their construction, the low cost of ship production in the colony also made it an attractive export to both Britain and other colonies in North America and the Caribbean.<sup>134</sup> Massachusetts produced 83.5 percent of the recorded colonial tonnage between 1674 and 1696, but that only amounted to a total of 144 vessels, or 6,708 tons. From 1697 to 1714, Massachusetts produced 91 percent of the colonial tonnage, but the total number of vessels registered had risen to 321, or 18,329 tons. Of those registered in the second period, 95 were sloops carrying an average of 29.1 tons per vessel; 58 were ketches carrying 32.7 tons each; and 52 were brigs carrying 44.9 tons each. By comparison, 94 ships were built, averaging 108.6 tons per ship. A brig could be a feasible alternative to a ship rig for trans-oceanic transit, but the lower cargo

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<sup>132</sup> Goldenberg, *Shipbuilding in Colonial America*, 97.

<sup>133</sup> Goldenberg, 30; Bailyn and Bailyn, *Massachusetts Shipping, 1697-1714*, 102–5.

<sup>134</sup> Goldenberg, *Shipbuilding in Colonial America*, 99.



capacity reduced the efficiency of making the long voyage. This was similarly true of the less popular bark, of which only 22 were built at an average of 50.8 tons.<sup>135</sup>

The growth in production of these smaller vessels indicate that, even before the end of the war of Spanish Succession in 1713, New England merchants were producing more and more vessels for inter-colonial trade along the coast and in the Caribbean. Registration of vessels within the British North American colonies began in 1696 with the passage of the "Act for Preventing Frauds and Regulating Abuses in the Plantation Trade," an updated navigation act which required owners of all vessels trading in or with the colonies to provide information of the vessel's ownership, description, date and place of construction, and to assert that there was no foreign ownership interest in the vessel.<sup>136</sup> While the mercantilist goal of the act was to ensure British trade was happening on British hulls, it failed to recognize the extent to which British American hulls would become engaged in the smuggling trade with Spanish, French and Dutch colonies in the Caribbean. The extent of the trade between North America and Caribbean colonies (whether British or not) was made possible by this dramatic growth of shipbuilding in New England.

### **Vessel Improvements**

In addition to the sheer quantity of appropriate vessels that were being built in the British American colonies, evolutions in rigging design that began in Europe in the seventeenth century began being adopted by shipbuilders and mariners in America in the early

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<sup>135</sup>Goldenberg, 133, 137.

<sup>136</sup>Bailyn and Bailyn, *Massachusetts Shipping, 1697-1714*, 4.

eighteenth century. Improvements in hull design began in both commercial ships and naval warships, but trickled down to smaller coastal craft and trading ships. However, I argue that it was the evolution of fore-and-aft rigging design, and specifically the development and adoption of the gaff rig, that produced the most dramatic changes in the craft being used by coastwise American mariners. Sleeker designs combined with more efficient sailing rigs led to more versatile craft that were able to navigate in tighter areas while still carrying more cargo. Additionally, the changes in rigging design allowed captains to set more sail area with fewer crew while still maintaining a level of safety. Development of the gaff rig as a replacement for other, more cumbersome rigs contributed to this and shaped the skill set of mariners who used it.

Shepherd and Walton, in their study of shipping productivity, argued that fewer crew were needed because the pirates had been cleared out of the Caribbean by the beginning of the 1700s, and the rise of trade between in the West Indies coincides with the elimination of piracy threats.<sup>137</sup> Self -defense, however, seems less of an influencing factor on the manning of sloops and schooners in which space was already at a premium. Additionally, that explanation for fewer crew fails to account for the ongoing threats from other nations' privateers in times of war throughout the century. The capability of fewer crew to carry more cargo was, instead, tied to the more efficient and less laborious rigging they were adopting.

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<sup>137</sup>Shepherd and Walton, *Shipping, Maritime Trade and the Economic Development of Colonial North America*, 84.

A variety of different types of rigs, including lug, spritsail, and lateen rigs, all evolved in Europe from the simple square rig, in which a rectangular-shaped sail was hung from a horizontal spar that was itself suspended from a vertical mast.<sup>138</sup> The gaff rig did away with the forward half of that spar, replacing it with the gaff, whose forward end connected to the mast. This seemingly simple difference allowed the ship to maneuver relative to the wind without having to lower the entire yard and raise it on the other opposite side of the mast. Not only did this require much less labor, it was less likely to cause difficulties if caught aback in a squall. At the same time, connecting the leading edge of the sail to the mast allowed it to be held tight against the wind for a wider variety of wind angles. The combination of these factors produced much more efficient rigs requiring fewer crew.

The gaff rig is generally credited with originating in Holland, where it appears to have initially been used on smaller personal craft, but the steps to its evolution occurred throughout Europe in the seventeenth century.<sup>139</sup> The design evolved in conjunction with hull shapes that were better suited to it and eventually migrated through the rest of Europe and to America. A variety of lug and spritsail rigs can still be seen on images of American harbors and remained common on inshore utility boats into the early nineteenth century, but for cargo transport along the coast and to the Caribbean the gaff rig dominates the seascape by the early eighteenth century, showing up on single-masted

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<sup>138</sup> For a review of the development of these rigs, see Edward Keble Chatterton, *Fore and Aft: The Story of the Fore & Aft Rig from the Earliest Times to the Present Day* (J.B. Lippincott, 1912).

<sup>139</sup>For a detailed survey of this evolution, see Chatterton, Chapter IV.

sloops and double-masted schooners.<sup>140</sup> The combination of less labor and greater maneuverability made the gaff rig the fundamental choice of coastwise merchant craft. Many of these designs continued to carry square sails as well for downwind power, but the sails were not necessary to work upwind.

### **Outfitting and Economy**

Construction of the actual hull of the vessel was far from the only element that went into building a ship. A diverse array of manufactured gear was required to outfit a ship under construction and prepare it for sea. Much of this material required specialized skills from a variety of individual tradesmen whose own employment tends to be neglected in assessments of the impact of ship construction. Ropemakers were needed for initial production of line used in the rigging of a ship, but specialized riggers were needed to turn the line into the custom measured stays that held up masts and controlled the sails on any given ship. Similarly, the unique measurements of every vessel and the need for precise fits meant that sailmakers often had to produce custom work for any given vessel.<sup>141</sup> Blacksmiths produced the specialized ironwork for fittings on deck as well as part of the hull, and other specialty manufacturers were needed to produce wooden parts such as the deadeyes and blocks (pulleys) that provided mechanical advantage in controlling the sails and rigging. The susceptibility of wood to rotting and wooden ships

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<sup>140</sup>Karl Heinz Marquardt, "The Origin of Schooners," *The Great Circle* 10, no. 1 (1988): 43.

<sup>141</sup>For examples of the precision required to fit rigging from vessel to vessel, see Smith, *The Journals of Ashley Bowen (1728-1813) of Marblehead*, Appendix 1, Rigging Schedules.

to leaking meant another entire industry was producing waterproofing solutions from cultivating pine tree sap and boiling it down to tar and pitch.<sup>142</sup>

All of these trades and industries were just as involved in the regular repair and refitting of existing ships as well. The deterioration of these natural materials meant extensive regular maintenance and frequent replacement. The work kept shipyards and their associated trades busy and fueled the economy of waterfront towns far beyond the shipyard.<sup>143</sup> The diversity of skills and trades that contributed to the creation of any given ship is also notable in that the operating crew was often tasked with using the same skills in the underway maintenance of the vessels in between visits to a shipyard. Developing these skills expanded their professional value and often provided avenues to full-time work ashore in these trades later in life.

### **Ships as Trade Items**

The availability of cheaply built ships in the American colonies created another export potential to the island colonies in the West Indies. Vessels built in New England that entered the trade made their way legally to markets in the British West Indies, but also were used by smugglers in New England not only as a tool for smuggling but as an object

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<sup>142</sup> Known collectively as “naval stores,” production of these pine-derived products in colonial North America had been encouraged by the British, seeking to reduce their previous dependence on the Baltic states to provide this key component of shipbuilding. Mikko Airaksinen, “Tar Production in Colonial North America,” *Environment and History* 2, no. 1 (1996): 115–25; Robert B. Outland, *Tapping the Pines: The Naval Stores Industry in the American South* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2004).

<sup>143</sup> For an assessment of the financing and economic impacts of shipbuilding and outfitting, see Steven J. Pitt, “Building and Outfitting Ships in Colonial Boston,” *Early American Studies* 13, no. 4 (2015): 881–907.

of smuggling. In 1764, Abraham Whipple and Nicholas Brown contracted with Providence builder William Smith to build a small cargo ship for Surinam trader Jacob Bogman. Measuring only 38 feet on deck, the Flying Fish was a small boat by the standards of the trade, but would have more than suited Bogman to make runs from Surinam to the Leeward islands. With only a 5'9" draft, it would also have been maneuverable enough to make its way up the Surinam River to sugar plantations where cargoes could have been loaded directly on board. Whipple and Brown paid Smith for construction of the Flying Fish entirely in molasses: 900 gallons on keel laying, 900 gallons on completion of deck and remainder at completion.<sup>144</sup> In so doing, they directly transferred their molasses into the economy for a vessel that was then sold to Bogman in exchange for more molasses. The boat was outfitted with members of Brown's regular crew for the delivery to Surinam. Leveraging the delivery for the opportunity of additional trade, Brown loaded the boat with cargo for Surinam.

Brown had another vessel built by Barnard Eddy beginning in December 1768, which was also paid for in molasses. It was specified to be a flush deck sloop with a 50-foot long keel. The agreed upon value was eight dollars per ton, but to be paid in molasses. That winter, Jonathan Ellis was contracted to do the ironwork for the new vessel, and specified his payment in a mixed form of barter, equaling "two tons bar iron at 80 dollars

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<sup>144</sup>Nicholas Brown, "Abraham Whipple to William Smith" (n.d.), Box 469 Folder 3, Nicholas and John Brown Co. Archive, John Carter Brown Library.

per ton, one (hogshead) of New Eng Rum at 2/lawful money per gallon, and the remainder in any goods I want by retail at the cash price."<sup>145</sup>

As early as 1730, Massachusetts agent Jeremiah Dunbar reported to the British House of Commons that New England merchants who had developed trading relationships in the islands were frequently acting as agents for French merchants who commissioned new vessel construction from New England shipyards. Even warships of as much as 40 guns were being built for French islands and paid for with French rum and molasses, according to Dunbar.<sup>146</sup> With the rare exceptions of meticulous records like those kept of the *Flying Fish*, it is difficult or impossible to trace the movement of individual vessels built in New England and shipped to the West Indies during the mid-eighteenth century. There is certainly a good chance that some of these vessels could have become privateers, pursuing English shipping during the Seven Years War. The development of shipbuilding trades and the shipbuilding industry in the North American colonies provided the abundance of small coastwise vessels that made the Caribbean trade possible. But it also created its own financial system and economy that was both fed by and fed into the Caribbean smuggling trade, particularly that of molasses from opposing French colonies and neutral Dutch colonies.

