

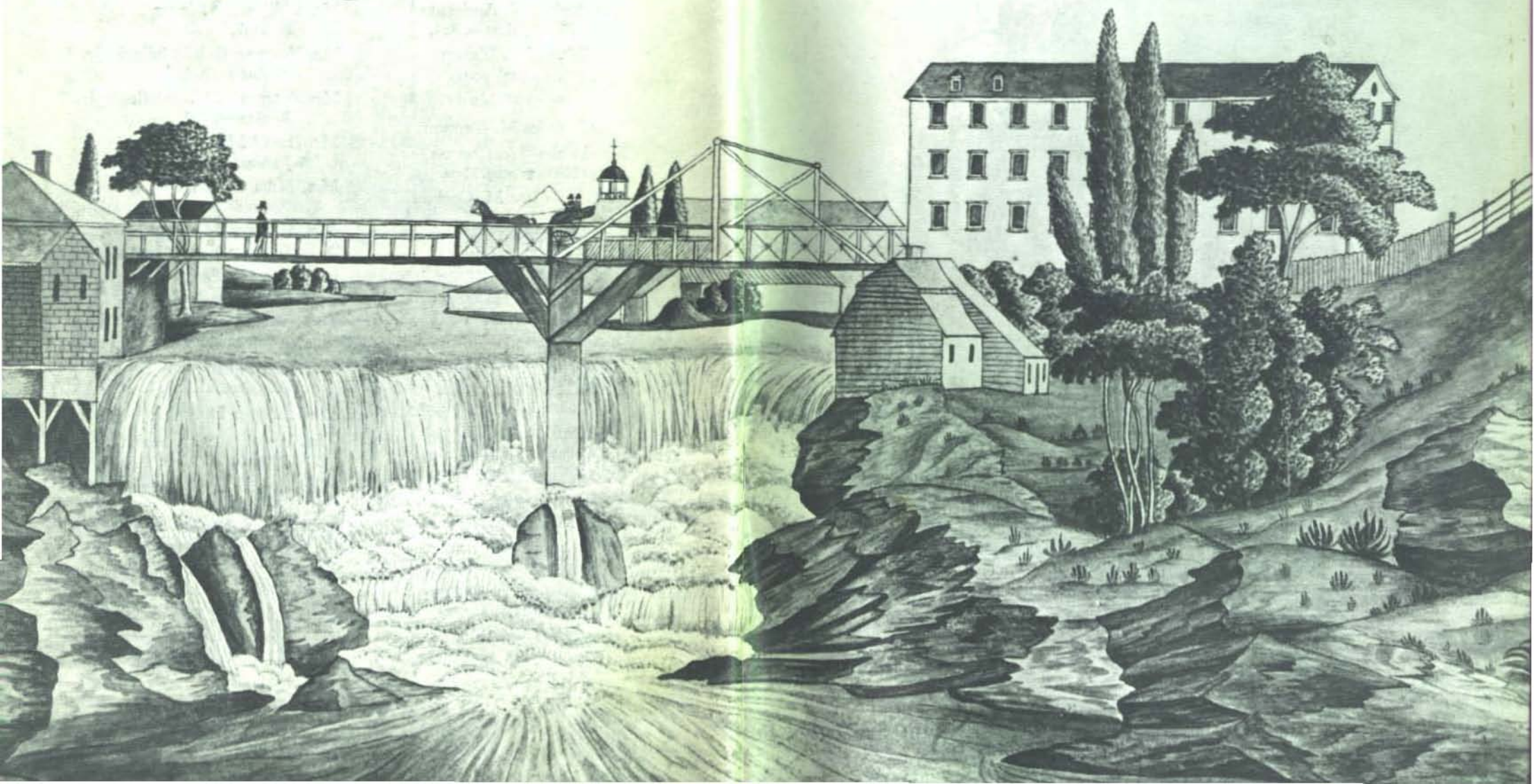
THE RHODE ISLAND HISTORICAL SOCIETY  
FIFTY-TWO POWER STREET, PROVIDENCE, RHODE ISLAND



# RHODE ISLAND HISTORY

VOL. 24, NO. 4

OCTOBER, 1965





PUBLISHED BY THE RHODE ISLAND HISTORICAL SOCIETY  
FIFTY-TWO POWER STREET, PROVIDENCE, RHODE ISLAND 02906

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## COVER

*The cover picture came into possession of The Rhode Island Historical Society by exchange from Charles E. Goodspeed of Boston on June 24, 1906, according to a notation on the back of the mount. A further notation reads, "the figures in the lower right hand corner seem to be 'D. B. 1812'. Could this refer to David Benedict of Pawtucket?" The picture seems to be a delicate water color outlined in pen and ink.*

# RHODE ISLAND HISTORY

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## THE WRECK OF THE BARK *MONTGOMERY*

transcribed by CLARKSON A. COLLINS, 3rd,  
introduction by REBECCA C. SKILLIN

### INTRODUCTION

THE MANUSCRIPT COLLECTION, known as the Congdon Papers, now in the possession of The Rhode Island Historical Society, represents one hundred years in the life of an East Greenwich seafaring family.

The collection would have value as Rhode Island and maritime history if it included only the correspondence, dating from 1811 to 1916, which creates with freshness and immediacy the interlocking lives of Captain John Remington Congdon, his father, Peleg Congdon, his wife, Cynthia Sprague Congdon, and his daughter, Mary Remington Congdon. From 1811 to 1817, there are the letters written from Providence and Apponaug by Mary Remington (1792-1820) to Captain Peleg Congdon (1785-1862), father of Captain John R. Congdon, containing long accounts of local and family news as well as war news of the British coastal blockade. Four letters to Peleg are from shipowners in Baltimore concerning the blockade, a Sidmouth license or British pass in 1813. Later, in 1837-1838, are two letters from Peleg to his son, John, concerning his career at sea besides related letters to Peleg from ship captains reporting on John's satisfactory service as ship's boy. Only one letter, dated 16 May 1812, remains of those which may have been written from Peleg to Mary Remington. It is a fine letter of nine pages describing his voyage from New York to Copenhagen as captain of the schooner *Experiment*, war conditions in Europe, seizures of American shipping, and the possibility of war between the United States and Great Britain.

The letters of Cynthia Sprague Congdon (1820-1880), wife of Captain John Congdon, although they number approximately sixty, include none to her husband. The finest of her letters, written after



1852 when she accompanied her husband, are those to her daughter, Mary, and her son, George, filled with descriptions of shipboard life of interest to children ages six and ten. Letters to her mother, Mrs. Lydia Sprague of East Greenwich, describe the social life of a captain's wife in port at San Francisco, Callao (Peru), or Valparaiso. There is a fresh, detailed account of her first trip around the Horn.

Over two hundred letters to and from Captain John Remington Congdon (1820-1863) include business correspondence, invoices of American and foreign firms with which he traded, ship's papers, letters relative to the settlement of his estate, and also personal letters from his father, children and brother, Henry Remington Congdon (1819-1883) of Providence. Outstanding are the letters written to his wife between 1844 and 1852 when she was at home in East Greenwich with the two children, or after that time, to his mother-in-law or the children, if his wife were with him. His last letter, written in journal entries, stops hours or perhaps minutes before he was swept overboard in a storm, from the clipper ship *Caroline Tucker* as it was rounding the Horn on the way to New York, 27 February 1863.

The correspondence of Captain John Congdon's daughter, Mary Remington Congdon (1842-1916), approximately one hundred and twenty-five items, is largely incoming until 1865 through 1870 when she corresponded with the German family of Amos Ferdinand Carstein (1843-1874) whom she married. Carstein, a German emigrant, was mate of the ship *Cromwell* on a voyage from Providence to Calcutta in 1870. His journal and letters to Mary are included, as are letters from James V. Dearstyne, hotel operator from Bath-on-Hudson, whom she married in 1883.

Fine as the letters are, and all of them indicate a remarkably constant level of refinement and articulate self-expression, it is upon Captain John Congdon's journals and their ship logs that the real value of the Congdon collection may be said to rest.

Beginning in 1836, when John went to sea as a ship's boy until 1854 when his wife began to accompany him, we have sixteen journals describing his life at sea. For the years 1854 to 1863, when he was captain, there are ship logs, as well as two journals kept by Mary Congdon, his daughter, for trips that she took with him in 1854 to the Bahamas and New Orleans, and in 1861 on the voyage to San Francisco, Peru and Spain.

