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The Commerce of Rhode Island with the
Southern Continental Colonies in the
Eighteenth Century*

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In few respects does the Rhode Island of to-day resemble the Rhode Island of colonial times. Many of the customs and institutions which occupied prominent places in the activities of an earlier day have now been superseded. Commerce, for instance, which was highly important to the colonial merchant has been displaced almost entirely by manufacturing; where capital was once utilized in building ships and carrying on trade, we to-day find it invested largely in mills and machinery.

*The Society of Colonial Dames' Prize Essay in American History for 1920-21. This paper is based largely upon contemporary materials drawn from the following: *The Commerce of Rhode Island, 1726-1800*, 2 vols., Mass. Hist. Soc. Coll., 7th series, vols. IX, X, 1914-1915; Newport Commercial Papers, MSS., in the library of Col. George L. Shepley, Providence; and Outward Entries and Manifests, MSS., in State Archives.

It is interesting, however, in view of the recent attempts to make the Narragansett Bay once more the scene of commercial activities, to study the early development and growth of trade in Rhode Island.

Commerce, in the eighteenth century, has somewhere been designated the "backbone" of Rhode Island in its life as a colony. Certainly in the days immediately preceding and following the Revolution, trade came to be the one central, dominating interest, and the number of prominent colonists who had no direct connection with some phase of these maritime ventures was limited. It is now recognized that, in at least three different ways, the commerce of these early colonial days had an important relationship to the later development of the colony. In the first place, from a purely financial point of view, commerce was largely instrumental in the establishment of many Rhode Island fortunes. In the second place, trade with her neighbors and with foreign countries fostered that spirit of independence in thought and action which was especially characteristic of the colony in the Revolutionary period, and has even descended to the present generation. Finally, it was out of the commercial activities of Rhode Island in colonial times that the manufacturing interests of the modern era were to spring; the foundation of the present day industrial enterprises is to be found in the maritime ventures of the colony.

There is always a tendency, in studying a particular phase of a given subject to over-emphasize its importance. This must be especially guarded against in considering the origin, nature and results of the commerce of Rhode Island with the southern continental colonies. Colonial trade in the eighteenth century was a complicated network of routes; ships doubled, redoubled and turned again on their tracks; they made triangular voyages on the slightest excuses; seldom indeed were two voyages made from and to exactly the same ports. For this reason, the trade of Rhode Island with the South cannot in any strict sense be isolated from the other phases of colonial commerce which are tangled about it; and,

consequently, an understanding of the nature of this commerce as a whole is necessary before the true importance of this relationship can be appreciated. We must have some idea of the whole before we can study subdivisions.

To comprehend the trade in its entirety, it must first be remembered that the American continental colonies were regarded by England as a part—and a rather unimportant part, as a matter of fact—of her Colonial Empire. From an economic point of view, which was the one most widely adopted in the eighteenth century, when Great Britain was dominated by the policy of mercantilism, the continental colonies were generally admitted to be far less valuable to the mother-country than the West Indian sugar-producing colonies. It is only in the light of this policy that the purpose underlying the passage of the Navigation Acts can be appreciated.

Moreover, as a part of this same economic principle, all colonies were thought of as secondary to the mother-country. The needs and the interests of the citizens at home were always the primary considerations of the British government, and it was believed that prosperity in England would naturally be reflected in the subject countries. Consequently, at least in the earlier years of the century, all the English colonies were viewed chiefly as sources of raw-materials; and it was probably not until after the American Revolution that these colonies were generally looked upon as the markets for English goods. England could see the wisdom of encouraging these colonies as sources of supplies; but, while she was fostering the development of British commerce, it was always the domestic merchants and the British-built ships which were especially favored.