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<sup>145</sup>Nicholas Brown, "Correspondence with Barnard Eddy, Jonathan Ellis, and Nicolas Clarke & Co." (March 1765), Box 674 Folder 6,7, Nicholas and John Brown Co. Archive, John Carter Brown Library.

<sup>146</sup>Joseph A. Goldenberg, *Shipbuilding in Colonial America*, 1st Edition (Charlottesville, Va.: University of Virginia Press, 1976), 106.

## CHAPTER 4

### CONDUCT OF SMUGGLING

The nature of the greater Caribbean basin and its myriad islands has always made shipping and its defense a challenge. Strong easterly prevailing winds dictate how sailing ships both approach the region and pass through it. The powerful Gulf Stream current is created in part by the wind along the southern half of the basin, but then turns around Cuba into the Gulf of Mexico for which it is named and heads against the wind around Florida and up the southeastern coast of North America.<sup>147</sup> The large islands of Cuba, Hispaniola, and Puerto Rico mark the dividing line of these two regions. At the eastern edge of the region, the Bahamas, the Virgin Islands and the long string of the lesser Antilles form a border between the Atlantic Ocean and the greater Caribbean. (See Figure 3.)

For sailing ships, navigation among these islands was dictated foremost by the ability of ships to sail upwind and work their way through the narrow passages among the many islands. Eighteenth-century merchant captains had myriad environmental and geographic hindrances to negotiate, but also dealt with a constantly fluctuating set of man-made

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<sup>147</sup> For a summary of prevailing wind and currents in the greater Caribbean basin, see National Geospatial Intelligence Agency, *Pub. 140 Sailing Directions (Planning Guide) North Atlantic Ocean and Adjacent Seas*, 17th ed. (Springfield, Virginia: National Geospatial Intelligence Agency, 2019); National Geospatial Intelligence Agency, *Pub. 147 Sailing Directions (Enroute) Caribbean Sea Volume 1*, 16th ed. (Springfield, Virginia, 2018).



hindrances based on the ebb and flow of various imperial powers over their colonies in the West Indies.

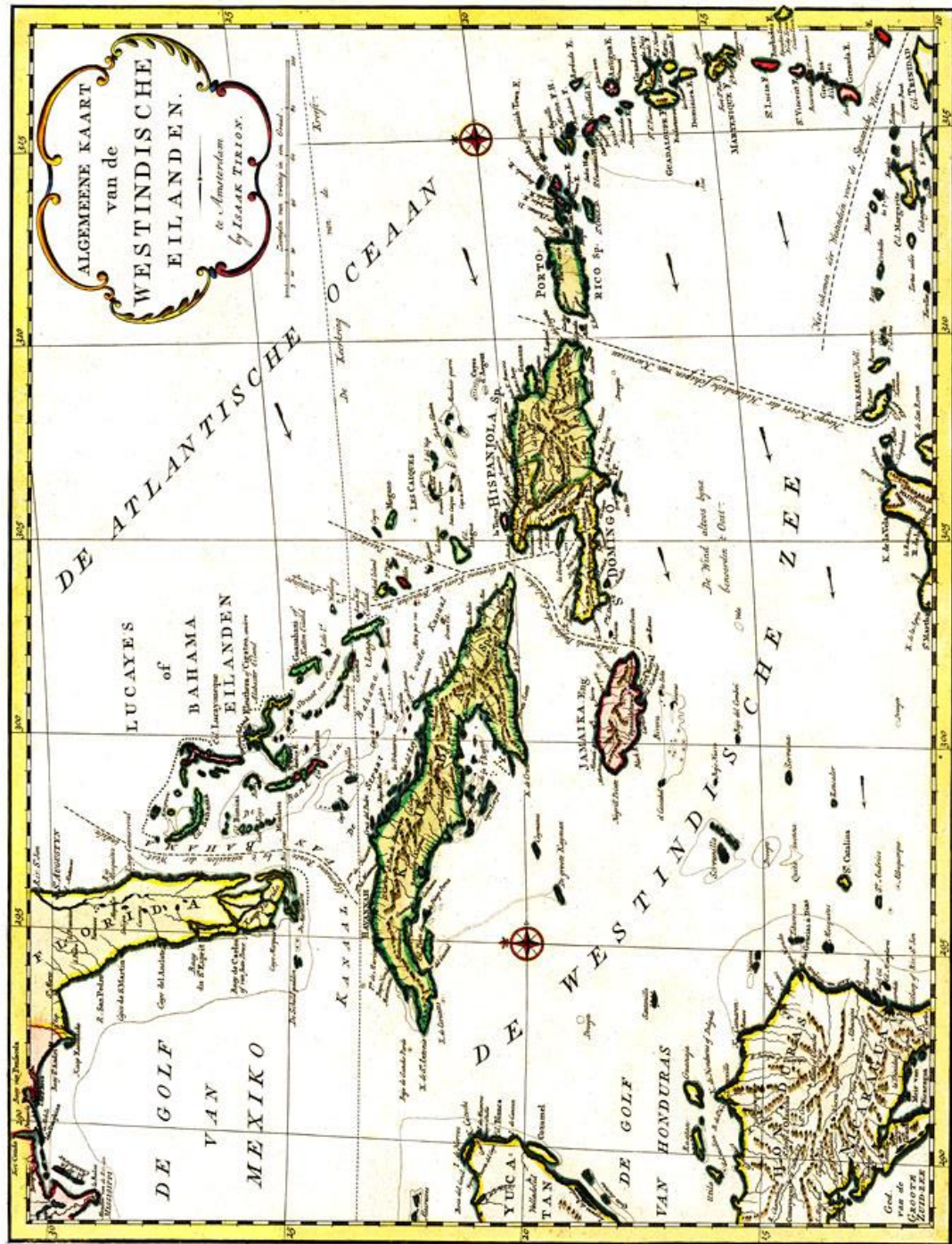


Figure 3: Izaak Tirion, *Algemeene Kaart van de Westindische Eilanden.*, 1769, Special Collections Department, University of South Florida.

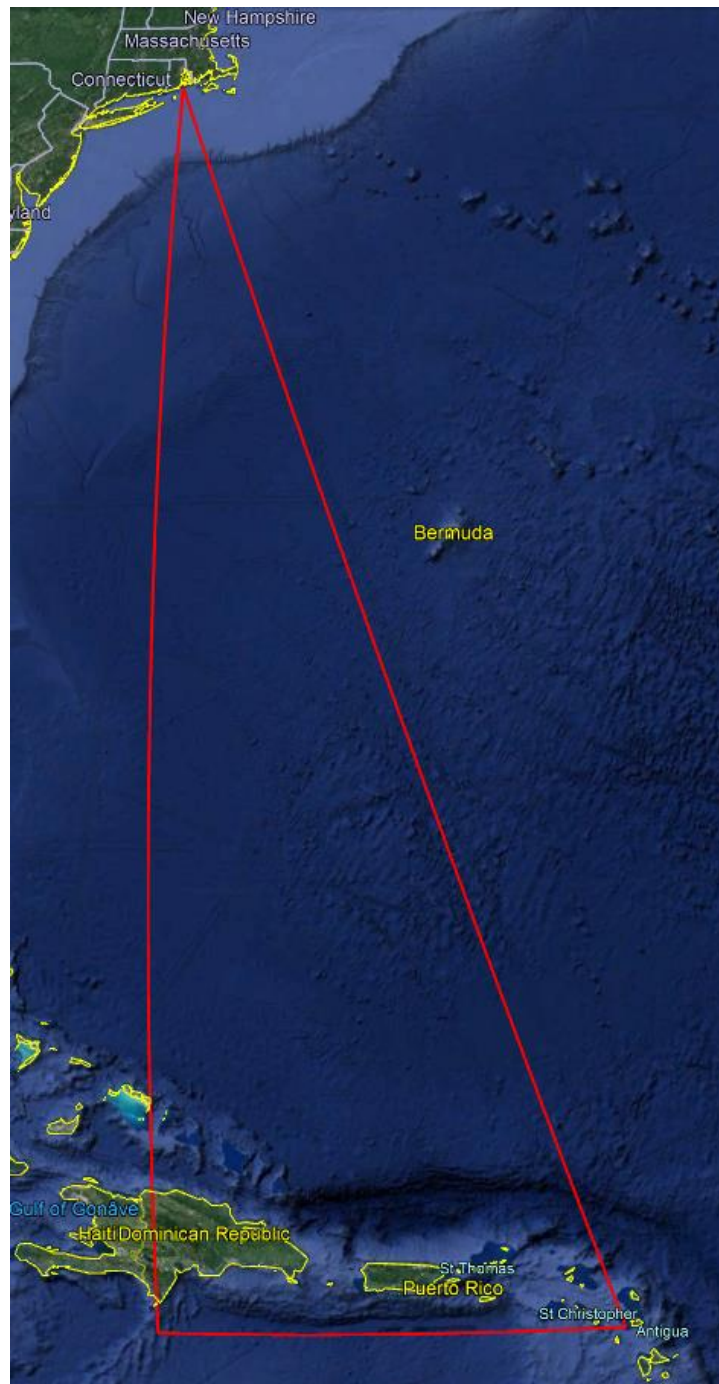


Figure 4: Although the primary course of a ship sailing from Newport, Rhode Island to Antigua is southerly, it must also work more than 550 nautical miles toward the east, against the prevailing winds. Image: Google Earth.

The routes and voyage planning done by merchant vessels within the Caribbean basin varied widely depending on where they were going and what they were doing.

Small-scale mercator projection charts tend to produce the illusion that the voyage from New England to the Caribbean is largely a passage due south, but to avoid the contrary Gulf Stream current and make it to the Windward and Leeward islands, ships were required to make a substantial push to the east against the prevailing. (Figure 4). A captain's decision on how to make that approach was dictated by both his final destination and his intent. Smugglers avoiding enforcement authorities in times of peace and privateers in times of war could have a particularly more precarious time of avoiding opposing forces.

As we shall see, evidence from insurance records and correspondence between captains and their merchant shipowners provide insight not only to who was smuggling, but to the routes and rationales for their methods as well. Exclusions and inclusions on the standardized coverage of the policies suggest specific threats that particular voyages may have faced. Many of the policies specifically provide for discounts to the premiums to be returned if a vessel met certain conditions during the voyage. Occasionally these conditions involved not stopping at specific islands or avoiding specific routes.