John Congdon went to sea when he was sixteen. By the time he was

twenty years old he was serving as second mate; within the next six years he was advanced to first mate. He secured his first command two years later on the ill-fated voyage when his ship, the bark *Montgomery*, was lost in a hurricane about 300 miles east of Nantucket. If Congdon was typical of the sea captains of the time, in that he was without fear and utterly confident of his ability to handle a ship and its crew in any weather, he seems to have a most uncommon ability to observe and comment on the world about him. Motivated by a very deep attachment and affection for his wife, no trouble was too great, no event too small or of too delicate a nature to prevent his relating of it. For this reason, the journals, amplified by his occasional letters, present a full account of the training of a ship's boy, his comments on discipline, officer and crew relationships, passengers and their way of life on board, shipping news and weather. Once on shore, he has an equally precise interest in native people and customs, the scenery, or business methods. The ships on which he sailed included the bark *Index*, ship *Oneida*, ship *Albion*, the ship *Sophia*, the bark *Weybosset*, the brigs *Oriental*, *Sacramento* and *Hannah Thornton*, and at last, the clipper ship *Caroline Tucker*. Generally, he sailed out of New York, making but few voyages from Boston and Providence. The seas and the ports from which he wrote included Glasgow, Valparaiso, Callao, Canton, Boston and Calcutta, Cadiz, Gibraltar and Rio de Janeiro, Mobile and New Orleans, Singapore and Havre. He made five trips to the east and west coasts of Africa. Yet, though he wrote from the port of seven seas, his true heart and mind lay in East Greenwich, Rhode Island.

Captain Congdon made several voyages to Africa for Rufus Greene of Providence. It was on such a voyage that disaster struck the bark *Montgomery*.

#### CAPTAIN JOHN CONGDON'S JOURNALS

Tuesday, September 12th, 1848. Left East Greenwich about 5 a.m.; my Cynthia in rather low spirits. Yet I believe she mustered fortitude enough to shed before me but few tears. Still I well knew the in[er] strugglings of her bosom. I knew her secret prayers and petitions ascended up with my own for my future welfare and safe return. Our little ones were yet asleep and I awoke them not to partake of our sorrow.

I left the wharf in my little sail boat (to meet my vessel off Warwick



Neck) with a light westerly air; when near Warwick Neck saw my vessel coming down with all sail set and a light westerly wind. I soon got on board of her, say 9 a.m., and we stood down the bay. About 11 a.m. off Wickford I discharged my pilot, sent a short note to Mr. R. Greene, and I then proceeded to sea. At 1 p.m. was out clear of Rhode Island Light, a light westerly wind. At 3 p.m. Rhode Island bore say N.W. dist. 12 miles, little or no wind. At 4 p.m. took strong winds from N.N.E.; took in royals & light sails. Continued to blow fresh through the remainder of the p.m. At dark considerable sea on, wind about N.E. and strong. Stood along S.S.E.; soon lost sight of all the lights, myself some little sea sick. I retired about 9 p.m., giving orders to be called every 4 hours & the weather reported to me.

Wednesday, September 13th. 1848; Comes in cloudy and strong winds from the N.E. continued, sea getting large; vessel under whole topsails and courses, making some water. One pump tried every hour kept her free. Saw many vessels standing different ways. Found the bark in good trim considering she being so deep, as she sailed as well as any vessel we saw standing with us.

P.M. of this day wind increasing, sea growing still higher. Crowded sail pretty hard on the bark as I wished to get a good offing before the wind hauled S.E. as I was quite sure of a blow from that quarter. Vessel still leaked, increasing instead of getting tighter. Crew came aft and told Mr. Fisher in my presence they could hear the water rushing into her bows forward. Mr. Fisher went and heard it; reported to me it was so. I made but light of it as I knew that was common to many vessels.

Towards night I had the topsails double reefed, mainsail furled. I still stood S.S.E. & S.E. by S.; wind hauled about East and gale increasing, also the sea. I expected a gale yet I had all confidence in the bark. I felt perfectly safe.

Thursday, Sept. 14th. Begins cloudy again, winds about E. and a gale. A heavy sea on. Judged myself well in the Gulf Stream, water very warm; heavy seas often boarding us, filling our decks with water. Our spare parts had got washed away, several of them, and I had some of the bulwark planks knocked off to let the water off the decks, as they were often full and my deck load sometimes afloat. I several times thought I would heave it all overboard. Yet as we done so last voyage and was some censured for it, I thought best to

save it if I could. Found the vessel still leaked; men had to keep our pump going the whole time. The men came aft again and said they could hear the wood in the fore peak washing about as the water washing about there. I thought they made it worse than it was, so I said [to] them, "Get hold of the pump then and see if you can't pump it out; and let me hear no more about your having so much water. Whenever it gets as high in the fore-castle as the key holes of your chests, then come and let me know again." I got them all at the pump, and I noticed that the pump did not throw as much water as it should. I had it drawed and I fitted it myself, had it rigged again and the pump continually kept going. Noon of this day got observations, latitude 36.15 N., longitude, 68.40 W.

P.M. of day wind hauled S.E. I tacked ship to the N.E. Mr. Fisher came to me after we tacked and said he never saw a vessel tacked and worked under the sail the *Montgomery* did now. I told him she would do much better than most vessels going, as I knew she would. Towards night I noticed the pump did not suck; that is the water did not all come out of the hold, pump going all the time, etc. So I ordered Mr. Fisher to sound the pump, that is to see how much water there was in the ship; being found out by putting an iron rod down the pump to the bottom of the vessel with a string attached to it. However far the water wet it up, of course, would denote just so much water was in the vessel. He reported to me 2 feet; this startled me. I then ordered both pumps to be rigged and to be kept constantly worked.

A little before dark, there being a large sea on, which constantly boarded us, I thought best to put her under sheeted sail to ease her a little more. I had the topsails clue reefed; jib and spanker taken in, which made her quite easy again. I myself continued some sea sick. I could not sit down at the table at all to eat. So I had Indian meal gruel made solely for me to eat three times a day or as often as I wanted it.

I was not much uneasy about the vessel yet, so I laid down between 9 & 10 p.m., having given orders to let me know how it was at 12 o'clock. It was done; reported to me all was about the same.

Friday, Sept. 15th. I was called at 4 a.m., was told the weather continued bad, a heavy gale blowing from south and sea still increasing. Both pumps were kept continually going and could just



keep the vessel free. I did not turn out until about 8 a.m., as I felt good for nothing enough, had some gruel for my breakfast &c. I found we really had got a pretty serious time; weather was cloudy with squalls of rain and winds blowing very heavy from the southward and a tremendous sea on.

A.M. I got out some old clothes to put on; took my old blue pants that mother repaired this time at home, my old satin vest and my green flannel jacket, put them on and my oil clothes over them. Went on deck about 9 a.m. and stopped there, found the sea at times washing right over both rails, and I noticed the pumps did not suck. However, as they were going all the time I knew no more could be done. Per indifferent observation made myself in about 37.40 N. and about 65.00 W.

P.M. I had everything secured about the ship, fore-castle scuttle forward secured down; no passing below at all, as I was fearful our decks might be filled and great quantities of water might go below them. I also had extra lashings put on the boats as they were often in the water, the vessel rolling first one boat in [and] then the other, and I was fearful I should lose them both. The deck load also I was fearful of, as at times when a heavy sea would board us the whole of it would wash up as high as the rails, and [what] was still worse the pump could not be sucked.

At 6 p.m. I had some gruel for my supper. All hands had something to eat and drink. Wind had hauled about S.S.W. and blew tremendous heavy with a terrible sea on. I made up my mind to scud the bark as long as I could, leak or no leak; if she held together. I was determined she should go ahead, as I was heading, or the vessel was, on or about her course, where I wanted her to go, and I knew a number of vessels were gone ahead of me; and by my memory my vessel, I thought, should gain some on them. And I knew by laying to I should be losing, and as long as I could steer the bark I deemed her as safe scudding as she was any way.

At 7 p.m. I had the foresail taken in, called Mr. Webb to take the wheel one side and I took the other, as I would trust no other on board to steer her and I was determined to send her as long as the sails and mast would stand, or as long as I could steer her. I ordered Mr. Fisher to look after the pumps, to keep all hands at them continually. It was done. She went quite well all the first part of the night but I could tell by her steering she must have some water in her,

and she got so heavy and logy that the sea often boarded her.

Saturday, September 16, 1848. Daylight of the day cloudy with squalls of rain and blowing a hurricane from S.S.W. and a tremendous sea on, which keeps our decks full continually both sides. Those steps, my C., which you went up in getting onto the poop were both washed over the rails. The sea often went completely over the vessel. Through the latter part of the night at times I certainly thought my mast could not stand. Carry sail I knew I must until daylight as I would not venture to heave my vessel to, it being so dark and there being such a tremendous sea on, I should be in danger of foundering at once when none of us could be left to tell the tale.