The whole system of American commerce in this century, grew up with little direct encouragement from the mother country. It was remarkable, for this reason, then, that trade should become so widespread before the Revolution, and surprising that the volume of intercolonial trade should be so large. It was natural that the home country should maintain intimate relations with all of her colonial possessions

along the coast, but whatever intercourse developed between the colonies themselves was the direct result of their own initiative and individual activity. Some of the settlements along the coast were especially favored by physical conditions in the development of trade, as Charleston, Philadelphia, Newport and Boston; and these places early assumed the leadership in commercial enterprises. The West Indies had become the favorite markets for New England vessels in the latter part of the seventeenth and in the early years of the eighteenth centuries, while Charleston and Philadelphia shared the transatlantic trade with Boston. Triangular, quadrangular, and even more complicated routes became popular; vessels were sent wherever a cargo might be purchased or sold to advantage. As capital accumulated greater and more extensive voyages were made, until, by the latter half of the eighteenth century—the period which will receive the preponderance of attention in this paper—an intricate maze of trade-routes had developed.

From the point of view of Rhode Island, the commerce with the southern continental colonies was less in extent than with the West Indies and even that with European countries, throughout practically the entire century. The route from Newport to Africa to the West Indies—the famous triangular voyage—was always, after about 1730, the most popular and the most lucrative; and in the number of vessels engaged, the voyage to the Southern colonies can scarcely be compared with it. One finds difficulty, however, in compiling statistics in support of this conviction, due in the first place to the lack of accurate records, and secondly, to the fact that one leg of the voyage from Providence or Newport to a southern port was frequently extended to the West Indies—or even farther.

Moreover, Rhode Island vessels were not the only ones to visit the southern colonies. A few colonial vessels were engaged solely in going to and from the West Indies; many more were occupied in carrying rice and tobacco to Europe and the mother country; and still others, owned in Philadelphia, New

York and Boston, carried on an intermittent commerce with these southern ports. Toward the middle of the century competition was particularly keen between Newport and Boston, and, while the vessels from the latter port usually outnumbered those from the former in the principal markets of the South, such as Charleston, Newbern and Norfolk, the merchants and captains of the Rhode Island ships were generally more aggressive. It might be well at this time to point out the double aspect, or two-fold function, of this trade with the south: in the first place, the Rhode Island merchants served as collectors and distributors of local or native products; and secondly, they acted as middlemen in gathering goods to be re-exported, or in distributing goods which had already been imported. When functioning in their first capacity, the Rhode Islanders seem to have had almost a complete monopoly in their field; in their second capacity, the competition of the Boston merchants appears to have been much keener.

The rivalry of individual merchants of the same town, however, was just as effective a means of regulating the prices as the competition between traders of different colonies. No individual, in any phase of commercial activity, was, apparently, ever able to corner a market and so dictate prices; the field was too large, commerce was too complex, and the most powerful merchants were usually too far—in distance and in time—from the scene of operations. Finally, there was practically no one who was interested in only one phase of commerce; combinations of voyages and of interests (such as manufacturing and retailing as well as trade) seem to have been the rule rather than the exception in the commercial world of the eighteenth century.

The earliest beginnings of a coastwise trade from Rhode Island are difficult to trace. Certainly, voyages to Virginia and the Carolinas were fairly common by the close of the seventeenth century, for Governor Cranston in his answers to queries of the Board of Trade submitted December 5th, 1708, reported the exportation of a cargo of rum, sugar, mo-

lasses, butter and cheese to the Carolinas in 1703, and another voyage of similar type made the following year to Maryland and Virginia in which the goods carried were exactly the same except for the omission of sugar. Without doubt, this commerce developed as a concomitant to the trade with the West Indies; as vessels began more and more frequently to make trips to Antigua and the other lesser ports on these islands, the advantages of a direct intercourse with the continental colonies became more and more apparent. The six-fold increase of Rhode Island trade in general between the years of 1688-1708 was naturally reflected in this trade.

Moreover, besides the gradual development which was due to the widening of interests of the local merchants through the accumulation of capital, there were other factors which influenced the growth of this trade and caused it to occupy a fairly prominent place in Rhode Island commerce after the first quarter of the eighteenth century. For one thing, the Southern colonies were steadily becoming more and more centralized about a single staple product. In Virginia, tobacco came to be cultivated to the exclusion of all other commodities; in North Carolina, tar and lumber were most emphasized; in South Carolina, rice was most important; and later, toward the end of the century, Georgia was becoming the recognized center of the cotton-growing interests. It was natural that these plantation provinces as they ceased to be even relatively self-supporting, should turn to the northern continental colonies for supplies and provisions. That the Southerners recognized their growing dependence upon Boston and Newport is partially shown by such acts of the colonial legislatures as those of the assembly of South Carolina in 1717 and 1721 in which discriminations were made in favor of local shipping.

