

Spring 2016

# Lost in the Atlantic: Emotional History in New England Maritime Societies, 1745 to 1815

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## Recommended Citation

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**Lost in the Atlantic**

**Emotional History in New England Maritime Societies, 1745 to 1815**

Lauren Percy

Honors in History Candidate

Professor Van Zandt

May 17, 2016

## **Acknowledgements**

Thank you to my parents for fostering my love of maritime history for as long as I can remember through books and family field trips. I am grateful to my family for encouraging my fondness for education and learning. I am thankful for my teachers who helped me discover that I feel most “at home” in history books. Thank you to Carolyn Marvin of the Portsmouth Athenaeum and Catherine Robertson of the Phillips Reading Room for helping me grow as a researcher. Thank you to Laura and Lara for everything you do for the History Department. Thank you to Professor Bolster for your support and guidance throughout my work on this project. I feel lucky to have your criticisms and suggestions on my work. I am grateful to Professor McMahon. Although you taught me that “I know nothing,” I feel ready to tactfully conquer the world with class because of your wisdom. Finally, thank you to Professor Van Zandt for challenging me in your class on Tudor and Stuart England in the first semester of my college career. I feel at home in our department because of your enthusiasm and guidance. Thank you for encouraging your students to grow as historians and as people.

I am indebted to my family, teachers, mentors, and professors who supported and nurtured my intellectual curiosity. I promise to pass on your gifts of encouragement to my future students.

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## Introduction

New England maritime men are remembered in the heroic stories that fill the pages of high school American History textbooks. East coast students on school field trips meet colonial seafarers who live in the tales of crewmembers aboard the tall ships. In New Castle, New Hampshire, Timothy Pickering and New England minutemen thrive in three-hundred-year-old legends of the Continental victory over the British Army at the Battle of Lexington and Concord. Historians remember the grand spoils captured off the *Grand Turk* that depleted British supplies and bolstered American morale during the War of 1812. History commemorates Jean Lafitte and Old Hickory for their victorious defeat of the British in the Battle of New Orleans. Men aboard merchant ships and privateers ensured economic advancement and national security during the unstable years of the new-born United States. There is no doubt that seamen are remembered for their economic contributions and military advancements in eighteenth and nineteenth-century New England folklore and historical chronicles.

For centuries, maritime allusions have riddled New England political and popular culture. The official seal of the state of New Hampshire depicts the USS *Raleigh*, one of the original warships commissioned by the Continental Congress in 1776.<sup>1</sup> The Piscataqua-built vessel represents the importance of privateering and maritime industries in New Hampshire's economic and political development. "Resting upon an anchor,"<sup>2</sup> the sailor pictured on the right hand side of Maine's official seal illustrates confidence in the state's fisheries and reliable relationship with

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<sup>1</sup> "State Seal," New Hampshire Almanac. Accessed April 25, 2016. <http://www.nh.gov/nhinfo/seal.html>.

<sup>2</sup> "The Great Seal of the State of Maine," Maine Department of the Secretary of State. Accessed April 25, 2016. <http://www.maine.gov/sos/state Seal/index.html>.

the sea. Above a banner labeled with the word “Hope,” a golden anchor surrounded by thirteen stars adorns the Rhode Island state flag.<sup>3</sup> The Ocean State’s official government website even designates the state’s own “State Tall Ship and Flag Ship.”<sup>4</sup> The website claims that “history comes alive” aboard a historically-accurate replica of the USS *Providence*.<sup>5</sup> The Rhode Island government boasts that “during her distinguished naval career, the 12-gun *Providence* sank or captured 40 British enemy ships!”<sup>6</sup> Rhode Island’s economic and political augmentation depended on the sea. Oceanic history lives in New England state symbology.

History recognizes that maritime men substantially contributed to the United States’ success and stability throughout the Early American Republic, and the acknowledgement is rightly deserved. However, further research into the role played by eighteenth and nineteenth-century seafarers in America’s infancy suggests that the triumphs of mariners and privateers never came without severe physical and emotional costs. Ships, and the memories of their men lost to the sea, are as lost in history as they are in the Atlantic Ocean.