As soon as daylight came I had the fore topsail taken in, determined to heave her. Mr. Webb was frightened at this, reckoned there was too heavy a sea on to bring her to. I well knew one thing, we could not now safely steer her even, and if it continued growing worse she still leaked more. She would soon come to, herself, and, as I said before, founder with all hands with her. I had not even yet looked upon our case as being dangerous. I now thought seriously that the *Montgomery* was now about giving up.

As I said before, I had the fore topsail taken in and furled, got all hands aft, watched a smooth chance between the smooth seas and brought her by the wind, or hove her to (to use the sea phrase this is the sailor's last resort with a ship in a gale of wind). She behaved well, lay to quite easy, her lee rails under water. All hands were at the pumps. Mr. Webb, I believe, had gone below to put on some dry clothes, he being completely wet through, but as I had my oil clothes on I was a little dryer.

I often thought, my C., during the night, while I was at the wheel, I will go below and get a piece of my cake; it will taste well, and then I thought I was wet and I should be bothered some to get it, so I will go without; so I did not go down at all. I still remained on the poop, aft, having an eye at the pumps to see if there was any chance for them to be sucked.

About  $\frac{3}{4}$  of an hour after I hove her to a tremendous squall struck her, which at once knocked her down on her broadside, masts, yards and sails all in the water. She turned over in one minute. Mr. Webb just got [out] of the cabin in time to save himself. I got by the after part of the house or by the wheel. As she went over I went to leeward with her. As I passed over the wheel I grabbed the spokes but I could



not hold on. I went under water to some depth. Exerting myself I soon came up to the top of the water. I thought to myself, "Am I here to be drowned? Am I to leave my wife and little ones now? Must I die at once?" And at the same time the answering idea came to me. "No, you shall be saved. I believe the thought came to me *God: thy will be done*. I felt no uneasiness from this time afterwards. My trust was in God, My Maker and My Preserver. I can't express the peace I received. I commenced striving to save myself with the same cool feeling, commanding power that I feel on ordinary occasions. I went under water again and I felt the lee wheel ropes. I knew what they were and I scrambled up until I came to the wheel, [got] over that and got hold of the weather wheel rope. I was then above water.

My oil clothes on bothered me some. I then got my right foot on or against the paint locker or round house aft. This gave way from under my feet. As it went I sprang and caught the weather manrope [a side rope to a gangway] on the starboard quarter, and I was then soon on the outside of the vessel or on top.

I heard the cries of "Oh, God, save me, save us. I can't swim. What shall we do? God have mercy on us" &c. I must say even in the situation I was now placed I smiled to myself to see and hear those around me, those who in prosperity cursed their Maker and so often spoke his name in vain, and now, when placed in a situation where they could see and know their inability to help themselves, how ready they were to call for aid and help, and in what imploring terms too. Here I could at once see the weakness and wickedness of the human heart.

I said nothing to anyone respecting this. I knew it was my duty to look after myself and also them. As I said before I felt that assurance God's will was for us to be saved, and I was determined that nothing should remain undone that we could do to help ourselves; that is, as far as my knowledge and experience would permit us to do.

I looked around and found all was there. I ordered a part of us to cut away the lanyards of the main topmast backstays and also the lanyards of the main rigging. In doing this I was in hopes the masts would carry away or go, and the vessel would right some. I also ordered the rest of us to cut and clear away the boat which hung on the starboard quarter cranes, the starboard quarter being now the only part of the ship out of water that the sea did not wash over.

Both of my orders were at once put into execution. After the rigging was cut, I had the satisfaction of seeing parts of all three of the masts go. It will be understood we were now all standing on the outside of the ship, she being over on her side, of course. The upper side was level as the deck. The only danger was in being washed off, as the sea continually went over us.

The mainmast went a little above the deck with all above attached to it; also the foremast by the eyes of the lower rigging with all above; all the head gear, fly[ing] jib boom, the jib boom and bowsprit; and also the mizzen topmast. Yet after all this the vessel did not right but little; she was too full of water, as she at once filled on going over, it entering her cabin, bursting in windows and doors.

The reader will understand this was all done in less time than it takes me to write it.

On my seeing the vessel did not right on the masts going, I turned my attention to the boat, now all clear, ready to be launched off the ship's side. I had a long rope kept fast to. I was fearful she would swamp as soon as we launched her; yet I knew it was our only chance. I felt myself some cumbered up with my oil clothes on, so I at once hauled them off and hove them into the sea, that I might be better able to swim in case I should be compelled to much.

We soon launched our boat off the quarter safely. She only filled, say, a quarter full. Then we had great trouble to keep her clear of the vessel. As each sea came, she would be far above the ship and would appear as if she was at once to be upon the wreck of our vessel, and again she would be far below us.

In a few minutes we were all on board the boat but one man. I had, myself, swum from the ship to the boat, as I would not allow the boat hauled so near the ship for me to get in, for I knew if we once stove our boat our chance would be slim to be saved. As I have said before, when all was on board but one I cut the rope myself that was fast to the wreck, as I knew the man was a good swimmer; and as I got myself in the bow of the boat as soon as I boarded her to prevent her from being stove each time when she was hauled up for the men to get in, I well knew the danger we were exposed to. Each time I dreaded the consequences, and, as I said, when all but one was in I cut the rope. I would not risk the last time. I told the man to jump overboard as I [had] done and swim to the boat. He did so, and we soon had him on board.



We now had no oars and nothing to bail with. I ordered two men to take their hats to bail with, as our boat now had got  $\frac{1}{3}$  full of water. I then ordered some to tear up the seeling [Ceiling, according to *The Century Dictionary* a lining of planks on the inside of a ship's frame.] in the bottom of the boat to form paddles of. We soon done so and each one took a piece, and by so doing we were enabled to keep her head to the sea.

Mr. Webb was the most fearful of any of us that she would capsize. Every sea that came he would sing out, "Now look out; she will go over." I had, at once, on being in the boat a little while, come to the conclusion that we could by proper management keep her so she would be safe, and I did not want any on board to get frighten[ed] at all. So I said to Mr. Webb then, "You just be still. If you are afraid of being drowned, keep it to yourself. If the boat capsizes or fills, we will right her again. She can't sink, that's certain."

In the course of a few minutes we paddled to windward of the ship, and as the wreck drifted to leeward, of course the sea was strewn with fragments a long distance to windward. Our oars, a part of them, was lashed in the lee boat. She was under water, being well secured to the lee cranes. The other oars were fast in the forward house. Among the drift stuff we found the blades of three oars, say from 6 to 8 feet long each, and with them we pulled some, and at last we found one whole oar, the only one we saw after the vessel turned over. With this we could steer and keep our boat's head to the sea finely.

Our vessel's decks were soon stove in by the broken spars and casks (as all the lee rigging was yet fast) and the cargo began to float out; (by the way I should mention: my poor dog was in the after port of the forward house on some sails when the vessel turned over and I never saw him after, nor even never heard a whine from him. I supposed he was drowned at once. I lamented him much.) Amongst the first cargo was  $\frac{1}{2}$ -bbls. of flour. I had one picked up, also a bbl. of Am[erican] rum. We soon saw a large hhd. of bread drifting away. We pulled for and gained it, but we could not get it into our boat. We tried a long time to hold on to it and stove in the head with a block we had in the boat, one of the boat falls blocks. We stove it in a measure and at last had to leave it without obtaining any of it, as the cask would slew around in spite of us, and the water soon got into it where we stove it, and it then swam too deep in the water.

We could do nothing with it and we left it; let it go.

Pulled back again to windward of the wreck where we soon picked up 2  $\frac{1}{2}$ -bbl. of bread, but as the  $\frac{1}{2}$  bbls. were not water tight, the salt water had soaked them completely through. Yet I thought they would save life. We also picked up 2  $\frac{1}{4}$ -bbl. bread wet as the other: soon after 2 boxes of round cheese weying say 10 lb. apiece. These the water could not hurt much. These were good, and the boxes were fine to bail our boat with. We also picked up a square box of pineapple cheese containing 4 cheeses, say 5 lb. each; these were also good. And at last a keg of dried apples, say containing nearly a peck. I now felt quite satisfied we had enough to eat to keep us alive as long as our liquor would keep us. I could see casks of water drifting away, yet we could save none. I had no rope in the boat or I could have made fast to one, but I had none. Therefore I did not fret for this.

In the p.m. we again pulled to leeward of the wreck. After several trials one man boarded her, we pulling the boat as near the quarter as we could with safety. This part still remained above water as when we left her. In the morning I ordered him after he had got on board to heave us the end of the longest rope he could find. He went to the mizzenmast and cut the main topsail brace from there, unrove it, and gave us the end of it. We then slacked the boat off from the ship and lay fast to her by the rope. The man went up to the mizzen mast-head to see if he could see any vessel in sight; he could see none.