The development of this commercial intercourse between the north and south, however, was slow and somewhat spasmodic. Governor Johnson in 1708 reported that South Carolina in addition to a trade with England and the West Indies also had "a commerce with Boston, Rhode

Island, Pennsylvania, New York and Virginia," and a year earlier there is a record that "saddles and bridles were sent from New England [to Virginia] to be exchanged. . . . for pork, pitch, tar, wheat, Indian corn, or whatever else the country produceth." In 1732 this trade indirectly benefited by the removal of certain restrictions on the exportation of rice from the Carolinas, and it is fairly certain that by 1735, when the famous triangular voyages were becoming popular, the trade with the southern provinces was firmly established. Nevertheless, compared with the commerce with other places, it was still rather insignificant, for, in 1747, the amount of rice exported to Europe was nearly eighteen times the amount carried to the northern colonies, and even the exports to the West Indies were approximately four times as great as those to all the other colonies in America. The ratio between the number of vessels employed, however, was not as high; 86 ships were bound out of Charleston for Europe during the year to 48 for the northern colonies. Moreover, before accepting these figures as a criterion, it should be remembered that there were other conditions involved not taken into account in these statistics; that only a small percentage of the New England trade was centered in Charleston, while, on the other hand, the great bulk of the English trade with the southern continental colonies was with that port; and that this estimate does not include the illegal trade which even by this time was already flourishing.

The period from the middle of the century to the beginning of the Revolutionary War saw the greatest development in this trade, though it was interfered with, in part, by the increase in privateering during the wars with France and Spain which not only withdrew many ships from the coastwise trade, but also made commerce of any sort dangerous. The restraints upon commercial enterprises, however, resulting from the scarcity of capital before this time, were being raised by means of a multitude of successful maritime ventures with their accompanying profits; and the immigration to Newport of some sixty families of wealthy Portuguese

Jews after the great earthquake in Lisbon in 1755 still further lessened the number of voyages which had to be cancelled for financial reasons. Among these arrivals from Lisbon seems to have been the Lopez family, which was destined to become widely known through its activity in the commercial field. Trade between Rhode Island and the southern colonies was reasonably free from the restrictive regulations of the mother country, and as Weeden points out, "rarely did any colony break the course of this magnificent interchange by any foolish acts of legislation." In 1764 there were some 252 vessels engaged in the coastwise trade of Rhode Island from Newfoundland to Georgia, the great preponderance of which was with the South. This is the more remarkable, inasmuch as there was a general depression in trade during that year, due to the fact that Parliament then for the first time attempted to raise an appreciable revenue in America. With the more stringent enforcements of the old Molasses Act in 1763, and with the passage of measures providing additional duties in the following year, and of the Stamp Act in 1765, trade began to dwindle. George Champlin wrote his brother Christopher, the Newport merchant, from Baltimore, October 29th, 1765, that "Markitts are Extreame low principally Accation'd by the Stamp Acct, as there are a number of Vessels here a driving to load by the time the Acct takes place, selling their Cargoes at any rates which has nock'd down the markitts to nothing." The depression was neither lasting, nor very severe, however, for in 1769 Newport was flourishing; at this time the town was said to be at the height of its prosperity. Providence, during this same period was second in size and in commercial activity to the port at the foot of Narragansett Bay, but her merchants and shopkeepers were laying the foundation in trade and manufacturing so well that it was to be only a few years before she surpassed her rival.