From 1745 to 1815, young seamen mainly sailed on merchant ships, fighting ships, fishing ships, or whaling ships. Official ship logs of merchant and fighting vessels during the early Republic provide excellent logistical data about day-to-day operations, as well as moving personal writings by different members of the crew. The romanticism of whaling poetry also allows readers to grasp the emotional complexity of a seaman’s life on a whaling ship. Although this study references whaling poetry to convey the emotional nuances of sailing, the majority of

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<sup>3</sup> “State Symbols,” Facts and History. Accessed April 25, 2016.  
<http://www.ri.gov/facts/factsfigures.php>.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

the study focuses on sentimental intricacies found in primary and secondary writings about men on merchant and fighting ships during the mid-eighteenth and early-nineteenth centuries.

In order to craft his *Young Men and the Sea*, historian Daniel Vickers sifted through hundreds of ship logs and customs records dating from 1745 to 1775. Vickers discovered that an alarming number of young seamen hailing from Salem, Massachusetts died at sea. If lucky enough to survive the dangers of seafaring life, sailors often sought work on other ships or vied for an advanced position aboard. Although maritime careers did have opportunities for promotion, sailors rarely stepped aboard ocean-going vessels with aspirations of rising through the ranks to a “master” status. Upon return to shore, few seamen embarked on a profitable second career as a ship rigger or merchantman. The majority of retired sailors became dependent on their living family members for support.<sup>7</sup> Whether lost to the sea or lost in society on shore, many seafarers surrendered their places in New England communities for a life sailing the Atlantic.

The immense number of ships marked as “Lost at Sea” in the customs logs held in the Portsmouth Athenaeum in Portsmouth, New Hampshire, is utterly startling. A lost ship meant men lost at sea. The abundance of ships lost at sea undoubtedly complicated a young man’s decision to enter seafaring life. Some narratives, like the accounts of the *Grand Turk’s* attacks, portrayed seamen as brave men proud to risk their lives for their country. The official sections of ship logs create a patriotic history, while empty spaces within the books that contain personal and depressing discourses create an emotional history. This paradox is prevalent in primary and secondary literary sources regarding maritime life.

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<sup>7</sup> Vickers, Daniel, and Vince Walsh. *Young Men and the Sea: Yankee Seafarers in the Age of Sail*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2005. 131.

Poetry written by non-mariners regarding the dismal conditions of maritime family members ashore hardly reflects the valiant and prideful nature of the traditional “John Paul Jones” narrative. The works revolving around the disheartening situations of sailors written by prominent poets living on land lack the excitement of the tales told by tall ship crews. Songs, poetry, and letters scribbled on the inside covers and empty margins of official ship logs paint a sailor who hardly resembles a proud and patriotic privateer sinking British ships and confiscating enemy cargo.

Statistics, customs records, poetry, and ship logs suggest an entirely different narrative from the story told and consumed by students and modern-day Yankees. The stories behind early American seamen were driven by emotions. Censuses and personal documents do prove that men went to sea simply because their neighbors, fathers, and grandfathers went to sea. The cycle of New England seaport economies pushed young men to maritime life in order to support aging mothers and unemployed fathers. The emotional depth of surviving primary sources texturizes the traditional seafaring narrative and reminds readers that men on sailing ships loved, breathed, and lived.

The traditional survey of Early American maritime and naval history is incomplete. Yes, the successes of mariners and privateers played an extremely important role in the United States’ transformation into a serious national power, and the majority of sailors and Continental Marines hailed from New England seaport towns and villages. Historians, however, have yet to dive into the raw emotional conditions of seamen in the Early Republic.

A thriving literary culture aboard sailing ships has existed for centuries without much notice of modern historians. Seamen took advantage of any free paper, even in the empty spaces in official ship logs and records, to document their thoughts and personal experiences. Mariners



expressed the laughter and sorrows experienced throughout years spent on merchant vessels and privateers. With crews that cut across race and class, seafaring communities fostered a unique culture that could only be experienced and understood by the men that manned American sailing ships.

The conventional accounts of successful seamen include the individual bravery and brashness of sailors squabbling for prizes or fighting against enemy ships. This essay does not discount the potential for rapid wealth aboard a privateering vessel, or sailor contributions to American patriotism and successes of the Early Republic, as attractions to the sea. Mariners *are* remembered for their audacity and military achievements. Many young men of the sea *are not* remembered as human beings.