I then held a consultation with all, advised leaving the wreck in our boat and trying to get to the N.W., as I knew we were to the S.E. of the track of all vessels bound to Europe, and by remaining by the wreck we should be no better off. Water we could get none, neither provisions better than we now had, as we could see she was full of water. The cabin skylight was washed off, and as the water swashed, it fly [flew] high in the air out of it. I thought much of what I had left there below; I was entirely destitute. All I had, as it were, was desire[?]. I sometimes thought I would remain by the wreck, and, if she did not sink, perhaps when the gale abated we could by diving into the cabin save something; and then on second thought I see the risks we should run. I valued my own life and those around me more than I did what property there was left in the vessel. It was about my all, true, yet my life was spared and I would not risk it by stopping by the wreck. I judged my situation to be about in 38.00° north latitude and about 61.00 west longitude.



All hands acquiesced with me at once. I then told the man on board to cut adrift the gaff topsail which was lashed to the mizzen masthead, also to procure all the small ropes he could about, and the gaff topsail gaff. He did so. We again pulled our boat close to the wreck, and after several attempts we got these things all on board our boat.

Toward night the gale had abated and the sea was going down. The gaff and sail I intended to make a mast and sail of for our boat. About 4 p.m. I called to the man on board and told him to be ready to come on board the boat. He did so, and we soon got him on board with all the spare ropes he could procure.

About 5 p.m. we left the wreck and used our pieces of oars as well as we could, our boat heading to the westward by the sun. Our vessel was then fast breaking up and cargo fast washing out. At sunset she was out of sight.

At dusk I proposed forming ourselves into two watches, one half in charge of myself and the other half in charge of Mr. Fisher, the mate, half of us to be continually in charge of the boat, using the oars or sail as required to try and get to the westward as much as possible, we steering by the sun in the day and moon or stars by night. We did so.

It came my watch's turn first to lay down, or rest, until midnight, as near as we could guess. I mentioned then to all it had been my custom for years past before I lay down to sleep to return thanks to my Creator for his blessings to me, let my situation be what it would, and also to ask a continuance of his mercies to me, and that I might be dealt with with compassion and not with justice for my deeds and transgressions, and now as we were situated I doubly felt the need of help, and I would also wish to mention them all in my prayers if it should be their wishes. They all at once cheerfully called for it. I prayed aloud for us all, and at the end I had the satisfaction to hear from all the word "amen." I told them I had the satisfaction within myself we were all to be saved if we done all we could to carry out and help ourselves.

I then lay down in the bottom of the boat with one half of the men. We were all wet and had to stow close to get anywise warm. I went to sleep and had quite a nap. When we were called, as those on watch had got beat out pulling, I judged we had lain down two hours. We roused up and took our turns at the oars and the remainder lay down for a nap. My watch continued pulling until they got tired, and,

as I found we did not make much headway pulling, there being so much sea on, I told them we would rest a little while. I then judged (by the moon, as I knew it rose about 7 p.m.) it was about midnight. The wind had nearly all died away, still a large sea on.

Sunday, September 17th, 1848.

I will commence this day from midnight. I lay down on the stern sheets by the man steering, or who had the oar. About 1 a.m., as I could judge, we got a light air from S.E. I waited with some little patience for it to breeze up, as it was a fair wind for us. About 2 a.m. it had got to be quite a little breeze. I then roused all hands. "Come," said I, "let us rig this mast and sail." I had it all planned out in my head how I would have it & so I at once set knife, measured the mast and the boat, and at once cut out the lugsail in the dark, told them how to rig the mast &c. It was done, and we set the sail, and it worked to a charm, answered well.

I lay down no more during the night. At sunrise we had pretty good weather; wind had got to be a good breeze. I offered up thanks to Our Preserver for keeping us safe through the night and now again blessing us with this fair wind; begged to be rescued from our perilous situation as soon as it should be God's will.

The men now began to complain for the want of drink. We had picked up one of the little gold-boxes which I used to put gold dust in on the Coast. By the way, I should mention this was about the first thing we picked up from our wreck. I had put on the shelf behind my berth in my room some 6 or 8 of them tied up in a package the day I left Providence, and [it was] very singular these should be about the first things to drift out of the ship. I found this box would make a fine thing to deal out liquor in, as it held about  $\frac{2}{3}$  of a gill. So I used it for this purpose, giving each man it full. Cheese we ate as much as we wanted, also dried apples, but I cautioned all not to swallow the apple but to chew them and get all the moisture out and then spit them out. I done so myself, but I noticed my men would swallow them, and I ate but very little of the cheese.

Through this day the breeze continued strong and we sailed along I judged about, about 6 & 7 miles per hour. At times we could steer our boat with difficulty, the sea being so rough she would broach to, or come round sideways to the sea, which made it very dangerous.

My men called often for drink. I gave them it as often as every 4 hours. I tried to persuade them to try and abstain from it, and I



must say to my, or their, shame even my officers had not strength of mind enough to keep from using too much. As it did not quench thirst I myself took never more than one swallow into my stomach at a time, and that a small one; my stomach would not receive it.

At night I offered up prayers again and asked a continuance of the blessings upon us; to be saved if it was God's will. We passed a gloomy Sabbath, to me much so, and often did the tears roll down my cheeks. I felt more happy when I thought what an object of mercy I was, and I could not be half thankful enough to my Creator for preserving me. I was led to say, "Praise God. Praise God", and I often found myself unconsciously saying to my men, "Men, we shall yet be saved. I feel that my Creator will not let us perish here. I feel I have yet to live for my wife and family. I thank God for the great blessing they were to me.

Monday, September 18, 1848.

Through the past night scud our boat before a large S.E. sea. I lay down soon after dark, leaving the other watch in charge of the boat. I fell asleep but was soon awakened by their talking. They were steering by the North Star when I laid down, but it had come over cloudy and they had lost the way they were steering. One said the wind had shifted and they had lost the run altogether. I got up and looked about me, and I was as bad as the rest, for I could [see] no stars and I was completely lost from my course.

I was a little put [out] with Mr. Fisher, for if he had looked out as he should have done he could have kept his course. We had a fair wind and was going 7 miles per hour when I lay down, and now I saw no way but down sail and lay the boat's head to the sea until the moon should rise which I knew was about 10 o'clock. So we must lose 2 hours sail at least if the wind had not changed. So we down sail and laid to until the moon came up. We could see by her light where she was when she rose, and I found the wind had not altered at all; so we made sail again and kept on our course.

Latter part of the night the sea had got to be high and our boat, when on top of the sea, would shoot ahead with such velocity we could not steer her, and we were often near being swamped. I could not think of laying our boat to if we could possibly run her as the wind was fair and I knew we must exert all we could while we had strength to do so. However, it blew so hard we took in the sail, thinking the boat would sail herself fast enough under the mast; but we

found the sea was so high half the time our boat was becalmed and she could not keep clear of the seas. They would break on board of us. So I found we must either lay her head to the sea or set our sail again. I then planned it so we could reef our sail and only show about half of it. We did so, and it worked quite well again.

I this morn did not forget the obligation we were under to our Heavenly Father; begged him speedily (if should be his will) to relieve us from our situation.

A.M. of day the sea was so high we could not scud her all the time. Several times had to put her head to sea. P.M. wind died away some. We saw a sail standing to the N.W. All hands were much elated. I at once came to the conclusion she was too far off. We could not come near her. I checked their noisy exclamations, told them not to put too much dependence in such slight occurrences. We out oars and pulled for some time, an hour or more, but instead of coming up with the vessel she was fast leaving us. This made them much discouraged. I tried to reason with them, told [them] yet to keep up good heart; I trusted we should yet all be saved.

The water was very warm; so I knew we were again in the Gulf Stream. Toward night the wind hauled northerly and light, yet we still had a tremendous sea on. We could do nothing with our sail now, there being so much sea on, and the wind was not fair, as we wanted to go N.W. We could do but little with our oars also, and by using them I knew we could not wear long; we were not strong enough. And I also found it was also impossible to keep the boat headed to the sea. So I determined to try a new plan.

I had the boat's mast taken down and the sail rolled tightly around it and stopped with rope yarns, as we had some pieces of rope in the boat. I then had all the spare ropes we had knotted (or, to use the land phrase, *tied*) together and at dusk I had these lines, or the end of them, tied to the middle of our boat's mast and sail and that thrown overboard to answer as an anchor or drag for our boat to lay leeward of. I then had all the rope paid out and the end made fast to the end of the painter (a short one).

I found this worked well. As the mast drifted some 60 or 70 feet ahead of us, it answered to break the sea before it reached our boat in a measure. Also it kept our boat from drifting to leeward so fast. It answered all the purpose I intended it and much better than I expected.