The Revolutionary War had a most pronounced effect upon Rhode Island commerce; it was necessarily almost wholly suspended. The interruptions of trade occasioned by the occupation of Newport harbor by the British fleet, and by the cap-

tures by enemy privateersmen, interfered decidedly with the hitherto comparatively steady supply of products from the southern colonies. One positive effect which the war did have, however, was to bring the foreign commerce of Rhode Island under French influence. Hitherto transatlantic trade had been largely confined to England and the Mediterranean ports, but after the Revolution voyages were made to more distant markets; for it was at this time that commerce with China and the East Indies began to develop. Offices of American merchants were opened in France, due chiefly to the appreciation of the services rendered by the soldiers of that country during the War, not only in Rhode Island, but in the other colonies as well.

After 1783, the coastwise trade was resumed again much as before the War, and it was not long before it was practically as great in volume as it previously had been. The bulk of the commerce, however, was beginning to shift to New York, and, though trade with the southern colonies was once more sufficient to merit serious attention, it was not proportionately as large when compared to the trade as a whole. In 1786, by which time the coastwise trade was once more normal, there were 272 clearances registered from the port of Providence. Of these, 33 vessels signified their intention of going to some southern market, 32 were bound for Connecticut, and 44 had New York for their destination. Probably these figures included a number of duplicate voyages; two vessels were each listed several times as they made periodic trips to New York, and at least one other ship of 19 tons was making regular visits to Norwich, Connecticut. Moreover, it is not too much of an assumption to include approximately one-third of the vessels which cleared for New Jersey and Connecticut during the year, in the number which ultimately reached the Southern markets, making about forty odd vessels in all. This figure does not compare unfavorably with the fourteen coasters which Moses Brown reported as belonging to the port of Providence in 1764, but it must be remembered that the increase in other commerce was proportionately even greater.

The outstanding feature of the trade with the South after the Revolution, which was already becoming noticeable by the close of the century was the shifting of the commercial center of Rhode Island from Newport to Providence. The population of the latter town was making rapid gains, while Newport lost more than a third of her inhabitants during the War due to the occupation of the harbor by the British. Many of the wealthy Jewish families removed to other places and failed to return after 1783. Not for thirty years, however, was the leadership of Providence to become marked; meantime Newport made a strong, though futile, effort to regain her former position in the commercial world. With the beginning of the new century, the European wars seem to have had some effect in strengthening and widening the commerce of Rhode Island, but it was not until the rise of manufacturing and the development of railroads a little later, that any notable decline in the old coasting exchange took place. In fact, this trade never did actually die out completely; to some extent, at least, the commerce with the south—but for the slight interruption during the Civil War—has survived to the present day.

The general nature of the trade of Rhode Island with the southern provinces changed very little during the entire century; the differences between the voyages themselves, the goods carried, and the markets visited, in 1700 and eighty years later were so slight, comparatively, that the subject may be considered on the whole as static, for the chief fluctuation—in volume of trade—has already received sufficient attention.

Perhaps the most outstanding feature of colonial commerce, and the one which most appeals to the modern reader, concerns the nature of the ships themselves, and this may well be studied first. The kind of vessels employed was primarily determined by the nature, or physical conditions, of the country which they visited. The southern plantation districts are broken by numerous rivers, running almost parallel to each other, up

which it was almost impossible for large vessels to travel far. Moreover, as Joseph Boone and John Bornwell pointed out in their memorial to the Board of Trade, November 23, 1720, explaining the peculiar physiography of the Carolina coast, there also existed a "chain of sand banks with barrs so shifting and shallow that sloops of 5 feet water runs great risqs," and "this renders the place incapable of a Trade to great Brittain and what is carryed on is by small sloops from New England who brings them cloathing and Iron Wear and exports Pork and Corn." These "small sloops" of between 20 to 80 tons burden were also especially desirable because a small crew reduced the overhead expense of a voyage; small cargoes were purchased, transported, and sold with much less delay than larger ones required; and the amount of the initial capital needed to finance a small vessel and collect a cargo for her was more easily available—so that the risk of a given amount was scattered over a number of enterprises, instead of being limited to a single one, if the larger types of brigs and schooners had been used. This last factor, in particular, influenced the merchants in the early development of the trade, when money were scarce and had to be expended with great care. Usually, in a sloop of about 30 or 40 tons—which seems to have been the most popular size throughout this whole period—there would be, besides the captain, four or five or six sailors, depending somewhat on the nature of the cargo and the rigging of the vessels. The average pay in colonial currency about the middle of the century was £50 per month for a trained sailor, and £55 a month for the captain. £3 sterling for the captain, £2 sterling for the first mate, were wages frequently named in agreements.