Richard Pares in *War and Trade in the West Indies* addressed the details of how navies during the wars of the eighteenth century attempted to grapple with illicit trade, but much of his focus was on the strategies employed by those navies to either protect their own

trade or to raid the trade of opposing nations.<sup>148</sup> The Ezekiel Price papers housed at the Boston Athenaeum provide a window from the other perspective, that of the merchant vessels seeking to evade those navies.<sup>149</sup>

There were essentially three elements to each voyage in which authorities could pose problems: at the receiving port, underway between ports, and at the destination port. In some cases, smugglers were violating the law in both the disembarking port and the destination port. Underway in between, they could be subject to enforcement from either nation's authorities. Complicating matters further, the two-way nature of trade meant that the same port of call was likely both a destination and departure point. However, differing national trade laws on incoming and outgoing goods meant that captains could face different threats in each direction.<sup>150</sup>

The degree to which captains went out of their way to avoid authorities depended on the severity of enforcement efforts at any given time. Enforcement of navigation acts fluctuated dramatically during the eighteenth century, and during some years, smuggling was able to occur completely in the open with little or no fear of legal reprisal.<sup>151</sup> Enforcement methods varied as well. The strategies of European authorities for dealing with smuggling changed depending on the political personalities setting policy as well as

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<sup>148</sup> Richard Pares, *War and Trade in the West Indies*.

<sup>149</sup> Ezekiel Price, "Marine Insurance Policies, 1756-1781", Boston Athenaeum.

<sup>150</sup> For examples of the French rules and colonial motivations to break them, see Pares, *War and Trade in West Indies, 1739-1763*, 326, 345.

<sup>151</sup> Barrow, *Trade and Empire*, 87–88, 136.

the focus and goals of the enforcement. However, smuggling voyages occurring during years of minimal enforcement still prepared mariners for later evasion by acquainting them with local navigation requirements, and establishing relationships with authorities and accomplices in various ports where enforcement later arose.

Smugglers pursued several overarching voyage strategies that can be summarized in three main categories: vessel routing that allowed smugglers to evade authorities and land goods; making trades at intermediary neutral ports that served to circumvent restrictions based on nationality; and establishing relationships with complicit traders and authorities.

### **Routing and Deception**

The environmental dynamics of the greater Caribbean basin had a huge effect on the broad patterns of shipping and trade, as well as the discrete operational decisions that had to be made by individual merchant captains, navy squadrons seeking to patrol the region, and privateers seeking to capture commercial shipping. Prevailing winds and currents created clearly optimal routes for traders. Smugglers sailing outside the obvious courses risked raising suspicion, and utilized several means of deception to both avoid authorities and be able to convincingly proclaim their innocence if interdicted. I argue that successful Caribbean smugglers were those traders with a solid knowledge of the geography as well as the prevailing sea conditions throughout the Caribbean basin.

Prevailing wind patterns across the Caribbean and Atlantic are driven by global oceanic circulation cells located over specific latitudes. In the Caribbean latitudes, this means prevailing winds cross the Atlantic from the east/northeast and enter the Caribbean basin from the east very strongly. The winds continue toward the west from the Antilles islands

to Central America and Mexico. The Northern Equatorial current is an ocean current that follows a similar path from the east to the west at the latitude of the Caribbean basin. As it reaches the easternmost islands of the Caribbean, the current splits, becoming the Antilles Current, which follows along the outside edge of the Caribbean past the islands, and the Caribbean current, which passes through the islands and picks up volume and speed in the open Caribbean Sea proper. After passing south of the major islands of Puerto Rico, Hispaniola, Jamaica and Cuba, the current turns north through the Yucatan passage into the Gulf of Mexico where it becomes the Gulf Stream current, flushing between Florida and Cuba, up through the Straits of Florida and along the southeastern coastline of North America.

Scientific recognition of the ocean currents, particularly the Gulf Stream, was not widely disseminated until Benjamin Franklin published his first maps of the Gulf Stream. Those maps, however, were based on the expert knowledge of American ship captains who had been making use of those currents for many years.<sup>152</sup>

In his 1740 series of maps to promote the idea of war with Spain during the early phases of the War of Jenkins' War, George Foster published maps of the greater Caribbean basin as well as excerpts of the approaches to several key ports and strongholds. Both on the maps and in detailed notations throughout his margins, Foster drew and described the

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<sup>152</sup> For details on the balance between mariners' expertise and the authority of scientific elite voices like Franklin, see Joyce E Chaplin, "Knowing the Ocean: Benjamin Franklin and the Circulation of Atlantic Knowledge," in *Science and Empire in the Atlantic World*, ed. James Delbourgo and Nicholas Dew (New York: Routledge, Taylor and Francis Group, 2008).

prevailing wind patterns as well as the currents. He gave particular note to the Gulf Stream: "The Current Setting Strongly between Cuba & New Spain into the G.of Mexico, is turned N. by ye opposite Land & Sweeping round by Florida, passes out again with great Violence between that Coast Cuba & ye Bahama Islands in the Ocean. The Current also Sets N. tho' ye Windward Passage and some of ye Leeward Islands. Hence, tho' ye Wind blows forceibly at N. & N.E. into the G. of Florida, all Ships bound for Jamaic, as well as from Carolina &c as Europe, are obliged to get to Antigoa or St. Kits for sake of ye Trade Winds & Currents."<sup>153</sup> (See Figure 5)

Arguing for war with Spain, Foster produced the map showing prevailing winds, currents, and Spanish shipping, "in order to demonstrate that the Havana is the only Place the possession of which can possibly secure our Trade with the West Indies, and prevent the Spanish depredations."<sup>154</sup> But his descriptions of the Gulf Stream and the winds uncover a key facet of the approaches to the Caribbean. The massive ocean current driven into the basin by the prevailing winds was then forced to flush its way among the islands before funneling into the outlet between Florida and the Bahamas. This ocean circulation pattern combined with the prevailing winds made it very difficult for sailing ships

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<sup>153</sup> See text insert over inland North America on George Foster, *The Seat of War in the West Indies, Containing New & Accurate Plans of the Havana, La Vera Cruz, Cartagena and Puert Bello-- Also of San Augustin* (London, 1740), <https://jcb.lunaimaging.com/luna/servlet/detail/JCBMAPS~1~1~3109~101434:The-seat-of-war-in-the-West-Indies,.>

<sup>154</sup> See description at top of map. Foster; For a discussion of British interest in seizing Havana, see Elena A. Schneider, "Imagining the Conquest," in *The Occupation of Havana, War, Trade, and Slavery in the Atlantic World* (University of North Carolina Press, 2018), 17–62.



coming from New England or the Carolinas to get to the western Caribbean by making their way south along the coastline off Florida. The "great Violence" of the current was caused not only by speed, but that winds from the east (and more northeasterly in the winter months) blew against the current, giving rise to steep waves of short wavelength that could overcome vessels struggling against them. These conditions dictated that approaching vessels had to first beat their way eastward toward the northernmost of the lesser Antilles - Antigua - before turning westward with the wind and current toward destinations such as Jamaica, Hispaniola, Cuba, Puerto Rico, or destinations in the Spanish mainland colonies such as Cartegena and Porto Bello.

For ships departing from New England this geography meant ships were often fighting against the wind for much of the trip. As noted in the discussion above, these demands helped dictate the type of vessels that were being built in the colonies: frequently fore-and-aft rigged ships better able to sail efficiently upwind.

However, for ships outbound in the opposite direction, the same flushing current provided a push against the winds and could ride the Gulf Stream along the northern coast of Cuba and up the eastern seaboard of the North America. This pattern dictated the routes of the Spanish flota and galleon fleets that left from Vera Cruz and Cartegena, and rallied in Havana before carrying the Gulf Stream current out of the region.<sup>155</sup>

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<sup>155</sup> A. Lugo-Fernández et al., "Analysis of the Gulf of Mexico's Veracruz-Havana Route of La Flota de La Nueva España," *Journal of Maritime Archaeology* 2, no. 1 (2007): 32, 40.





Antigua, then, becomes a readily identifiable demarcation point for the division of shipping traffic that is either continuing to windward along the outside of the island chain, or turning west and heading downwind into the basin. [Barbuda is actually a bit further north and east of Antigua, but as a waypoint, Antigua's well-known harbor town, St. John's, made it more recognizable.] Ships that had easterly destinations may have still chosen to turn downwind at Antigua and continue along the western side of the island chain. The natural conditions that could make this preferable included the prospects of calmer seas in the shadow of the islands, but it could also be dictated by the human factors, including the stationing of British and French navy ships offshore in Atlantic approaches on the windward or eastern side of the islands. At stations off Martinique and Barbados, both French and British naval ships were stationed in the expectations of intercepting ships arriving from Europe.

This fork in the voyage paths becomes significant as a marker for determining and predicting vessels' destinations and intents. Captains' adherence to these also serve to demonstrate their acquired tactics for utilizing the prevailing natural forces to circumvent the man-made forces that might be waiting for them.

The complexity of the region and the variety of routing choices demanded that captains have a knowledge of the area or be able to acquire the information needed. The former was achieved through first-hand experience, usually in a lower ranking position, sailing in the region. The latter was passed on through interaction with others who sailed in the region or through the coast pilots and charts.

This discrete knowledge of the region and the variety of ways in which the region could be transited was crucial to smugglers' ability to evade customs authorities, unfriendly navies and hostile privateers on their way to load and unload goods. Knowledge of the geography and the prevailing sea conditions underpins nearly all the smuggling tactics discussed below.

Vessels departing British North American colonies for the West Indies were laden with mixed cargoes that were needed on all the plantation islands. Particularly during the Seven Years' War and under increased British enforcement after the war, a captain might receive two sets of orders from the merchant shipowner. One set outlined a legitimate voyage to a British colony such as Barbados, while another set delineated the secret, but true, destination of the vessel - a port colony of some other European nation where the markets for the products were more lucrative. The first set of orders provided a written pretense that could be presented to a navy ship or privateer seeking to seize smugglers; the second served as the actual agreement between merchant and captain. As noted in the case of George Hopkins, detailed in the introduction of this dissertation, this practice is known only because some merchants kept copies of both sets of orders in their own records. But successfully executing this ruse depending on more than the captain and crew being able to talk their way out of a seizure after being boarded. The route of the vessel contributed to the likelihood that a vessel would be even be seen in the first place, and if it was, its location relative to its false and true destinations provided an indication of where it was really headed.

Ships headed from New England to the western and central Caribbean frequently got similar orders, usually for the British island of Jamaica. Joseph Kinnicutt, for example,

Master of the Obidiah Brown's sloop *Speedwell* got orders and a bill of lading that indicated a mixed cargo bound for Jamaica. Kinnicutt's real orders, however, were to go to Hispaniola, landing at “Ocoya” or “Port Leuca” on the south side of the island.<sup>156</sup> Although neither destination as spelled by Brown exists on either contemporary or current charts of the island's south coast, either or both names most likely refer to the French port of Aux Cayes, known today as Les Cayes, in modern Haiti.

