

Captain John C. Lowell Correspondences with Clark & Sewall

October 11 & 16, 1850



**Letters from Captain John C. Lowell to Clark and Sewall
Shipping Co., Bath, Maine, from onboard schooner John
C. Calhoun while awaiting cargo in Baltimore, Maryland**

Sewall Family Papers, Maine Maritime Museum Archive, MS22.365.24



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N.B. The *John C. Calhoun*, built, owned, and captained by men from Bath, was named in tribute to the seventh Vice President of the United States and the former senator of South Carolina, a staunch anti-abolitionist who supported a slave-based economic system throughout his political career.

Baltimore Oct 11th 1850

Mr. F Clark

Dear Sir

I arrived here last wendsday. found some freight* on board the *JC Calhoun*. Mr. Henderson says that he has engaged 100 tons of iron pipe at 84 p ton + 150 casks of coal. as much as I can judge I should think we had about \$800 freight with what we have on board. I engaged this morning 80 negroes at \$12 p head + think the prospect good for 40 or 60 more at the same rate.** the ship is to sail on the 23rd without fail + am in hopes to make freight passage money \$25.00*** perhaps more. please say nothing about my taking negroes.* if you will let me know where to write you I will keep you advised of all my proceedings while here. please write me

yours truly

JC Lowell

N.B. Captain Lowell uses periods sporadically. They have been regulated here for clarity .

***N.B. "Found some freight:"**
Captain Lowell, committed to sailing to New Orleans on the 23rd, is struggling to find enough cargo to make the voyage profitable. His solution? To take on passengers and enslaved people for transport.

****N.B.** Enslaved people were valuable cargo. It was not uncommon for Maine-built cotton-carrying vessels to transport enslaved people for domestic voyages, particularly because they made such regular stops in southern US ports.

*****N.B.** At this time, slavery had been abolished in Maine for three decades. While the domestic trade of enslaved peoples in US waters was not necessarily illegal, it would have been frowned upon back home in Maine. Lowell therefore requests that the matter be kept private.



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October 16, 1850

Baltimore Oct 16th 1850

Misters Clark + Sewall

Gentlemen

I received your favour of the 14th and was pleased to hear that my proceedings were satisfactory to you.* I have taken on on board 65 tons of iron pipe since I wrote you last + a few boxes of goods.** a boat load of pipe sunk coming round. I am in hopes they shall raise the boat so that we shall get the pipe. I am in treaty with a negro trader for 20 more negroes + think there is no doubt but I shall get them. I have been stirring Mr Henderson up a little. he doesn't stand it very well. he says he is doing all he can for the ship + thinks we will make a fair freight. for my part I am rather doubtful. I think all that will save us will be the passengers.*** I wrote you to Bath the same day that I wrote Mr Clark. you wrote Mr Clark is married + gone to the Lakes. I should think he would have a cool time of it but I hope he will have a good time. I shall write again in a few days + let you know all that is going on

Yours Respectfully

JC Lowell

***N.B.** Clark & Sewall presumably responded immediately with their approval of the transport of enslaved people aboard their ship.

****N.B.** In addition to transporting passengers, vessels could take on private goods for transport, kind of like a package delivery service.

*****N.B.** Profit from the passengers, who paid \$25 for their passage, is what will "save" the voyage from being a financial loss.

N.B. Additional letters from this collection reveal that upon arriving in New Orleans, the *John C. Calhoun* waits several weeks before loading enough cotton to make the next trip, to Le Havre, France, profitable. After informing Clark & Sewall of the size of his cotton cargo, Lowell writes: "This was the best that I could do + [I] hope it will prove satisfactory to you. The ships on the berth for Liverpool are getting no cotton + it will be some time before they get away + the fleet is increasing very fast." Cotton, an industry fueled by slavery, was such a profitable cargo that it attracted a glut of ships to southern US ports. In addition to Le Havre and Liverpool, New England mill towns such as Brunswick and Lewiston, Maine were regular destinations for cotton-carrying vessels.



*To learn more about untold elements of
Maine's maritime heritage and to see
these documents in person, visit the exhibit
Cotton Town: Maine's Economic Connections to Slavery,
on display at Maritime Museum until May 8, 2022.*



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