The voyage from Providence or Newport, required on the average, from three to four weeks. Occasionally it was made in less time; more often, with shifting winds and rough weather, the time consumed was greater than this. Capt. James Brown in a letter to his brother Nicholas, dated February, 1749, wrote that he had "undergon many hardships and Difi-

culties Which I shall give you a few of the Perticulers But to Whrite the Whole It Would take a quire of Paper. I had a Passage of 31 days. . . . There is Vessels hear that have had 30-35 and 40-45 Days Passage and Vessels are Lucked for that have Been out of Boston and York six and seven Weeks." Again, in 1784, John Burgwin, a merchant of Wilmington, North Carolina, reported to Christopher Champlin of Newport, "the long and disagreeable passage I had from your place of 30 days put it out of my power to give you that early intelligence you wished to receive respecting the Cargo you depended on my house preparing for your Brigantine." Usually it required about three months to dispose of the goods brought from Rhode Island and to collect a cargo for the return voyage. If the captains were extraordinarily keen bargainers, however, two voyages might be made during a year, but the great majority of traders made only one, and that in the fall, since just after harvest time the staple products were most plentiful and generally cheapest. In 1786, for instance, November was the month during which the largest number of ships cleared for southern ports.

Though a large proportion of the Rhode Island vessels which visited the southern colonies carried on a direct barter with the plantation owners, there were, nevertheless, in each province some town which was the chief center of commercial activity for the surrounding districts. Baltimore in Maryland, Norfolk in Virginia, Wilmington and Newbern in North Carolina, Charleston in South Carolina, and Savannah in Georgia, were the principal ports south of Philadelphia. There were very few good roads, however, connecting these trade-centers with the upcountry regions, especially in the first half of the century; consequently, it was found to be more profitable for the merchant-carriers to deal directly with the ultimate consumers, or "primary producers." It was usually easier for the small sloops to sail up the rivers of the plantation country, than for the owners of the

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—T. U. Devoll '97

OLD SHOP SIGN

Formerly suspended over Waterman's Shoe-Shop on Cheapside
(now North Main Street)

The Rhode Island Historical Society will hold a loan exhibition of old signs in December. Members are requested to assist the Committee in obtaining signs for this exhibition.

and complain greatly of the decline of Trade, and say it is owing to the large Value of Cash, that is sent out of the Province for duties on Molasses, however I believe much Contraband Trade is carried on here, indeed the Kings officers durst not venture to do their duty with Strictness; they send a great deal of their returns from the West Indies to N. York for Sale, and in payment of English Manufactures sent them from that place. Their most considerable Merchants, are Mr. Joseph Wanton, Mr. Lopes, a Jew, Mr. Thurston, Messrs. Pollock and Hayes, The Beaver stood their Hatters lately from 6/6 to 7/—York Currency. One Mr. William M. Campbell an Attorney at Greenwich appeared to be the most able Speaker in the house of Assembly. One Samuel Bowers was their Speaker.

Sett off from Newport for New York in a passage Sloop, on the 15th of June, in Company with Mr. Bridges and Captain Thomson of New York, and one Mr. Monroe from Scotland; by Contrary winds and Calms, were 3 days in getting down the Sound to N. York, it was extream pleasant sailing along this Coast, and long-Island on the left, appeared like an intire Garden near it is Fisher's Island.

Commerce of Rhode Island

(Concluded from Page 110)

products to be exported to transfer them by ferry several times until they finally reached Charleston or Norfolk, as the case might be. The emphasis which the managers of the large plantations placed upon their staple product during practically this whole period preventing, as it did, these colonies from being agriculturally self-supporting, had a profound influence upon the nature of the goods which were exported from Rhode Island.