Soon after dark we all lay down except one man. One has to be on the watch to look out [that] our rope did not break and thereby lose our mast and sail, also to look out for vessels, as I knew we ought to begin to see some, as we must be near the western edge of the Gulf Stream.

We had not been dry since we had left our vessel. Constant exposure and such fare had reduced us much. Yet I felt myself in good spirits and strong too. One thing we were all much troubled with. Our back sides were so raw from sitting down constantly, we could scarcely sit at all in a correct position, and our limbs were getting stiff, and we at times could move only with difficulty.

When he, the one on watch, got tired he was to call and be relieved. Tuesday, September 19th, 1848

About 1 a.m., as near as I could judge, the man on the watch sung out, "Sail ho!" We all raised up, and, sure enough, we saw a vessel some ways [off]. However, we pulled in our mast and out oars to pull after her. She was standing S.E. before the wind. We soon found she was going away from us, and I told all it was useless to chase after her, as we were going right away from the land and there was no possibility of catching her. So we gave it up, and we then continued pulling westerly through the night.

At sunrise we had quite fine weather, a light northerly wind, and sea was getting quite smooth. We now saw another vessel but a long way off and she steering S.E. It cheered us some. As I told them, and as I was satisfied, we should now see more vessels, as we were getting into the track of them.

I was this morn called upon voluntarily to offer up thanks and a blessing upon us. Yet my men were continually calling for drink and wanted much more than what I gave them. One of them said we had better heave it all overboard at once if they could not have as much as would allay their thirst. I reasoned with them: the less they drank the better it was for them. I myself drank not one quarter-part as much as I gave them, yet I was better in every respect, but I was astonished at seeing the liquor work as it did. Common times I could not take one half swallow into my stomach without being sick, and now I could take two swallows and it did not enter my head at all. I felt no ill effect from it.

A.M. of this day the sun came out at times, and we pulled off our clothes; got all dry before night, for the first time since we left the

vessel. My knees and ankles got so stiff I could hardly stand up, so I this day bathed them twice in the new rum as we had plenty, also my arms and face. I was very thirsty, yet I could not get more than one or two swallows of this liquor down me. I often rinsed my mouth in salt water. Several of the men at times would drink of it. I avised all not to do it.

In the p.m. we still had fine weather and a light northerly wind, a smooth sea on. We had our sail set and was making some little progress to the westward. We began to talk about being inside the Gulf [Stream]. I told them we must yet be about 200 miles from Nantucket, yet with two days good wind we could fetch there.

We had now eaten up one round cheese and had cut one of the pineapple cheese. Our bread we found so much soaked with salt water that our stomachs would not take it at all, so we hove the  $\frac{1}{2}$ -bbl. overboard to get it out of the way.

Two of the men this p.m. about gave up, lay down in the bottom of the boat forward and there remained. I could not get them to exert themselves any more. They thought it was no use to try any longer. I told them I could live a week longer, I thought, on the same fare I now had. I felt strong and able yet. However, I could not get them up, and one of them would not drink any rum.

At night I again called on the Being in whom I had my sole trust and confidence. And as I offered up my feeble petition there in that open boat, naught around, above, beneath me but sky and water; yet the peace I then received was unspeakable. I wept for joy. I thought upon those who were so near and dear to me, and I knew, or felt, that even then there was a petition going up for me, and that petition ascended with mine; and I could hear the welcome answer to me, "Peace. Be still. You shall be saved."

Oh, my dear reader, you whoever reads this, put your trust in God. In Him you will have a prize far above all that this earth can give. I was as well satisfied I should be saved as I was that I then had my being. And I don't know but I must say I was then willing to leave this world should it be God's will so for it to be. God forgive me if I felt wrong, for I feel I should live for those on earth who are mine; who are so near and dear to me.

We kept our sail set all the night, with a light N.E. wind. Wednesday, September 20th, 1848.

Comes in pretty good weather with a good breeze from S.E. again,



and pleased were we, for it was driving us freely to the westward.

After I had returned thanks for the mercies of the past night and begged earnestly, if it was God's will, we might speedily be relieved from our perilous situation, I sat down and reckoned up a little about where I thought we must be, and I came to the conclusion we were about 150 miles from Nantucket, S.E. from it, and if this wind held 2 days more we could reach land.

I got those men that gave up yesterday to drink some liquor and set up, and we were in quite good spirits with this fair wind again. We steered as near as I could guess to N.W. About 9 a.m. we made a sail ahead as far as we could see, and I at once judged her to be a vessel bound for Europe and I knew her course must be N.E. on the wind. After a little while I saw it was so. We hustled our boat up about north and sailed along to cut the vessel off. We saw to our great satisfaction it was so. She neared us fast, and she was a large bark. We out oars and pulled as well as we could to help us along some, and many were the cries. "Pull now, that we may soon get a drink of water." "Oh, if I can only get a drink of water, I will be satisfied."

We got within two miles of her. I saw she did not see. So I had a red shirt (one of the men's) tied to our longest oar and shoved as far above the mast as it possibly could be; and then, even, she could not see us. We were within one and a half miles of her. Many of us began to grumble she didn't mean to pick us up. I said, "No, my men. I can't think there are any human beings living so bad as that. Do not think so hardly of any as that. If you do, you can never expect God to take care of and protect you, for I can't think anyone as bad as that."

The vessel had nearly passed us before she saw us, when all at once I saw her let run her main royal halyards as a signal to us. She saw us, or at least I read it so. Next, up went his mainsail, and soon aback went his mainyard to lay to or wait for us.

Oh, what glad hearts beat in our bosoms. Happy was I, I felt, to praise God, for I trusted I was now [to] be saved. My prayers [had] been heard and now answered.

We were soon alongside the vessel. As we passed under her stern I saw she hailed from Falmouth. I took it she was English. We soon had a rope hove to us and our boat hauled up, and all of us ordered to come out of our boat. If we could get up we were soon up, and the

ship's company took charge of our boat.

I met the captain. He took my hand and says, "My dear fellow, make yourself at home. Your story I will hear presently." He says, "Are your officers here?" I then introduced Mr. Fisher and Mr. Webb. I told him I had so-and-so in my boat. He ordered his mate to take care of what was in her and then hoist her up on the quarter cranes.

The captain invited us, that is myself and two officers, into his cabin. I asked him if he would be so good as to look after my men, as I knew if they got near water, where they could drink their fill, it would be very injurious to them. He at once called his steward, told him to give the men one pint of water each and no more, and to be sure and remove the pump from the cask, that they could procure no more.

I told him my situation, how long I had been in my boat, &c., and now I began to feel my weakness. I could not walk alone without holding on to something, and my speech was affected.

I could not converse freely. The captain at once had some port wine put on the table, some toasted bread, and some water; and we ate and drank a little. He then requested us to wash ourselves in fresh water, as he saw we were hard-looking fellows. I had on no boots only stockings, and my old blue pants; they had got torn in several places; and a striped shirt, and that dirty and stiff from muxing about in the boat; and Mr. Fisher & Mr. Webb were worse, if possible.

We washed, and then a change of clean clothes were brought us. We put them on, and then he requested us all to lay down (in berths prepared for us in the cabin) and have a little sleep and rest. We did so. He ordered his steward to have some soup made for us. It was done.

I lay down; I could not sleep. Oh, how thankful I felt I was thus saved and cared for. I soon got up, and my thirst was so great I could not refrain from constant drinking nearly, but I took but little at a time. Mr. Fisher & Webb took much more than I did, and I constantly admonished them not to do so.

In the p.m. we were some better. I looked after my men. I found they had likewise been well cared for and were comfortably situated and had a comfortable place to live in.

I found the vessel we were now on board of was the American bark *Elijah Swift*, of Falmouth, Massachusetts, one of the New York and Glasgow packets; was now 5 days from New York bound to Glasgow, commanded by Capt. F. B. Lewis, also of Falmouth. He



requested us to make ourselves perfectly at home. His vessel should be our vessel, and we should fare the same as he did. His manners I was at once pleased with. I took him to be a gentleman, and his feelings told me he was a brother sailor, a man who could feel and appreciate the wants of another seafaring brother. I often said, "Thank God. Thank God."

J. R. C.

## EARLY 19th CENTURY PROVIDENCE IMPORTS FROM THE CARIBBEAN AND BRAZIL

by EARL C. TANNER<sup>1</sup>

HAVANA was a ten days' sail from Narragansett Bay in the early 19th century. Rio de Janeiro lay six weeks beyond. In between were some 35 ports, both large and small, which were regularly visited by Rhode Island vessels. Here were located the markets which ranked first in the foreign commerce of Providence at the time when that commerce was at its height. Certain of the commodities purchased in the Caribbean and Brazil were of an exotic nature and distinctive of their places of origin. By far the most important, however, were the staples of tropical agriculture — sugar products and coffee.