In Kinnicutt's case, like Hopkins', a bill of lading accurately showed the cargo on board, but the vessel and its cargo were really destined for Hispaniola rather than Jamaica, as the paperwork indicated. The ship's hold contained 202 barrels of flour; 1,100 feet of boards; 800 hoops, 927 bunches of onions; 20 boxes of spermicetti candles; 4 desks, 8 barrels of oil; 6 horses; 3 barrels of pork, 3 barrels of beef; and 700 weight of bread. Brown had suggested Kinnicutt come back with sugar, molasses, coffee, indigo or cotton.<sup>157</sup>

Kinnicutt's voyage routing would have been much easier than Hopkins'. He had a number of options for making the approach to the southern coast of Hispaniola from New England. Some of them would have had him passing that coastline prior to approaching Jamaica and could have easily been seen as being on the normal course to Jamaica. Thus, he would have had no issues explaining his course or location to any authorities

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<sup>156</sup> Orders to Joseph Kinicutt, Sloop *Speedwell*” (n.d.), Box 468 Folder 4, Nicholas and John Brown Co. Archive, John Carter Brown Library. Copies of both sets of orders survive.

<sup>157</sup>Obidiah Brown, “Orders to Joseph Kinicutt, Sloop *Speedwell*” (n.d.), Box 468 Folder 4, Nicholas and John Brown Co. Archive, John Carter Brown Library.

underway. Nor, if he approached from the east along the southern shoreline, was he likely to encounter the naval station off Jamaica, where British naval ships were patrolling.

The destination and that safer route from the east did, however, require a more detailed understanding of the southern coastline of Hispaniola, and familiarity with the port approaches there. Les Cayes is so named because of its location north of Ile de Vache and an archipelago of smaller surrounding keys with connecting shoals. Approaching and navigating through Canal de l'Est, the narrow passage between the cays and the mainland, required a solid knowledge of the area. It is likely Kinnicutt had been there before, though there is no proof of that in Brown's papers. If he had never been there, he may have been able to consult a combination of coast pilots and charts of the coastline to provide some guidance, but more importantly he relied on the ability of his crew to manage the vessel. Sailing in unfamiliar waters along a coastline required sharp lookouts and watchstanders to sight the shoreline in the distance, recognize the changes in the patterns and color of the water that could indicate shallows or shifts in current. As noted previously, on a small trading vessel with a limited crew, it serves as another example of the importance of each crew member's contribution to the success of the voyage and refutes the notion that crew were a homogeneous commodity, particularly in cases where the voyage routing required a closer approach to the shoreline, away from naval squadrons on station.

The balance between navigational safety and evading seizure is highlighted in the Ezekiel Price insurance records' contingencies for invalidation of the policy, and the benefits for premium rebates if certain conditions were met. These conditions help craft a framework for understanding the operational risks and exposures to seizure. To mitigate the risk of

losses, the underwriters frequently promised a rebate on the premiums if the insured vessel did not "go to windward", or to the east of the Antilles where stationed naval vessels increased the risk of capture during the Seven Years' War. This was true even for vessels transiting between Dutch Surinam and New England, suggesting that passage along the leeward side of the Antilles islands then along the coast of South America to Surinam was deemed safer. Such a circuitous route, however, would have demanded additional navigational prowess of the captain, who needed to be familiar with the approaches along the South American coastline. This direction from insurance providers, however, contrasts with the routing Obidiah Brown gave to George Hopkins on the *Nancy* in 1764 after the war had ended. Brown telling Hopkins to sail well to windward to evade authorities suggests a change in the expectation of enforcement methods and locations in the wake of the war.

Even ships that were not necessarily carrying any illicit cargo often sought out particular routes and timing to conceal their arrivals and departures and intentions from competing vessels in the chaotic Caribbean markets. This resulted in few vessels being willing participate in convoys, one of the primary means of protecting merchant shipping from attack by enemy vessels during war. This facet of trade in the Caribbean particularly confounded navy squadrons as well as politicians who were seeking to establish a viable strategy for either protection of shipping or raiding of enemy shipping.<sup>158</sup>

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<sup>158</sup>From Pares, *War and Trade in West Indies, 1739-1763*, 288: "they swarmed about the seas, scuttling imprudently from island to island in pursuit of the last half-penny of profit."



## Neutral Stops

During both the War of Jenkins Ear and the Seven Years' War, New England merchant mariners continued to traffic in contraband from European colonies belonging to nations that were at war with Britain. Roaming enemy privateers certainly added a level of hazard to any shipping during this time, and war had the added impact of creating more volatile markets. Merchants, generally, and more so the mariners they employed, did not look forward to the prospect of war.<sup>159</sup> However, once war came, they sought to make the most of trade opportunities by finding the best markets at the lowest operational and financial risk.

Seeking out neutral ports that could act as transshipment points was among the most popular strategy even after Britain attempted to clamp down on it with the “Rule of 1756” which forbid trade through neutrals.<sup>160</sup> During the Seven Years' War between Britain and France, key ports for ongoing neutral trade included the Dutch island of St. Eustatius, and Spanish port of Monte Christi on the north coast of Hispaniola.<sup>161</sup>

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<sup>159</sup>As Boston merchant Stephen W. Greenleaf wrote in June 1756 to Wilkinson and Ayrault in Rhode Island, “Whether a war will operate to our advantage or not must be left to the event; but if the trade does not revive, we have but one way to save ourselves, and that is to retrench our expensive living.” Stephen W. Greenleaf to Wilkinson and Ayrault, Boston, June 29, 1756. R. I. Hist. Soc. *Commerce of Rhode Island 1726-1800 Vol. 1*.

<sup>160</sup> For a concise summary of the rule and its later impacts, see James Farrant, “Modern Maritime Neutrality Law” (Masters, Durham University, 2015), 53, <http://etheses.dur.ac.uk/11006/>.

<sup>161</sup> Pares, *War and Trade in West Indies, 1739-1763*, 383, 388.

Monte Christi had the benefit of being just over the French/Spanish border on Hispaniola. There was little in the way of a sheltered harbor there, and less in the way of goods originating there. As a Spanish port, however, it was considered neutral in the conflict between France and Britain, and served both French and British American ships, who traded with each other there. As a strategy for evasion, Monte Christi did not escape the attention of the Royal Navy for long though.

British authorities believed that the degree of trade with France that was occurring through Monte Christi was a detriment to the war effort, shoring up the economy of the enemy. Even as the war was beginning British naval vessels began seizing American ships trading through Monte Christi and other neutral ports, particularly the Dutch islands. On a single day, August 3, 1759, five vessels were seized coming out of Monte Christi and sent to Jamaica for condemnation. Increased enforcement did raise the risks for captains, but merchants' successes in litigating seizures in the admiralty courts encouraged the trade to continue.<sup>162</sup>

How much the trade through Monte Christi swayed the economy one way or the other is unclear. The number and diversity of ships from different colonies made for a volatile market whose prices were constantly in flux based on momentary spikes and collapses in demand that were driven by an equally diverse set of circumstances. French colonies during the war were more eager to trade with American merchants who supplied them with critical provisions like flour, than they were with British West Indian merchants who

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<sup>162</sup>Tyler, *Smugglers & Patriots*, 29–32.



were importing dry goods and exporting indigo.<sup>163</sup> With mixed cargos arriving, the discrete makeup of any individual cargo could spell the difference between success or failure. Cash flow from the sales of these goods in the islands was used largely to buy French molasses.

All of which assumed one actually made it to market. Writing in November, 1759, from Monte Christi to Rhode Island merchant Christopher Champlin, captain W. Grant reported, "There is now in the Roade about 45 sail and eight or ten Ready to sail, so we have a prospect of very good Times. Markets Rises and produce falls at a prodigious Rate, in particular Mollasses which is to be got now for 19 ps. 8/8. The Brigg Hawk from Antigua has Taken two Sloops and a Snow outward Bound and Carried them to port, which I believe will be attended with very Bad Consequence in case their are Condemned, as there is two or three more here and only Waite to hear of the fate of those already Carried to port, before they begin to make Reprisals."<sup>164</sup> Grant's note suggests that the market could hinge on whether or not captains perceived that they were at risk -- not necessarily risk of seizure as much as risk of condemnation and loss of cargo in Jamaica. As noted, naval captains were forced to prosecute their claims in court, but it was usually the merchant and his legal representative that provided the defense, not the smuggling captain. Naval captains were not guaranteed of success, which hinged on their own understanding of the law, the success of a professional legal defense, and the

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<sup>163</sup>Pares, *War and Trade in West Indies, 1739-1763*, 357.

<sup>164</sup> W. Grant to Christopher Champlin, November 28, 1759, as published in *Commerce of Rhode Island 1726-1800 Vol. 1*, 1; 1726–1774:79.

tendencies of the local court. That combination of factors contributed to the risk assessment of captains with a vessel full of contraband, and added to the myriad other factors in considering what they carried as well as when and where they sailed.

Trade continued despite the volatility of the circumstances. Despite British efforts at shutting down Monte Christi as well as the Dutch neutral trade through St. Eustatius, illicit trade continued. In part, this was a willingness on the part of mariners to sail even when they risked seizure.

### **Flags of Truce**

The exchange of prisoners in wartime necessitated sending ships carrying those prisoners to enemy ports. This was achieved under a "flag of truce," which allowed a non-military vessel to arrive at a port, discharge prisoners, and depart without fear of being held captive. For British North American and French colonial merchants, however, this system also offered a means of reaching lucrative ports for trade that were off limits during wartime, under the guise of dropping off prisoners. As a technique for illicit trade, flags of truce became notoriously popular, vexing British authorities who were trying to reign in trading with the enemy.<sup>165</sup> A letter on board signed by a colonial governor or other customs representative was designed to serve as a permit to sail, while also providing proof of how many prisoners were on board, along with the number of crew and amount

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<sup>165</sup> Pares, *War and Trade in West Indies, 1739-1763*, 389, 446–52.

of provisions to feed the ship's complement for the voyage.<sup>166</sup> However, colonial officials were frequently willing to issue false or specious documents, and mariners would also keep the permits on board at length, conducting multiple voyages under the protection of one Flag of Truce letter.<sup>167</sup> Deputy Governor William Denny of Pennsylvania, for instance, became particularly well known for selling Flag of Truce letters to merchants trading from Philadelphia to the islands. Officials like Denny helped spread out the opportunities for such trade as well, by dividing up prisoners to be returned into groups of as little as a single prisoner on an outgoing ship. Frequently, none were on the return trip.<sup>168</sup>

Relative to other smuggling strategies, flags of truce offered a logistical simplicity. British vessels were able to cut out the middlemen in neutral ports, going right to the French islands that wanted their produce. At the same time, the voyage itself was simplified. Evasion came in the form of documentation that could be presented in the case of a boarding, rather than the more arduous task of sailing hundreds of miles out of the way to avoid the prospect of being boarded in the first place. In one eighteen-month period between 1747 and 1748 (during Queen Anne's War), 60 ships were reported to

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<sup>166</sup>See example affidavit of Flag of Truce from William Read for Thomas Remington, captain of the schooner Wind-Mill, *Commerce of Rhode Island 1726-1800 Vol. 1*, 1; 1726-1774:78.