We find that the commodities which were carried from Providence and Newport to the southern markets were many and varied. Within a period of about eighteen months, for instance, the Sloop "Polly", John Martin, master, made three

trips to Virginia. On the first voyage, the "Polly" cleared out of the port of Providence, October 8th, 1785; on the second, February 3rd, 1786; and on the third, October 23rd of the same year. Out of thirty different commodities which were carried by this vessel (which was only of average size, 30 tons), only seven,—molasses, rum, butter, cider, leather shoes, chocolate and cheese—were common to each of the three cargoes. Nine other varieties of merchandise and produce were taken on two of the three voyages, as follows: candles, lime, sugar, "calves" skins, hay, potatoes, onions, cranberries and coffee. Boards, shingles, fish, beef, oil, apples, tea, axes, desks, riding carriages, cotton cards, "boots and legs", sole leather, and a hogshead and barrel of general merchandise complete the items listed in the exportations of this one vessel. The bulk of the cargo in each case was made up of rum, molasses, shoes and cheese. In addition to these articles, which, however, seem to have been characteristic of the ordinary voyage to the South, one might name flour, oats, pork, salt, cotton cloth, iron-ware, saddles, chairs, hoes, bricks, hoops and staves, medical supplies and drugs, brandy, lemons and cedar pails as products which were occasionally carried to these provinces.* The nature of the commodities sent out from Rhode Island depended upon the local merchant's surplus; or upon what the merchant believed might be most needed, and hence most readily sold, in the particular region which he was accustomed to visit.

In general, the exports of the colony were of two kinds: those which had been previously imported from England or from the West Indies; and those which were drawn from the neighboring country about Providence or Newport. The greater part of the goods carried to the southern continental colonies seems to have belonged to the former class, and the extent to which the distilling of West-Indian molasses into rum was carried on in Newport during the century shows the importance of this re-exporting business. But the purely

*Outward Entries and Manifests in State Archives.

domestic goods—chiefly agricultural products—are perhaps more interesting. It is said of Capt. James Brown of Providence that he “drew on Massachusetts and Connecticut as well as Rhode Island for his cargoes of provisions and lumber.” Candles and hemp came from the immediate neighborhood; butter and cheese were purchased from the farms of the interior of the colony; cattle and horses were frequently driven down from Worcester and Uxbridge in Massachusetts, and from Plainfield and Killingly in Connecticut; “boards, shingles, staves and hoops were collected from Taunton and Greenwich;” oil, fish and soap were brought in by sloops from Nantucket; lumber and shingles came from the shores of the Kennebec in Maine; and dry goods and ship supplies were often purchased in New York. Practically the whole of the surrounding country were called upon to supply some kind of goods or provisions to be sent to the southern colonies.

Similarly, many of the products which were imported from the southern colonies in exchange were further distributed after reaching Rhode Island. The traders, who were frequently shop-keepers and manufacturers as well, were usually careful to load their vessels for the return voyage with such products only as were most salable at home. The bulk of these cargoes naturally consisted of the staple products of the colony or colonies which they visited. In a few cases the raw materials were sent to Rhode Island, there manufactured into the finished products, which were then brought back to the southern market again. A notable example of this was the wheat which was rather frequently sent to Rhode Island from the Carolinas, only to be later returned in the form of flour. Besides wheat, other southern agricultural products which sometimes found their way to Rhode Island shops, were corn, potatoes, peas, beans, and bacon; while references to shipments of feathers, live hogs, and other varieties of stock, deer skins and ox-hides are occasionally found. The chief imports, throughout the century, however, seem to have been rice and indigo from South Carolina; tar, turpentine and

lumber from North Carolina; and flour and tobacco from Virginia and Maryland.