### SUGAR PRODUCTS<sup>2</sup>

Sugar cane culture had been introduced into the western hemisphere by the Portuguese and Spaniards early in the 16th century. Conditions in the West Indies and in Brazil were peculiarly favorable for staple agriculture of this type. Soil and climate were ideal while sea lanes provided equally convenient access to sources of slave labor in Africa and to the markets of Europe and North America. Latin

<sup>1</sup>This article is adapted from the author's *Trade between the Port of Providence and Latin America, 1800 to 1830* (typed Ph.D. thesis, Harvard University, 1951), 28, 50-69.

<sup>2</sup>In the following discussion of sugar and coffee, statistics for the port of Providence are based on an analysis of the Providence Customs House papers. Descriptions are based on material in Bryan Edwards, *History Civil and Commercial of the British Colonies in the West Indies* (London, 4th ed., 1807), II, 232-309; J. R. McCulloch, *A Dictionary, Practical, Theoretical, and Historical, of Commerce and Commercial Navigation* (Philadelphia, Am. ed., 1840-1841), II, 555-557; and J. Smith Homans and J. Smith Homans, Jr., *A Cyclopaedia of Commerce and Navigation* (New York, 1858), 334-338, 1766-1778. For more modern accounts, see Noel Deerr, *The History of Sugar* (London, 1950-1951), and Heinrich Eduard Jacob, *Coffee, the Epic of a Commodity*, Eden and Cedar Paul, trs. (New York, 1935).

America's only competitors for the North American market in the early 19th century were Louisiana, which was handicapped by a short growing season, and the Orient, which was handicapped by its distance from western markets.

The principal sugar products imported from Latin America into Providence were brown sugar, white sugar, molasses, and rum. All of these were produced by slave labor on large plantations in the West Indies and northern Brazil. The canes, planted from shoots in rich soil, attained a height of ten feet or more and were then cut, tied into bundles, and pressed between several sets of rollers. The juice yielded by this process contained ordinarily about eight parts of water, one part of sugar, one part of oils and gums, and various impurities. The first process of refinement was called clarifying and consisted in heating and in the addition of lime, about half a pint to one hundred gallons. This resulted in the formation of a heavy scum and the elimination of excess acids. The clear liquid was then carefully drawn or siphoned off and conveyed to evaporating boilers. These were a series of cauldrons, each smaller than the last, where the liquor was boiled and skimmed until reduced to the proper thickness for cooling and curing. The former process was effected in shallow wooden vessels and the latter in open hogsheads perforated at the bottom to permit draining of the molasses. The result, then, was brown sugar in hogsheads and molasses in cisterns below.

An alternative process used to produce white sugar was called claying. The procedure described above was followed through the cooling stage. The sugar was then placed in conical receptacles, small end down, and terminating in holes half an inch in diameter. After the molasses had drained off, a layer of wet clay was spread over the top and moisture allowed to seep through the sugar. The result was a whiter sugar which could then be powdered by crushing.

The molasses obtained from curing or claying was either packed for sale or sent to the distillery. In the latter case it was mixed with water, sugar scum (from the boiling process), and the lees of former distillations (to induce fermentation). A common formula called for fifty gallons of lees, six gallons of molasses, thirty-six gallons of sugar scum, and eight gallons of water. A hundred gallons of such a mixture, fermented and distilled, would yield about ten gallons of high grade rum: more or less, depending on the extent of distillation. The strength of the spirit was graded from a minimum of first proof



to a maximum of fifth proof.

Brown sugar and molasses were normally packed for the export market in hogsheads or barrels. A hogshead held about 750 pounds of sugar or 95 gallons of molasses; a barrel held about 200 pounds of sugar or 25 gallons of molasses. White sugar was usually packed in boxes of about 350 pounds, though barrels were sometimes used. Rum was almost invariably packed in hogsheads or puncheons of 100 gallons.

The amount of rum imported into Providence from the West Indies steadily declined during the first three decades of the 19th century. The annual average of 87,000 gallons for the first decade dropped to 52,000 gallons for the second decade, and 11,000 for the third decade. The thirty-year total was 1,497,467 gallons. Of this, by far the greatest proportion was third proof, with lesser amounts of second and fourth proof and almost none of first or fifth proof. The reasons for decreased imports can hardly be said to include incipient prohibitionism, although this was soon to become an important factor.<sup>3</sup> The decline in imports is rather to be explained by a very high impost levied in 1812. This occasioned increasing consumption of domestic spirits, both grain and cane. The latter is clearly indicated in the sharp rise of molasses imports. The annual average of 197,000 gallons for the first decade increased to 315,000 gallons for the second decade, and 642,000 gallons for the third decade. The estimated thirty-year total was 11,542,570 gallons.

Sugar imports show a more normal pattern, dropping during the decade of the war and coming up again in the 1820's. Brown sugar imports for the first decade averaged 811,800 pounds; for the second decade, 657,500 pounds; for the third, 856,113 pounds. White sugar imports for the first decade averaged 214,700 pounds; for the second, 43,804 pounds; and for the third, 63,122. This latter figure, representing only a partial recovery of the former average, is indicative of increased refining facilities in this country. The thirty-year totals were 23,254,627 pounds of brown sugar and 3,216,300 pounds of white sugar.

Supplies of sugar products imported directly from Latin America were materially supplemented by imports through Boston, Newport,

<sup>3</sup>The first public temperance gathering to be held in Providence met in April, 1827. Welcome Arnold Greene, ed., *Providence Plantations for Two Hundred and Fifty Years* (Providence, 1886), 76.

New London, New York and, especially, Bristol, Rhode Island. Prices in Providence varied constantly. The usual range for brown sugar was \$10 to \$15 the hundredweight. White sugar was about \$3 more expensive. Molasses ranged from 30¢ to 55¢ the gallon and rum from 40¢ to \$1.20 the gallon (changes in tariff being largely responsible for the fluctuations in rum).

#### COFFEE

Among the commodities imported from Brazil and the Caribbean into Providence, coffee ranked with sugar products and, in the case of Brazil, hides. The coffee shrub, a native of Abyssinia, spread in the 16th century throughout the Middle East and, at the end of the 17th century, to the East Indies. From Java, specimens were taken to Amsterdam and thence, early in the 18th century, to Surinam. At the same time, plantings were made in Jamaica and soon after, throughout the West Indies. By 1790, the island of Hispaniola had become the chief supplier of this commodity to both Europe and North America. The political and social upheavals of the 1790's, however, had disastrous effects on Haitian coffee exports: Cuba, Surinam, and other West and East Indian producers fell heir to the markets that Hispaniola had dominated. A latecomer was Brazil where the shrub was not extensively grown until late in the century. For many years the Brazilians continued to produce sugar and indigo instead of coffee, but the opening of Brazilian ports to foreign commerce in 1808 and the rising price of coffee on world markets finally worked a revolution in Brazilian agriculture. Between 1808 and 1830, the annual crop increased from 8,000,000 pounds to 168,000,000 pounds. This change was duly registered at the Providence Customs House where huge shipments of Brazilian coffee began to make their appearance along with the smaller, but more regular, shipments from the West Indies.

Coffee, like the other staple products of Latin America, was produced by slave labor on plantations. The coffee shrubs were about twenty feet high and the fruit about the size and color of cherries. From each fruit, two beans were obtained by washing away the pulp or by drying and sifting. The product was usually packed for export in bags or barrels of about 150 pounds each.

Average annual imports of this article into Providence during the first decade of the 19th century were 143,090 pounds; during the



second decade, 101,520 pounds; during the third, 170,400 pounds. The thirty-year total was 4,150,054 pounds. As in the case of sugar products, additional supplies were obtained through other ports. In 1805, imports through other coastal ports were approximately 8,550 pounds, as compared with 66,022 pounds of direct imports. In 1825, indirect imports amounted to 145,950 pounds, compared with 118,990 of direct imports. The changing ratio was indicative of a trend which eventually resulted in the extinction of the direct coffee trade at Providence. During most of the period Providence prices ranged from 20¢ to 30¢ the pound.

In the early 19th century, sugar products dominated the Caribbean trade while coffee rapidly assumed the leading role in trade with Brazil. Of equal interest, however, were other products typical of certain ports.