<sup>167</sup>William Smith McClellan, *Smuggling in the American Colonies at the Outbreak of the Revolution: With Special Reference to the West Indies Trade* (Department of Political Science of Williams College, 1912), 50.

<sup>168</sup>Beer, *British Colonial Policy, 1754-1765...*, 90-91.

have sailed from New England to the French islands under flags of truce.<sup>169</sup> John Bannister, a merchant in Newport, Rhode Island, made numerous voyages under flags of truce, heading to a variety of Spanish and French ports that included Monte Christi and the Bay of Honduras.<sup>170</sup>

Wartime pressures on other sources of supplies made this trade particularly lucrative for the Americans.<sup>171</sup> If the merchant were found to have been trading in the enemy port, the ship and cargo could be condemned, but it appears from records of seizures that there was rarely substantive punishment for the captain and crew if they were seized.

In the summer of 1758, Captain Paul Tew, in command of Nicholas Brown's brigantine, *Prudent Hannah*, was seized by the British warship *Chesterfield* off the coast of Virginia while en route from Rhode Island to Hispaniola under a flag of truce. Having escorted a English squadron to the Chesapeake Bay from England, *Chesterfield*, under the command of Julian Legge, was conducting a patrol off the American coast looking for both enemy vessels and other ships ostensibly breaking trade laws.<sup>172</sup> This was a lucrative pursuit in that Legge stood to receive a portion of the value of seized ships and goods in the form of prize money.

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<sup>169</sup>Barrow, *Trade and Empire*, 161.

<sup>170</sup>Desrosiers, *John Banister of Newport*, 53.

<sup>171</sup>Pares, *War and Trade in West Indies, 1739-1763*, 356,388.

<sup>172</sup> George Reese, "A Case of 1758 in the Vice-Admiralty Court of Virginia," *The Virginia Magazine of History and Biography* 89, no. 4 (1981): 406.

On board *Prudent Hannah* were fifteen French prisoners being returned to Port Au Prince with the expectation of exchanging them for English prisoners held there. Also on board, however, was a substantial load of cargo. Tew's bill of lading showed only five barrels of pork and 30 barrels of flour, presumably a legitimate amount for the sustenance of the crew. However, in the hold of the *Prudent Hannah* were 47 barrels of flour, 37 of beef and pork, hogsheads of fish, firkins of butter, bread, and 1,000 bunches of onions.<sup>173</sup> This was considered by Legge to be clear evidence that Tew was planning to use the proclaimed prisoner swap as an excuse to do a substantive amount of trading with the enemy in violation of the law.

The ship was taken to Williamsburg, Virginia in Chesapeake Bay where Tew wrote to Brown of his predicament. Brown immediately sent back letters of credit to cover Tew's expenses and promised that the firm would defend against the charges. Tew had initially pleaded with Legge to return him to a New England port such as Providence, where undoubtedly he felt he would have a more receptive audience with a local judge who would have been familiar with the Browns.<sup>174</sup> In less sympathetic Virginia, however, the ship and cargo were condemned, taken by the court and ordered to be sold off.<sup>175</sup>

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<sup>173</sup>Matthew Parker, *The Sugar Barons: Family, Corruption, Empire, and War in the West Indies*, Reprint edition (New York: Walker Books, 2012), 306.

<sup>174</sup>Paul Tew, "Capt Paul Tew to Nicolas Brown, Re: Seizure of the Brigantine 'Prudent Hannah'" (letter, n.d.), Box 674, Folder 2, Nicholas and John Brown Co. Archive, John Carter Brown Library.

<sup>175</sup>"Dateline: Williamsburg," *Boston Evening-Post*, October 7, 1758.

Tew argued in court that he held legitimate paperwork from Rhode Island that authorized his voyage and its authenticity. His argument was rejected by the court. Despite the loss of the ship and cargo, Tew and his crew returned to Providence.

Tew's success with getting credit from his merchant shipowner indicated the firm's confidence at the time that they would be able to recover their assets as well as protect their employees. However, their treatment in Virginia also exposes the regional distinctions that occurred among Britain's North American colonies.

Common law courts as well as admiralty courts could hear seizures like that of the *Hannah*, but each of those courts faced different local pressures on their decisions that affected how they were likely to decide. The common courts favored the merchants, but only local merchants. Vice-Admiralty courts, like the one in Virginia that Tew was facing, were expected to be more resistant to local pressure, but even those courts' officers were living locally in the colonies and subject to the mores of that community.<sup>176</sup> For a Rhode Islander like Tew in Virginia, his chances in either court were diminished. It is understandable that he pleaded for return to a court in New England. Tew was shocked and exasperated by the attitude he received from Legge of the *Chesterfield*, who denounced Tew as a traitor to his country, a response that indicates the degree to which smuggling mariners were able to mentally divorce attitudes about allegiance from the business of trade that was operating outside that allegiance

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<sup>176</sup> For a detailed review of the differences between the courts and their influences on trade, see Ubbelohde, *The Vice-Admiralty Courts and the American Revolution*.

A Flag of Truce for a vessel whose cargo was intended for trade rather than the consumption of the crew and prisoners on board essentially constituted a false set of paperwork attesting to the legitimacy of the cargo, which ostensibly prevented outright seizure during times of war for vessels that were trading with the enemy. However, on their return to the colonies, those ships faced a secondary issue regarding the cargoes coming back to the North American colonies that had to face the scrutiny of British customs officials. Captains then faced either outright seizure for illicit cargo, or faced steep duties that could render cargos less profitable, if at all. One solution to this was to seek out false paperwork verifying the cargo on board as being British.

Fraudulent clearance paperwork was particularly easy with the bulk of cargo being brought back to New England from the French and Dutch colonies of the Caribbean. Sugar and molasses made up much of the cargo coming into New England from the Caribbean, and getting paperwork saying it was the product of a British sugar producing colony like Barbados was made easier by the homogeneous nature of the commodity.<sup>177</sup> As long as the captain was able to pay an official ashore to generate the paperwork, it would be difficult to impossible for customs authorities at the receiving port to specifically discern the origin of the sugar or molasses. As in other situations, the shifting imperial controls over the islands appears to have contributed to the ease with which captains were able to obtain fraudulent paperwork.

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<sup>177</sup> Shepherd and Walton, *Shipping, Maritime Trade and the Economic Development of Colonial North America*, 229.

### **Arrivals and the Complicit Actors Ashore**

The Flag of Truce phenomenon indicates the degree to which smuggling mariners were able to conduct their trade with the participation of complicit officials ashore.

Notwithstanding condemnations of vessels like the *Hannah*, it appears that many traders were able to secure illicit Flags of Truce and make successful voyages. And in the event they were caught, many mariners successfully relied on courts that defended their practices. Alliances with shoreside conspirators and assistants was not unique to Flags of Truce, though.

Through complicit customs officials, and inshore mariners with support vessels, smuggling mariners were able to get contraband ashore, particularly on the North American receiving end once efforts at enforcement ramped up after the end of the Seven Years War. Smaller fore-and-aft rigged vessels were able to maneuver against the wind, but needed mariners on board who were comfortable with sailing into tight sounds, bays, and harbors where the space to maneuver and get out to safer, deeper water in the event of a problem were limited. But the problem with smaller locales was that they often lacked the infrastructure to unload cargo. Without a wharf to sail up to, even small vessels were obligated to lighter cargo ashore in small boats. The average coastwise merchant vessel had neither the crew manpower nor the boats to do this on their own, so help from ashore was necessary.

Transferring cargo to small, very localized craft also provided potential cover for that cargo in port. But success at this ruse required local mariners who could pull it off. The nature of the small boats used for transporting cargo to shore was such that these vessels



were locally owned and operated, as they could not either be transported over land or sailed any great distance. In addition to being willing to conspire with smugglers, those local boat owners needed to be intimately familiar with the coastal geography where cargo was being brought in. Alternatively, or sometimes in conjunction with this the assistance of these local transports, smugglers needed to find a local customs official willing to overlook this activity and/or provide appropriate clearance paperwork. Customs officials in small towns, where local circles of people were smaller and smuggling's contributions to the local economy were larger, were more likely to be enticed in participating in illicit clearances.<sup>178</sup>

In the 1760s, as revenue cutters and naval vessels began patrolling the areas around major ports and harbors, smugglers were forced to make more aggressive use of their local knowledge to get to places. In 1765, Captain Abraham Whipple (later of Gaspee fame) received very specific directions from his employer and from the ship's owner, Nicholas Brown of Providence, Rhode Island. Returning to Narragansett Bay from Surinam, Whipple was told to explicitly avoid passing by the port of Newport at the mouth of the Bay, where customs officers were stationed. Instead, Brown provided Whipple with several contingency options depending on the weather and the ship's possible detection.<sup>179</sup> All of these options demanded that Whipple have a sound knowledge of the passages of the bay, their tides and currents, and other hazards.

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<sup>178</sup>Barrow, *Trade and Empire*, 141.

<sup>179</sup> Nicholas Brown & Co. to Abraham Whipple, 13 January 1765. As quoted in Peter R. Schmidt and Stephen Mrozowski, "Documentary Insights into the Archaeology of

Compounding Brown's concern was the rapidly changing level of enforcement that merchants were experiencing. Smugglers had been regularly landing cargo at Conanicut Island in the middle of the Bay across the passage from Newport, but Brown was uncertain how much the situation would have changed by the time Whipple arrived. So instead, he instructed Whipple to either sail up the western passage into Narragansett Bay, on the other side of Conanicut Island from Newport, or up the Sakonnet River to the east of Newport. Either way, he was to proceed as quickly as possible directly to Providence. If weather prevented Whipple from being able to sail up either passage, he was to send his mate ashore as a messenger.: "...Lett your mate Mr. Hopkins on Shore to proceed to us as fast as possible, not stopping for Nite nor foul weather nor telling no person from wenth he Come and we will meet the Brig in schows and as many hands as needful to unload."<sup>180</sup>

The use of scows - flat-bottomed barge-like boats - was common for transferring cargo from ships to shore as well as transporting cargo from point to point within sheltered inland waters like Narragansett Bay. Scows were simple to build and utilized by coastal residents for a variety of purposes.<sup>181</sup>

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Smuggling," in *Documentary Archaeology in the New World*, ed. Mary C. Beaudry (Cambridge University Press, 1993), 38.

<sup>180</sup> Nicholas Brown & Co. to Abraham Whipple, 13 January 1765. As quoted in Peter R. Schmidt and Stephen Mrozowski, "Documentary Insights into the Archaeology of Smuggling," in *Documentary Archaeology in the New World*, ed. Mary C. Beaudry (Cambridge University Press, 1993), 38.