In addition to the numerous merchant-traders who had little capital beyond what was invested in a single vessel and its cargo—the true “peddlers” in coastwise commerce—there were a number of outstanding families who owned several vessels and carried on a regular trade. The most prominent seem to have been the Champlin and Lopez families in Newport and the Brown family of Providence. The members of these three families alone apparently controlled a major portion of the capital invested in the coastwise commerce just before the Revolution; there are records of three different sloops—the “Dolphin”, the “Richmond” and the “Industry”—all belonging to the Lopez family, setting out for North Carolina within a period of some ten days, which shows how extensive were the interests of this one group in the coastwise commerce. William Minturn, James Robinson, Philip Wilkinson, Henry Collins, Sueton Grant, John Channing and the Hopkins and Malbone brothers are some of the other names associated with the commercial activities of Newport; Stephen Dexter, Ebenezer Knight, Esek Hopkins, and the two Russells were among the best known shop-keepers of Providence. It was customary for these “entrepreneurs” in the coastwise commerce to allow the greatest freedom to their captains in the matter of selling their cargoes, and in collecting and purchasing goods for the return voyages, although many of them maintained correspondents in the chief ports of the South to look further after their affairs. For example, John Scott in Charleston occupied a similar position to that which Christopher Champlin held in Newport, and each frequently acted as the agent for the other in his respective town. Josiah Hewes in Philadelphia, Josiah Watson in Alexandria, and the firm of Burgwin, Jenkes and London in Wilmington occupied similar positions.

It was not unusual for several vessels to arrive in a single port, or district, at one time. In 1768 George Champlin re-

ported to his brother Christopher that on the same day on which he reached Charleston, a ship and a sloop from Boston and only eight days before the sloop "Scammehorne" from New York had entered the same port. Competition between these various traders was frequently keen; those who were the first to arrive naturally sought to secure for themselves the cheapest and most accessible goods, leaving the higher priced grades for the late-comers. George Champlin, whose voyages to Baltimore were quite regular during this period wrote his brother on November 30th, 1767, that he had "been 50 Miles in the back Woods Endeavouring to buy Cheaper, but all to no purpose." Most of the complaints as to the market, however, cannot be uniformly accepted at their face value; it is astonishing that any successful voyages could have been made when the number of complaints of poor markets and bad weather in the letters of these captains is considered. The situation was further complicated by the method of buying and selling in small quantities, by the general lack of means of communication, and by the instability of the markets and their decentralization. Admittedly wasteful and inefficient, the only possible excuse for existence of this system was that apparently there was no better method of trading which could be substituted. For example, Governor Burrington of North Carolina, as early as 1730 saw the disadvantages of the system of barter, and he advocated the establishment of a new town and custom house to be located on Ocacock Island, which was said to have an excellent harbor, but nothing ever came of the plan. This peculiar kind of trading, as it developed in the plantation provinces, was probably as well adapted to the nature of the country as any other which might have been devised, and it had some compensations—prices were usually kept at a minimum.

The questions of governmental protection, of insurance on vessels and their cargoes, of the influence of colonial finance, of the development of manufacturing in its relation to commerce, and of the early attempts to establish a

monopoly by the candle manufacturers, all fascinating topics, unfortunately must be omitted in this discussion of the coastwise trade.

Other matters having a more or less vital influence upon the coastwise trade can only be superficially pointed out at this time. The rapid development of privateering toward the middle of the century had a tendency to retard all commerce for a few years; on the other hand, the popularity of smuggling acted as a stimulus to the coasting exchange. The use of tobacco, as well as rum for money on the Guinea coast brought the trade with the southern colonies into a close relationship with the triangular voyages.

In the contemporary accounts by travellers and others of the nature and extent of Rhode Island commerce in the eighteenth century, the importance of the coastwise trade seems to have been more frequently under-estimated than exaggerated. Only the Duke of La Rochefoucauld Liancourt in 1800 mentions the fact that "the coasting-trade is that which the people of this town [Newport] chiefly prefer," and "the ships from Providence carry it [barley] chiefly into the southern states, from which they bring, in return, other cargoes.

A modern consideration of the question would seem to demonstrate that this coastwise trade was of somewhat greater importance than the judgment of contemporary writers would indicate. In general, its effect seems to have been out of proportion to its volume. The partial dependence of the South upon the northern colonies made the final breaking off of relations with England during the Revolution less pronounced; and through this intercourse between the two sections, sympathetic ties were to develop which were later to bind the colonies in one unit, and to solidify them finally into a single, unified nation.