#### OTHER IMPORTS FROM BRAZIL AND THE CARIBBEAN

Particular ports in the Caribbean and Brazil were noted for some one or more characteristic products. Such was the case with Turks Island, Bahamas. A typical cargo from Turks Island was that of the schooner *Delight*, 107 52/95 tons, which arrived in Providence October 5, 1801. She had on board one item only:

4,659 7/8 bushels salt

The southern Bahamas and, particularly, Turks Island were rich in salt ponds and beds. Indeed, salt was practically the only export from the area except for very small quantities of miscellanies, such as scrap metal, goat skins, and turtles. Turks Island was a major source of salt for the Providence market but not the only source, alternative supplies being available in the United States, England, Spain, Portugal, and the Cape Verde Islands. During the first decade of the 19th century, annual imports from Turks Island and its neighbors averaged 37,285 bushels. Next decade, the trade was completely cut off for a time by the War of 1812, and annual average imports fell off to 12,357 bushels. A partial recovery was made during the third decade of the 19th century when annual average imports rose to 16,200 bushels, but large quantities continued to be obtained from the areas that had been the chief suppliers during the War of 1812. Turks Island salt always brought a few cents more per bushel than European salt, that is, about 60¢ a bushel.

One of the most distinctive areas of trade in Latin America was the Bay of Honduras. From 1818 to 1828, Providence vessels called regularly at the mouth of the Belize River in British Honduras and, during the latter part of the period, at the Spanish ports of Omoa and Truxillo. A typical cargo from the Bay of Honduras was that of the schooner *Columbus*, 119 tons, which arrived in Providence on August 4, 1826.

10 logs mahogany  
22 logs cedar  
10 tons, 1,500 pounds logwood  
107 seroons indigo  
1 cask, 1 small bag cochineal  
1,996 pounds sarsaparilla  
2 barrels, 1 box tortoise shell  
1 turtle  
21 coconuts  
95 hides  
500 pounds old copper

Of the several woods imported from Latin America into Providence, mahogany and logwood were by far the most important.<sup>4</sup> From 1818 to 1828 the Bay of Honduras was the principal source of direct importations. Honduras mahogany, of which 1,866 logs were imported in eleven years, grew usually on low-lying wet land. The trees were felled, trimmed, hauled to the nearest stream, made into rafts, and floated down to the Bay. Logs averaged two feet square and twelve to fourteen feet long, but were sometimes much larger.<sup>5</sup> Honduras mahogany went into furniture of all sorts and pianos. It was not considered equal in texture to a type of mahogany imported in small quantities from the West Indian islands, but it had the compensating virtue of holding a veneer unusually well. West Indian mahogany was, therefore, often glued onto Honduran mahogany. Having been made into chairs, tables, and other pieces of furniture, the wood frequently found its way back to Latin American markets.

Logwood, a second staple of Honduras, was cut on low, swampy ground during the dry season and floated off during the wet season. In eleven years, 1,798 tons of Honduran logwood (as well as a small

<sup>4</sup>The following information on mahogany and logwood is from Homans, *op. cit.*, 985, 1273, 1303. For a contemporary account of British Honduras, see Capt. (George) Henderson, *An Account of the British Settlement of Honduras* (London, 1811).

<sup>5</sup>According to Henderson, American buyers were not allowed to take logs larger than 20" in width. Henderson, *op. cit.*, 33-34.



quantity from the West Indian islands) were brought to Providence. There it was either sold for re-export or converted into dye for the local textile industry. In the latter case, the wood was chipped into small pieces and immersed in water or alcohol to produce a deep red color. Other woods imported in small quantity from Honduras or elsewhere in Latin America included cedar, *lignum vitae*, *brasileto*, Nicaragua, and fustic.

Woods were not the only dyestuffs obtainable in Honduras for the area was also a major source of indigo and cochineal.<sup>6</sup> The former was produced by boiling the indigo plant, some five feet tall when cut, in huge vats. The sediment precipitated was collected, dried into cakes, and used as a blue dye. Between 1800 and 1830, 94,692 pounds of this commodity were introduced into Providence from all parts of Latin America; Honduras, the principal Latin American exporter, sent as much as 13,811 pounds in a single shipment. Other foreign sources were the Orient and, in Latin America, Venezuela, Brazil and Curaçao.

Cochineal was, in the early 19th century, a Honduran export of considerable value. It consisted of cochineal insects which were scraped with blunt knives from the plants on which they fed; dipped in boiling water; dried in the sun; and packed in bags, barrels, or boxes — 70,000 insects to the pound. In eleven years, Honduras sent \$37,434 worth of this commodity to Providence where it was used in the manufacture of crimson and violet dyes. Additional supplies of cochineal were obtained in the Orient.

Almost all of the 30,468 pounds of sarsaparilla directly imported into Providence from 1818 to 1828 was of Honduran origin. This commodity consisted of the roots of the sarsaparilla plant which were dug up and cleaned with great labor. A worker would sometimes spend as much as a whole day on a single nine-foot root. The liquor obtained by brewing sarsaparilla was at the time much esteemed as a drug.<sup>7</sup>

It was a common practice for vessels returning from Honduras or certain of the West Indian islands to bring one or more turtles as a table delicacy.<sup>8</sup> Green turtles sometimes grew to be three or four feet

<sup>6</sup>The following information on indigo and cochineal is from Homans, *op. cit.*, 330-331, 1026-1028.

<sup>7</sup>*Ibid.*, 1688: "Sarsaparilla," *Encyclopaedia Britannica* (11th ed.), XXIV, 223.

<sup>8</sup>For a contemporary account of turtle hunting, see Henderson, *op. cit.*, 45. See also George Coggeshall, *Second Series of Voyages to Various Parts of the World* (New York, 1852), 164-5.

long and weighed up to three hundred pounds. They were usually caught on shore or in nets stacked off shore. In the latter case, wooden turtles were sometimes used as decoys. Another article of commerce obtained from the same sources as green turtles was the shell of the hawksbill turtle. On the back of each shell were thirteen plates as large as 8" x 13", weighing up to nine ounces each. Under heat and pressure these plates were highly workable and were used to make combs, snuffboxes, and similar products.<sup>9</sup>

The remaining items on the manifest of the *Columbus* (coconuts and copper and hides) were regular Honduran exports though less distinctive than those above. Coconuts were obtainable at any tropical port and were regularly brought to Providence in small lots of twenty or thirty. Honduran shipments were larger and frequently ran to several hundred. Honduras, like the Bahamas, seems to have been a depot for scrap metal. "Old copper" was a regular item, shipments of a few hundred pounds being most common. Honduras was also the major source of hides north of Brazil and Argentina. Honduran exports of this commodity, however, were dwarfed by South American shipments.

The cargo of the *Columbus* would have been completely typical if it had included a few hundred grass hats and a few thousand Spanish dollars. Hats were a regular, though minor, Honduran export, while specie was an equally regular and much more important export.

Prices of some of the Honduran exports were approximately as follows:

logwood, \$25 the ton; indigo, \$1.45 the pound; cochineal, \$3.50 the pound; sarsaparilla, 35¢ the pound; tortoise shell, \$11 the pound; hides, 13¢ the pound.

The price of mahogany varied greatly with the size and quality.

Providence trade with Cayenne (French Guiana) was not absolutely distinctive but it was characterized by certain commodities not hitherto discussed and not regularly imported from any other one place. The cargo of the sloop *Phebe*, 54 52/95 tons, which arrived at Providence on December 10, 1808, was typical:

5 hogsheads, 26 barrels, and 10 bags cocoa  
16 bales cotton  
1 bag coffee  
1 hogshead old copper  
6 bottles peppers  
300 oranges

<sup>9</sup>"Tortoiseshell," *Encyclopaedia Britannica* (11th ed.), XXVII, 71.



Direct importations of cocoa into the port of Providence were extremely irregular. During the first decade of the 19th century, a fairly steady average of 18,997 pounds a year was maintained. In the absence of evidence to the contrary, it may be assumed that chocolate factories known to have been in operation in the 1790's were still active.<sup>10</sup> During the second decade, the average fell to 4,452 pounds with three years of no importation and with five years of less than 500 pounds each. During the third decade, the range was from no importation in 1826 to 109,029 pounds in 1824. Thanks mostly to this one good year, the annual average for the third decade was 15,376 pounds. The high total for 1826 was due to one enormous shipment of 108,189 pounds from Ecuador. However, Ecuador was seldom visited by Providence ships. The usual sources were in the West Indies or on the northern coast of South America. Cocoa as imported into Providence consisted in beans of which ten to thirty were taken from large pods (seven to ten inches long and three to four and one-half inches in diameter). The pods grew on small trees not more than twenty-five feet in height. The beans were dried in the sun and, usually, packed in bags for shipping. Prices were about 15¢ the pound.

Small amounts of cotton were imported into Providence from the West Indies and South America, but the quantity was almost infinitesimal when compared with the huge imports from the southern states of the United States. From 1800 to 1809, 113,386.5 pounds were imported from Latin America. In 1810, 10,089 pounds were imported followed by no imports for the next nine years. From 1820 to 1829, 180,632 pounds were imported from Latin America.