<sup>181</sup> For a history of scows and related designs, see Howard I. Chapelle, *American Small Sailing Craft: Their Design, Development and Construction* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1951).

If weather stymied Whipple from getting up the bay, the success of Brown's operation would have depended on his ability to call upon a network of local boats, manned by experienced crew capable of sailing the boats and doing the work, but also discreet enough to be trusted with the furtive operation. That Brown felt comfortable being able to muster such resources if necessary suggests that merchants did indeed rely upon a wide network of local mariners to support their smuggling operations at the receiving end.

Waddell Cunningham in New York also had access to a similar such a network in Long Island Sound.<sup>182</sup> But in the vague scheduling of sailing ships, attempting to orchestrate a clandestine offshore meeting was still difficult at best, as noted by the arrival of the ship *Prince of Wales* in July 1756. In a series of detailed letters beginning in May, Cunningham provided directions to several different contacts in Long Island Sound, New York and Philadelphia – laying out instructions and contingency plans. His letters included numerous missives to Capt. John Nealson of the *Prince of Wales*, who presumably would have already been on route across the Atlantic. Exactly where he dispatched these letters and how he hoped they would reach Nealson remain unclear from the text of the letters as recorded in firm's letterbook.

On May 29, Cunningham wrote to Nealson, informing him that officers were actively seizing cargo. His instructions were to have Nealson send word as soon as he arrived in the colonies and Cunningham would "send up Sloops to take in Our goods & proceed

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<sup>182</sup> Truxes, *Letterbook of Greg & Cunningham, 1756-57*, 2001.

with them to Philadelphia Where I am well informed they may be lodged with Safety.”<sup>183</sup>

Cunningham was fearful that the Customs Service officials were acting more aggressively throughout New England and suggested that Nealson may be better off entering in North Carolina. This contingency suggests that the reach of Cunningham's network of smuggling accomplices extended well beyond the Long Island-Philadelphia corridor in which the firm seemed to usually operate. It is doubtful that Cunningham would have been prepared to transfer the cargo overland back to New England, but rather that Charleston served as an alternative market for contraband goods or that another coastwise vessel could return the cargo.

Consequently, Cunningham's direction also points to the importance of inter-colonial trading sloops as participants in trans-shipping smuggled goods among the North American colonies. Sloops (small fore-and-aft rigged vessels with a single mast and often a crew of fewer than a half-dozen) arriving from the southern colonies would not have raised the suspicions of the customs officers in New York or Philadelphia, ostensibly making the effort of the additional shipping worthwhile to merchants like Cunningham.

That same day, he wrote to John Lloyd, a boat captain in Stamford, Connecticut. Lloyd owned two sloops, but also served as a preventive officer for the British Customs Service. Preventive officers were assigned to smaller towns between the major ports of entry. They had the authority to clear in and clear out coasting vessels in inter-colonial trade,

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<sup>183</sup> Waddell Cunningham to Capt. John Nealson, master of the snow Prince of Wales, May 29, 1756, as published in Truxes.

but the specific goal of the role was thwarting the landing of illicit goods in those towns.<sup>184</sup>

Cunningham instructed Lloyd to expect Nealson on the *Prince of Wales*, and made clear in no uncertain terms that Lloyd would be taken care of. "I has her entirely under you care & as you direct the Captain, he will proceed," Cunningham wrote. "What money you may want let me know as soon as you can, & I shall send it, & I shall do as handsomly for you & your officers as any that has been yet with you."<sup>185</sup>

This promise of a payoff better than "any that has been yet with you" to not only Lloyd but an untold number of his officers suggests that Cunningham had leveraged this connection before. The collusion of small town customs officers like Lloyd was another link in the network that allowed merchants to safely enter contraband goods. In such towns, customs work was not a full-time position and officers frequently owned their own boats or also worked as captains aboard other boats. As in the case of Lloyd, they may not have only just looked the other way, but also actively participated in getting contraband goods distributed ashore. Joseph Chew in New London, Connecticut, was another merchant who doubled as a local customs official and smuggler.<sup>186</sup> On July 7, Cunningham wrote to Chew, imploring him to assist Nealson by intercepting the *Prince of Wales* in Long Island Sound and helping Nealson safely deliver his illicit cargo. "For

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<sup>184</sup> Barrow, *Trade and Empire*, 78.

<sup>185</sup> Waddell Cunningham to John Lloyd, Stanford, May 29, 1756. As published in Truxes, *Letterbook of Greg & Cunningham, 1756-57*, 2001, 131.

<sup>186</sup> Truxes, *Defying Empire*, 41–42.

Godsake, dont neglect to keep the Boats out & to make them pursue the Vessel till they can come up with her," Cunningham wrote.<sup>187</sup> Here, Cunningham was explicitly looking to a local customs officer to provide the same type of underway offloading to scows that Brown had anticipated using with Whipple.

Two weeks later, despite apparently receiving assurances from Lloyd, Cunningham wrote another cautionary note to Nealson, warning him of regular seizures and providing more detailed instructions on how to specifically evade the authorities. "You must be upon your Gard to let no Boats Board your Vessel, & if you find any danger at Stamford after Landing the goods on freight, proceed directly with our own Goods into Philadelphia River &, without stopping, go within Ten Miles of the Town & send A Letter to Messrs. Scott & McMichael who will be prepared to dispatch you."<sup>188</sup>

John Scott and John McMichael were an Irish firm in Philadelphia that regularly worked with Cunningham receiving goods and organizing shipments.<sup>189</sup> Whether Scott and McMichael themselves would have come out to meet Nealson, or whether the firm would have hired local boatmen to transfer cargo from the *Prince of Wales* is uncertain.

But even this contingency plan did not appear to soothe Cunningham's fears. By the next day, he was writing yet again to Chew, this time letting him know that Captain William

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<sup>187</sup> Waddell Cunningham to Joseph Chew, New London, July 7, 1756, as published in Truxes, *Letterbook of Greg & Cunningham, 1756-57*, 2001, 168.

<sup>188</sup> Waddell Cunningham to Capt. John Nealson, Captain of the snow Prince of Wales, June 14, 1756 as published in Truxes, 137.

<sup>189</sup> See Waddell Cunningham to John Scott and John McMichael, August 9 1756, and August 13, 1756 for additional examples of agreements between them. Truxes, 192, 194.

Dobbs was being sent in a sloop to interdict Nealson and guide the *Prince of Wales* to a landing spot safe from seizure. Two weeks later, he wrote to Captain Charles Stewart, yet another sloop owner, directing him to attempt to locate the *Prince of Wales* as well, take on cargo and deliver it to Scott and McMichael in Philadelphia.

Later letters suggest that Nealson did arrive in New London on about July 21, and managed to offload cargoes to various places with several different merchants and contacts that prevented anything from being seized by authorities.

As this chapter demonstrates, smugglers employed a variety of tactics to successfully transport contraband cargo successfully to market. The routes they chose relied on solid understandings of the waters in which they were sailing and the skill to navigate and maneuver through those waters. The ports of departure and arrival that they chose relied on geographical knowledge as well as the ability to connect to networks of complicit actors who could provide cover in the form of paperwork, or in the form of surreptitiously landing contraband cargo in small towns away from more diligent customs officials.

Honing these diverse methods and adapting those methods to changing circumstances over time made smugglers a unique qualified subset of colonial mariners.

## CHAPTER 5

### CAREER TRAJECTORIES

The career trajectories and family relationships of the smuggling mariners reflect the complex nature of the mariner as a skilled international conduit while also a locally grounded and often deeply connected member of his community. This combination of factors led to mariners having allegiances and career paths that were more in line with what benefitted themselves and their immediate communities, rather than what benefitted the British Crown or its colonial authorities - two sets of objectives that were often not aligned. The mariner who was trading with the enemy one year, could the next year become a privateer taking enemy ships as prizes for the Crown. Often these shifts were driven by changes in opportunity for better or worse. Similarly, when opportunities arose ashore, mariners frequently translated their unique mix of maritime skills and commercial networking into later life careers back in the communities they came from.

When Paul Tew's ship *Prudent Hannah* was seized by the British off the Chesapeake for carrying a full load of cargo to the French Caribbean under a Flag of Truce, he seemed the indignant, unrepentant smuggler. But just a year before, Tew had been commanding a sloop out of Providence that had participated with two other privateers in seizing a French privateer laden with cargo.<sup>190</sup> Tew was clearly someone motivated by

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<sup>190</sup> "Boston." *Boston Evening-Post* (Boston, Massachusetts), no. 1157, October 31, 1757: [3].



opportunity, but by 1761, Tew had taken a up a more landbound life, having begun serving as Sheriff of Providence County.<sup>191</sup>

In that position he was responsible for handling the sale and disposition of property seized by privateers.<sup>192</sup> As such, he made a percentage of the assets that were sold and distributed. While his primary motivation for moving to a life onshore is unrecorded, his pursuit of condemnations could not help but be colored by his own experience at the hands of authorities. He also served as the commissioner for several insolvent estates and bankruptcies.<sup>193</sup> By June, 1777, he had retired and moved to Woodstock, Connecticut, where he died on August 3, 1784.<sup>194</sup> Tew serves as another example of a mariner who had developed a reputation locally and was able to translate that reputation to a position of affluence and authority ashore that also leveraged his skill set and cemented his role in the community. In Tew's case, it is likely that his late life retirement to Woodstock was driven by the presence of a daughter living there.

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<sup>191</sup> Diary of Thomas Vernon, as published in *Rhode Island Historical Tracts* (Sidney S. Rider, 1879). 100.

<sup>192</sup> "Advertisement for Sale of Prize Ship *Eagle* and Cargo", *Providence Gazette*, August 31, 1776, as published in United States Naval History Division, *Naval Documents of the American Revolution: American Theatre: Aug. 1, 1776-Oct. 31, 1776. European Theatre: May 26, 1776-Oct. 5, 1776* (Naval History Division, Department of the Navy, 1972). 316.

<sup>193</sup> "Advertisement." *Boston Gazette* (Boston, Massachusetts), no. 217, May 28, 1759: [3]. "Advertisement." *Providence Gazette* (Providence, Rhode Island) IV, no. 166, March 14, 1767: [4].

<sup>194</sup> Rhode Island, *Act and Resolves At the General Assembly of the State of Rhode Island and Providence Plantations ... July, 1776-Oct. 1800*, v. 2 1777 (J. Carter, 1777). 22

William Dobbs, captain of the sloop *Liverpool*, whom Cunningham had implored to intercept the *Prince of Wales* in 1756, is another mariner who was able to translate his international experience and ties to the maritime community into a coveted local position that leveraged his deep local knowledge. Dobbs conducted voyages to the West Indies in the 1750s as well as being involved in the coastal trade throughout the 1760s. According to shipping news reports, Dobbs had already been captain of *Liverpool* in 1754, two years before his service to Cunningham, and sailed the ship to Jamaica.<sup>195</sup> He later became a channel pilot for the port of New York and conducted reconnaissance for George Washington during the American Revolution, two positions that testify to his mastery of the local coastline and waterways as well as his support for the Revolution.<sup>196</sup>

By the mid-eighteenth century, many mariners traced their American lineage back several generations and had never even set foot in England. They were instead the progeny of other mariners and traders from whom they were developing a separate tradition of free trade throughout the Caribbean basin. George Hopkins, captain of the *Nancy*, is a prime example of the family ties and relationships among merchants in the maritime trade that gave rise to generational careers. George was one of three sons of Stephen Hopkins. A fourth-generation Rhode Islander, Stephen Hopkins had become involved in shipbuilding as partners with Nicholas Brown and Brown's brothers, and had begun trading in the

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<sup>195</sup>“New York Shipping News,” *The New-York Mercury* (New York, August 12, 1754); “New York Shipping News,” *New-York Mercury*, November 25, 1754.

<sup>196</sup>Truxes, *Letterbook of Greg & Cunningham, 1756-57*, 170, letter 98n1.

West Indies in the early 1740s.<sup>197</sup> In 1745, Stephen Hopkins became part owner in a privateer during King George's War. Between the 1750s and 1770s, he served four terms as governor of Rhode Island and three terms as Chief Justice of the Rhode Island Supreme Court. Despite this, he also continued to be involved with Brown in the smuggling trade throughout this period.

His son, George, born in 1739, began sailing to the Caribbean on Brown-owned vessels as a teenager. Based on portage bills for crews hired by Nicholas Brown and Co. throughout the 1750s and '60s, it appears that George worked his way up rapidly from deckhand to mate to captain by the time he was 20 years old. In 1759, he and his brother, Rufus were accused of trading with the enemy, when a political nemesis of their father publicly claimed that the brothers had been seen on separate ships delivering cargo to the French in Port-au-Prince under an illegitimate flag of truce.<sup>198</sup> Though undoubtedly true, the assertion was part of a larger, unrelated political feud and no consequential legal action took place. In May, 1761, while en route from Barbados back to Providence, George Hopkins and his ship were taken by a French privateer and later ransomed back.<sup>199</sup> At that time, he was sailing for Daniel Jenckes, another prominent Rhode Island merchant shipowner and captain. George had married into the Jenckes family. Three

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<sup>197</sup>Thomas Williams Bicknell, *The History of the State of Rhode Island and Providence Plantations* (American Historical Society, 1920), 880.

<sup>198</sup>Elisha Brown, "Providence, September 22, 1759," *Boston Gazette*, September 24, 1759.

<sup>199</sup>"New-Port, May 19," *New-York Mercury*, May 25, 1761.

years later, George Hopkins was once again sailing for the Browns on the *Nancy* to Surinam. He died at sea off the coast of Charleston, South Carolina in 1775.

Though his life was cut short at an early age, George Hopkins' experience provides evidence of the myriad international experiences in maritime trade that shaped the outlook of many similar American merchants and mariners. Raised in an environment that placed an implicit value on shipping and free trade, Hopkins both traded directly with Britain's enemy, was taken hostage by that same enemy, and violated navigation acts by smuggling from Dutch colonies. From Hopkins' perception, it would have been very hard to self-identify as a participant in a colonial relationship destined to serve the economic benefit of a distant metropole. Even if he had some economic incentive to do so, his life and interactions with French, Dutch, English, and Spanish mariners throughout the West Indies were far more likely to cause him to see himself as a citizen of a broader world. However, his father's involvement in positions of authority in Rhode Island suggest that the family saw themselves as deeply rooted in the community and invested in its long-term success and stability.

Abraham Whipple, the captain whom George Hopkins was to meet up with in Surinam, is another example of this development carried substantially further. Like the Hopkins brothers and others, Whipple had a long career as an established smuggler and mariner. Unlike George Hopkins, however, Whipple stayed alive through the American Revolution, during which time he earned the position of the first Commodore of the Continental Navy. The trajectory of Whipple's career and life also reflects the lack of any sense of imperial loyalty. Born in Providence, Whipple began sailing at an early age and led a highly successful privateering cruise in 1758. Whipple had no problem taking ships

belonging to the enemies of the empire. But his identity remained as an independent free trader operating outside the colonial constraints of empire. Whipple participated in extensive smuggling voyages for the Brown family through the 1760s, and became the leader of the *Gaspee* affair that demonstrated an early rejection of imperial authority among local vessels and crews.

Whipple's role as first Commodore of the Continental Navy and his heroics only enhanced his reputation as a patriot. He was taken as a prisoner of war, and when he was paroled at the end of the war, he anticipated returning to a maritime career made even more lucrative by the new trading environment promised by the successful revolt. Unfortunately, recession plagued Rhode Island in the immediate post-war years, and Whipple struggled to repay debts he had incurred during the war.<sup>200</sup> Ironically, despite having helped end imperial hold on American and West Indies trade, Whipple was unable to reclaim the extra-colonial status of free-trading merchant mariner that he had held for so long under colonial rule. Whipple eventually was forced by finances to relocate to Ohio in 1789 and lived out the remainder of his days as a farmer. He died in 1819.<sup>201</sup>

Ezekiel Durfey had been one of the young sailors on board the Brig *George* sailing to Surinam in 1765. Born in 1748 in Rhode Island Durfey was only 17 when he joined the crew of the brig *George*. It is possible that that was Durfey's first voyage, given the nominal privilege allotted him in the voyage. However, he was still early in a career that

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<sup>200</sup>Sheldon S. Cohen, *Commodore Abraham Whipple of the Continental Navy: Privateer, Patriot, Pioneer* (University Press of Florida, 2010), 134–37.

<sup>201</sup> *Ibid*, 155.

would be marked by multiple seizures, amid continuing efforts to ply the trades routes he learned early on. Durfey was on board the ship *Tracy* when it was seized by the British on September 14, 1780, during the height of the American Revolution. Durfey and his shipmates were sent to the Old-Mill Prison to wait out the war. In 1792, he was back to trading in Surinam.<sup>202</sup>

He was still engaged in that trade in 1796, serving as the captain of the schooner *Happy Return*. Durfey left Newport, Rhode Island for Surinam on October 2, 1796 but weather conditions caused him to seek safe harbor in the port of Demerara, Guiana. Demerara had been a Dutch colony, but when the French occupied the Netherlands in 1795, Britain sent an expeditionary force from Barbados to formally seize the the port colonies of Demerara and Essequibo. They met no resistance and control of the Dutch colony shifted to the British. This occurred just a few months prior to Durfey's arrival and it is uncertain he knew about the circumstances before deciding to land there. According to records from the U.S. Court of Claims, Durfey remained in Demerara until the Spring, then set sail to return to Newport, Rhode Island. Off of Anguilla, he and his ship were seized by a French privateer. *Happy Return* and its cargo were condemned based on the French assertion that Durfey had visited a British port, Demerara.<sup>203</sup> Durfey was initially confined in the then-French-occupied Dutch colony of Groot Baai (today's Sint Maarten),

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<sup>202</sup> "Commanders; State; Rhode Island; February; Surrinam; Captains". *Columbian Centinel* (Boston, Massachusetts) XVII, no. 15, May 2, 1792: 58.

<sup>203</sup> Greg H. Williams, *The French Assault on American Shipping, 1793-1813: A History and Comprehensive Record of Merchant Marine Losses* (McFarland, 2009), 170.

but must have been returned to Demerara by the French. He was reported to have died there in May, 1797.<sup>204</sup>

For Durfey, the Dutch colonies had become a clear extension of the American colonies, and he had developed relationships there that allowed him to continue trading successfully for many years. Relationships forged before the American Revolution continued after the establishment of the United States. Even the English occupation of Dutch Guiana did not appear to affect this trade. During his winter stay in Demerara, he traded on the account of *Happy Return*'s Seekonk, Massachusetts owner, Simeon Martin, selling his outbound cargo and acquiring a mixed cargo of sugar, rum, coffee, and cotton.<sup>205</sup> But those relationships did not protect him from enforcement of international trade restrictions by France when he was seized.

Durfey's oldest son, also named Ezekiel Durfey, appears to have continued in his father's maritime career. In September, 1799, he was preparing the sloop *Lydia* for a voyage from Providence to Rhode Island to Charlestown, South Carolina for at least the second time. In addition to offering to take passengers and freight, he advertised that he had Charlestown tobacco he wanted to sell and was looking to purchase a variety of New England agricultural produce, "Butter, Cheese, Apples, Cider, Potatoes and Oats."<sup>206</sup> Ezekiel Durfey Jr.'s pursuit of a mariner's career, despite his father's tumultuous

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<sup>204</sup> "Mortuary Notice." United States Chronicle (Providence, Rhode Island) XIV, no. 695, May 11, 1797, 3.

<sup>205</sup> Williams, *The French Assault on American Shipping, 1793-1813*, 170.

<sup>206</sup> "Advertisement." Providence Journal, and Town and Country Advertiser (Providence, Rhode Island) I, no. 38, September 18, 1799, 1.

experiences, suggests the degree to which the maritime culture and attitudes toward trade were passed on from generation to generation. However, based on his coastwise work with the *Lydia*, the younger Durfey may have chosen to avoid the hazards of the West Indies trade. At the same time, Durfey was also benefitting from a less restrictive coastwise trade that came in wake of the American Revolution.

Benjamin Wanton was another mariner whose family relationships likely influenced his decision to take to sea. Born in 1732 in Newport, Rhode Island, Wanton was the nephew of Joseph Wanton, who would later serve as governor of the Rhode Island colony during the *Gaspee* incident, similarly rose up through the ranks to captain. Both Benjamin and his younger brother, Brenton Wanton, became ship captains, but by June of 1757 Benjamin took command of a privateer, the brig *George*, being bankrolled by Rhode Island merchant, Christopher Champlin. Under Wanton's command, the *George* was extremely successful, capturing two French ships by October. Wanton went on to command another privateer, the *Defiance* in 1758 and participated with several other ships in another seizure of French ships.<sup>207</sup> Benjamin's fate is unknown, but his brother Brenton continued to sail in the West Indies trade as captain of a sloop into the 1770s.<sup>208</sup> The Wantons were another example of the ways in which local connections and roots

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<sup>207</sup> "Boston." *Boston Evening-Post* (Boston, Massachusetts), no. 1153, October 3, 1757: 4. "Portsmouth, June 16." *New-York Gazette, or Weekly Post-Boy* (New York, New York), no. 817, August 28, 1758: 2. "Advertisement." *Newport Mercury* (Newport, Rhode Island), no. 28, December 26, 1758: 3.