The next item on the manifest requiring comment is "6 bottles peppers." This was of the cayenne type, famous for its fieriness. It was available at various markets in both the West and East Indies but was imported only in small quantities. The final item, "oranges," is typical of the Caribbean. It was customary to bring a few hundred as part of almost every cargo from the Caribbean region. The total value, however, was seldom more than a few dollars. Those on the *Phebe* were worth about \$2.20.

Cuba, best known at the time for its molasses, sugar, and coffee, had two or three characteristic minor products which are illustrated by the cargo of the brig *Mary Ann*, 148 tons, which arrived from

<sup>10</sup>Edwin M. Stone, *Mechanics' Festival* (Providence, 1860), 101.

Matanzas in Providence on November 20, 1818:

50 boxes white sugar  
47 boxes brown sugar  
194 hogsheads and 5 tierces, 1 barrel molasses  
20 bags coffee  
66 boxes segars (48,403 segars)  
quantity oranges & limes  
1 keg peppers  
1 cask honey

On Cuban manifests, an item of regular and increasing importance was cigars, or as they were generally called, segars. The soil in certain sections of the island was then, as it still is, exceptionally well adapted to the production of high-grade tobacco. The leaves were picked, rolled into cigars, and packed in boxes of varying sizes, those containing 1,000 cigars being most common. The cigar smoking habit made considerable progress throughout America during the first three decades of the 19th century. In 1817, Cuban exports of this item were stimulated by the abandonment of the government tobacco monopoly.<sup>11</sup> Imports of cigars at Providence (almost exclusively from Cuba) jumped after 1820 from an annual average of 32,288 to an annual average of 168,865. This increase did not take place wholly without opposition, for beginning with July 4, 1823, the smoking of cigars on the streets of Providence was forbidden by municipal ordinance. The fire wardens were charged with enforcement and were, for a time, most rigorous.<sup>12</sup> Cuban cigars were worth, in Providence, about \$15 the thousand.

Other characteristic Cuban exports to Providence were honey<sup>13</sup> and fruits. Of the last, the *Mary Ann* brought oranges and limes, both very common. Fruits occasionally brought from Cuba were pineapples and tamarinds. Tamarinds, as then imported, were the seed pods of the tamarind tree. They were about three inches long and were packed in kegs or jars which were filled with boiling syrup and sealed.

Several important Brazilian products are suggested by the cargo of the ship *Two Catherine's*, though a few of the items were picked up

<sup>11</sup>Ramiro Guerra y Sánchez, *Manuel de historia de Cuba* (Havana, 1938), 239.

<sup>12</sup>Greene, *op. cit.*, 74.

<sup>13</sup>Apiculture was introduced into Cuba from Florida about 1764. Honey and beeswax soon became important Cuban products. Willis Fletcher Johnson, *The History of Cuba* (New York, 1920), II, 225.



in Africa. The *Two Catherines*, 346 38/95 tons, arrived at Providence, July 5, 1823, from San Salvador with

- 10½ tons fustic
- 230 pounds sea horse teeth
- 2½ barrels tapioca
- 2 barrels, 51½ gallons balsam of capaiva
- 3 boxes gold and silver
- 1 box contg. 10,000 Spanish dollars
- 1 hoghead and 2 barrels nutria skins
- 1 box artificial flowers
- 4 glass musical boxes

Fustic, a yellow dyewood, was a regular minor export of Brazil. (A far more important Brazilian product was indigo. This article, however, was seldom imported into Providence from Brazil, for Honduras and India were preferred sources.) Hides and skins are suggested by item #7 on the manifest of the *Two Catherines*. Nutria skins were an export article of some significance, while dried and salted ox hides (and jerked beef) ranked with coffee and sugar as the most important Brazilian exports.<sup>14</sup> Brazil's role as a supplier of animal products, however, was obscured on the one side by Argentina's far larger exports and on the other side by Brazil's own specialization in coffee. Still, it should be noted that Brazil stood second to the River Plate among Latin American exporters of animal products and that this type of export ranked with sugar and coffee in Brazilian exports to Providence.

Tapioca was a typical minor Brazilian export. It was made from the roots of the cassava plant out of which a deadly poison had first to be extracted. (Indians saved the poison for their arrows.) The residue was a farinaceous matter from which tapioca could be prepared.<sup>15</sup> Balsam of capaiva was a specialty of the state of Pará, Brazil, though also produced elsewhere in South America and the West Indies. In its typical liquid form, it was transparent and oily and had a pleasant odor but a very disagreeable taste.<sup>16</sup> A medicine not

<sup>14</sup>Coffee, a minor product at the opening of the century, rapidly advanced to a leading position. An analysis of Brazilian imports at the port of Baltimore in 1823 showed coffee first accounting for 59% of the total. Hides were second and sugar third. Frank R. Rutter, *South American Trade of Baltimore* (Herbert B. Adams, ed., *Johns Hopkins University Studies in Historical and Political Science, Fifteenth Series*, IX, Baltimore, 1897), 15.

<sup>15</sup>Homans, *op. cit.*, 1793.

<sup>16</sup>*Ibid.*, 87.

included in the cargo of the *Two Catherines* which deserves special mention among minor Brazilian products was ipecacuanha, the roots of the plant of that name. Brazil was known as a principal source of this much prized drug.<sup>17</sup> Artificial flowers, item #8 on the manifest, were a specialty in Brazil where they were made in certain convents from feathers.<sup>18</sup> The last item of importance on the manifest of the *Two Catherines* is money. Vessels returning from Brazil were often able to bring a few thousand dollars in specie, a type of return not easy to obtain outside of Latin America. The sea horse teeth and perhaps the gold were of African origin, while the music boxes illustrate that miscellaneous type of article likely to be found in any large cargo.

Such were some of the characteristic imports from Brazil and the Caribbean. With the exception of Brazilian hides, they represented a very small part of total exports, but they gave to the trade of each area a distinctive quality it would not otherwise have possessed.

<sup>17</sup>*Ibid.*, 1087.

<sup>18</sup>See anonymous notebook, written by a trader of the early 19th century, and now at the Library of The Rhode Island Historical Society with the call number Vault m-C-736.

## APPENDIX A

### SOURCES OF SUGAR PRODUCTS

Providence had long been accustomed to obtaining sugar supplies in the West Indies. In colonial times, molasses was one of the chief supports of the Providence economy providing not only a major item of import, but the basis for a very active distilling industry, which, in turn, provided rum for export to the slave coast and elsewhere. After the Revolution, Providence ships promptly returned to the Caribbean and the sugar trade. The trade of the early 19th century, however, was not quite like that of the mid-18th century. The distilling industry was much reduced and the slave trade had greatly declined. In their places had come increased domestic consumption of imported spirits and a lively business in re-exports to Europe and to American coastal ports from Savannah to St. Andrews.

The sources of supply within Latin America, too, had changed.<sup>19</sup>

<sup>19</sup>It should be noted that Brazil, in the 16th century, was a leading supplier of sugar for Europe, though not for North America. In the 19th century, Brazil tended to concentrate on coffee while hides and sugar were next in importance. See note 14.



The British West Indies, once of chief importance, were reduced to a secondary source. Haiti, the principal supplier during the 1790's, was similarly reduced after 1800. Cuba became the primary source for sugar while the Danish West Indies became the principal suppliers of rum. Secondary sources for sugar were the French, British, Swedish, Dutch West Indies, Puerto Rico, Haiti, and Brazil. Some rum came from most of these areas, but none from Cuba or Brazil.

## APPENDIX B

### DIRECT AND INDIRECT IMPORTS OF SUGAR PRODUCTS

Direct imports of molasses for the year 1805 totaled 224,420 gallons; indirect, 141,550. The increase in direct imports of this article, noted in the text above, was paralleled by a similar increase in indirect imports, for in 1825, 439,140 gallons were imported directly from Latin America and 234,000 gallons through other ports. Sugar imports, white and brown, for the year 1805 were 2,197,089 pounds directly from Latin America and 336,540 through other ports. In 1825, there were 538,038 direct and 1,749,660 indirect. These statistics gave warning of the impending decline of the Providence merchant marine.

The figures on rum may be misleading, for coastal manifests often failed to distinguish between domestic and imported rum. A comparison of the quantities of all types of rum imported from coastal ports in 1805 with the corresponding figure for 1825 is, however, suggestive of the enormously enhanced traffic in domestic rum occasioned by the increase in tariffs on imported spirits. In 1805, 49,000 gallons of all types were introduced into the port of Providence from coastal ports compared with 92,095 gallons directly from the West Indies. In 1825, 205,400 gallons of all types were introduced into Providence from coastal ports compared with 11,034 gallons directly imported from the West Indies. Imports from coastal ports were mostly, but not all, domestic.

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