<sup>208</sup> Benjamin Wright to Aaron Lopez, Salamarr (Savana-la-Mar, Jamaica), April 28, 1771 as published in *Commerce of Rhode Island 1726-1800 Vol. 1*, 1; 1726–1774:365.



connected them with international trading opportunities and careers at sea that accrued to lives ashore.

While Benjamin Wanton came to specialize in privateering, no doubt lured to stay in it through the war as a result of his successes, James Duncan made the shift to privateering as a result of failure in the smuggling trade. Seized off of Jamaica in 1760, Duncan failed to secure a claim for his ship or cargo and was forced to return to New York to face the merchants who had lost so much in his venture: Metcalf Bowler and Chris Champlin. The capture and failure of the trading voyage convinced Duncan to become a privateer himself, however he was dedicated to the idea of capturing Jamaican merchants who were trading with Spain. Duncan's motivation was not service to the British economy or its navigation acts, but revenge on those who had deprived him of his success while pursuing the very same smuggling operations themselves. Duncan wrote to Bowler and Champlin that he was "truly sensible of your loss as well as my own and know of no other way to get Satisfaction but to fitt out a small Vessell against the Jamaica men who have at least 40 Sail of Vessells runing up and down to Hispaniola."<sup>209</sup> In 1762, Duncan had become captain of the privateer, *Defence*, owned by Bowler, one of the same merchants whose cargo he'd been forced to surrender two years early.<sup>210</sup>

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<sup>209</sup>James Duncan to Bowler and Champlin, New York, December 24, 1760 as published in *Commerce of Rhode Island 1726-1800 Vol. 1*, 1; 1726–1774:87.

<sup>210</sup>Robert Grieve, *The Sea Trade and Its Development in Rhode Island and Providence Plantations: With an Account of the Evolution of Travel and Transportation by Land and Water*, 1902.

Unlike Duncan and Wanton, Peter Ritto, who rose up through the ranks from Mate to Master working for the Brown family, was another coastwise mariner and smuggler who shifted to working as a privateer in wartime. In 1757, during the height of the Seven Years War, Ritto was working as a seaman on the sloop *Providence*. In April 1758, he was also named prize master on that vessel, a task in which he would be responsible for captaining captured vessels back to port under a skeleton crew.

This responsibility several years before his work with the Browns suggests that he had already begun developing skills that would propel him along on a maritime career beyond that of a seaman deckhand, but also points to his flexibility in finding work both in support of and in defiance of the Crown.

Ritto continued to work as a captain in the coastwise and West Indies trades throughout the second half of the 1760s and into the 1770s, including ongoing trips to Monte Christi, the clearinghouse for French and Spanish cargoes.<sup>211</sup> Ritto made enough through his active trading to acquire property and a home in Providence. It is unclear what role, if any, he chose to play in the Revolution; he is not listed among Rhode Island's naval or

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<sup>211</sup> "Extract of a Letter, & C." *Newport Mercury* (Newport, Rhode Island), no. 412, July 28, 1766: 3. "Shipping News." *Newport Mercury* (Newport, Rhode Island), no. 431, December 8, 1766, 3. "Shipping News." *Newport Mercury* (Newport, Rhode Island), no. 723, July 13, 1772, 3. "Shipping News." *Newport Mercury* (Newport, Rhode Island), no. 791, November 1, 1773, 3.

military participants. He died on February 23, 1786.<sup>212</sup> He was believed to have been about 66 years old, and left a moderate estate behind for his wife, Mary<sup>213</sup>

William Rhodes was another who demonstrated the ability to shift back and forth – working as a smuggling merchant mariner as well as a privateer for the Crown during the Seven Years War. From at least 1764 to 1767, he was captain of the sloop *Sally and Polly* sailing short voyages along the coast between New York and Rhode Island.<sup>214</sup> By 1768, he had developed enough coastwise expertise to share his knowledge of the approaches to Plymouth harbor, Massachusetts, as the head of a committee for the Boston Marine Society.<sup>215</sup>

From 1771 through 1774, despite the increase in customs enforcement, Rhodes had shifted from the northeast coast to the West Indies trade. In September 1772, as captain of the brig *Spywood*, Rhodes and his vessel were seized in Newport, Rhode Island upon his return from a voyage to West Indies. While Rhodes may have fought the legality of the customs claim in a common court or Vice-Admiralty Court, he also chose to file charges in Rhode Island's Superior Court against Robert Keeler, captain of the HMS

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<sup>212</sup> James Newell Arnold, *Rhode Island Vital Extracts, 1636–1850*. 21 volumes. Providence, R.I.: Narragansett Historical Publishing Company, 1891–1912, 227.

<sup>213</sup> Providence (Rhode Island) Court of Probate, Wills and Index, Vol 7, 1785-1797. 35-38.

<sup>214</sup> "Shipping News." *New-York Mercury* (New York, New York), no. 655, May 14, 1764:3. "Shipping News." *New-York Gazette, or Weekly Post-Boy* (New York, New York), no. 1269, April 30, 1767: 3.

<sup>215</sup> "Directions for Sailing in and out of Plymouth Harbour; Taken by Moses Bennet, William Rhodes." *SUPPLEMENT to the Boston-Gazette, &c.* (Boston, Massachusetts), no. 703, September 19, 1768: 2.

Mercury. Rhodes charged Keeler with trespass and for assaulting him and imprisoning him aboard his ship for 16 hours after he arrived in Newport. Rhodes' mate, Seth Wiley, filed similar charges but was apparently held on board for 12 days. The court decided in Rhodes' and Wiley's favor, charging Keeler a total of 105 pounds plus court costs.<sup>216</sup> In September, 1774, Rhodes sailed out of Rhode Island again on his way to Hispaniola.<sup>217</sup> It appears that he drowned after falling overboard during a gale on that voyage.<sup>218</sup>

Despite his unfortunate end, Rhodes' career demonstrates the nearly seamless shift from the American coastline to the Caribbean. Rhodes successfully defied customs authorities while shipping goods among both British and other West Indies colonies. At the same time, he remained ingrained in his local community, serving the Boston Marine Society with his local knowledge of the coastline he frequented for the benefit of other mariners.

This diverse sampling of the career trajectories of merchant mariners engaged in the smuggling trade demonstrates the variety of ways in which mariners were able to develop specialized maritime skills and leverage those skills for their career advancement, whether by remaining in traditional ship captain roles, serving as privateers, or translating their maritime knowledge to positions of authority and affluence ashore.

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<sup>216</sup> "Providence, March 20." *Providence Gazette* (Providence, Rhode Island) X, no. 480, March 20, 1773:3.

<sup>217</sup> "Shipping News." *Newport Mercury* (Newport, Rhode Island), no. 837, September 19, 1774: 3.

<sup>218</sup> "Providence, Feb. 18." *Newport Mercury* (Newport, Rhode Island), no. 859, February 20, 1775: 3.

## CONCLUSION

When George Hopkins accepted his duplicitous smuggling orders for the sloop *Nancy* in 1764, he was acknowledging not only a willingness to violate the British Navigation Acts, but a confidence that his own diverse skill set would see him through to success in that endeavor. He knew he would have to navigate far offshore to sail his small vessel outside the range of British patrolling naval vessels off Barbados to reach Dutch Surinam. He knew he would have to maneuver diplomatically among the merchants, traders and plantation owners of Surinam. He counted on his knowledge of the West Indies islands and their fluctuating political control to not only get his vessel to those ports, but to acquire the false paperwork he needed to carry his Dutch cargo back to the British Rhode Island colony.

Hopkins had the support of fellow captains and traders like Abraham Whipple collaborating in support of his success. Hopkins appears to have successfully landed his illicit cargo, based on the lack of any records of opposition or objection, but as Whipple's experience in Narragansett Bay demonstrated, landing cargos could often be the most arduous element of a smuggling voyage, particularly after the rise in tariffs and enforcement that followed the Seven Years War through the beginning of the Revolution.

These coastwise merchant mariners and the others depicted in this dissertation demonstrate a sophisticated set of professional skills and a complex array of social characteristics that help redefine them as participants in imperial maritime trade and in the opposition to the restrictions on that trade that accompanied the rise to revolution in the British American colonies.

New England's coastwise trading vessels were often single-masted sloops or two-masted ketches and schooners that employed nominal crews who worked together in a far flatter shipboard hierarchy than naval ships or even the larger trans-oceanic merchant ships. Every crew member's skill on deck was critical in this environment, and captains occupied a far more egalitarian position in which they were directly sharing in work and its hazards.

The captain relied on himself and his mate to practice a uniquely wide range of navigational techniques that crossed the disciplines of coastal piloting practiced by the purely inshore vessels, and ocean navigation practiced by the trans-Atlantic ships. To evade enforcement authorities, smuggling mariners were forced to be even more highly adept at mastering both arts.

The periodization of this dissertation is largely driven by the rise of the West Indies markets and the rise of smuggling to meet those markets. But this trade could not have become the lucrative, illicit pursuit that it did without the concurrent advancement in navigational sciences and the development of more maneuverable vessels able to conduct the trade over a wide range of sea conditions and circumstances. In that sense, this is not only a story of the collapse of imperial control over colonial trade, but a tangent to the history of sciences and the enlightenment as it applied to the maritime trades.

The combination of skills and attributes that made for a successful smuggler in this arena also made for something of a paradox. As their international connections and knowledge of farflung island geography and Caribbean navigation grew, the ensuing trade opportunities depended in part on their deepening affiliation with a local political

economy at home. They crafted ongoing employment and business relationships with the local merchant shipowners who they worked for. They relied on networks of support in the form of complicit customs agents and local boats to help land contraband cargo and get it to market. And they depended on intimate navigational knowledge of their own local coastlines, harbors and bays to thwart enforcement authorities when necessary. In the process, these relationships often led mariners to form even more in-depth local connections in the form of shoreside positions of authority later in their careers.

In short, the more they succeeded as illicit international traders, the more locally entrenched many of them became. And at the same time, the more they were able to successfully leverage their local assets, the greater the opportunities became for them to succeed as smugglers across an array of international colonial borders.

This paradox created a nuanced and complex demographic. Their experiences shaped their views of the world in myriad ways. They were locals with a refined international perspective and saw the Caribbean, if not the rest of the world, as their backyard and workplace. In the end, this complex relationship appears to have led many of them to side with the American rebellion against the Crown. But these mariners also demonstrate that their motivations cannot be reduced to simplistically expressed desires for freedom and liberty by an unskilled labor force. They were equally as willing to serve as privateers in support of the Crown during the Seven Years War as they were to trade with the enemies of the Crown at the same time. They were opportunists who were developing a new loyalty to localized commercial networks and relationships that trumped any allegiance to a distant metropole that many of them had never seen. They were, in that sense, crafting the beginning of a new American identity both at home and abroad decades before the

Revolution. In the process they created the roots of a maritime trade that continued to grow in operational sophistication and global reach during the decades that followed the American Revolution.



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