Poets painted wives waiting on the edge of rocky cliffs, longing for the return of their dearly-missed husbands. Many writers depicted women as dependent on their husbands for economic support and happiness. Works composed about women ashore failed to wholly represent New England coastal supportive communities that fostered female independence. Some women took advantage of their husband's absences by enjoying the liberties to manage the family property and finances. Women played a key role in maritime households, and often worked as tavern keepers or seamstresses in order to support their families. Despite the fact that many women did not individually own property, wives enjoyed the freedom to dictate the running of the family households as they saw fit during the time of their husbands' absence. Historian Lisa Norling, in *Captain Ahab had a Wife*,<sup>8</sup> effectively explores gender and social spheres in New England coastal towns. Historian Christopher Magra argued that the absence of

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<sup>8</sup> Norling, Lisa. *Captain Ahab Had a Wife: New England Women & the Whaleshery, 1720-1870*. Chapel Hill, N.C: University of North Carolina Press, 2000.

men on shore never dissolved coastal communities, but strengthened familial ties on land and at sea. Coastal communities required cooperation ashore and at sea. Although he recognized that the “sea certainly isolated maritime laborers” from women ashore, Magra stressed that maritime industries created common circumstances that “strengthened shore-based familial and friendly bonds.”<sup>9</sup> It can be argued that work and opportunities for women on land strengthened the communal framework of New England coastal towns.

In order to understand the personal and psychological struggles of seafaring men and their families, it is necessary to examine literary circles aboard merchant and privateering vessels. Primary sources suggest that maritime men thought of themselves not only as seamen, but as patriots, lovers, friends, and fathers. For sailors, the emotional impact of a life at sea is crucial to examining what sailors understood their role to be in Early American society. By trying to discover what transpired inside the minds of New England seamen, it is possible to better understand the development of the Early American Republic.

This study will investigate the known successes and failures of New England seamen, second-hand poetry about women on land and men at sea, personal narratives of family members ashore, and the deeply intimate writings of men on sailing ships. Through official documentation and the productions of literary circles, it is possible to determine the relationship between the external and intrinsic motivations of men and their families to go to sea and stay at sea. Life in seafaring communities intensified human experiences. Familial separation and loss has universally emanated grief in seafaring traditions. The New England maritime narrative is a

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<sup>9</sup> Magra, Christopher P. "The Fraternity of the Sea: Family, Friendship and Fishermen in Colonial Massachusetts, 1750-1775." *International Journal of Maritime History* 22, no. 2 (2011) 113-28. Accessed May 2, 2016. Historical Abstracts with Full Text, EBSCOhost.

story of under-dog triumphs, psychological and emotional struggles, broken expectations, and loss. This study seeks to honor the sacrifices of seaport families and communities.

## I

### Why the Sea?

Daniel Vickers has argued that occupational opportunity pulled young men to the sea in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries.<sup>10</sup> Generations of young men followed in their father's and grandfather's footsteps by pursuing maritime careers. Throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, most coastal cities and towns contained "sailor towns," neighborhoods that housed seafaring families and weary visitors. Vickers noted that the entire town of Salem, Massachusetts, was a "sailor town." While ashore in Salem, seamen rejoiced knowing that their voyages had ended successfully by entertaining themselves in local taverns, spinning tales about their adventures abroad, and flirting with the young women of the North Shore, possibly in hopes of one day settling down, starting a second career, and raising a family. For many men in coastal New England, however, the latter would never come to fruition.<sup>11</sup> In *Young Men and the Sea*, Vickers portrayed Salem as a town that came alive once the fathers, husbands, sons, and brothers returned from their voyages at sea. According to Vickers, maritime work proved to be nothing exceptional for local men. The New England coast supplied merchant vessels, privateers, and naval ships with able-bodied young seamen.

The city of Salem and its inhabitants participated in a symbiotic relationship in which the city relied on commerce conducted by seagoing men,<sup>12</sup> and sailors sought maritime employment in order to support their families. Occupations on sailing ships offered opportunities to families

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<sup>10</sup> Vickers and Walsh, *Young Men and The Sea*, 251.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> Vickers and Walsh, *Young Men and The Sea*, 6.

that might not have been able to survive financially from farming or other craftsmen jobs. In communities where families competed for land and work, a life at sea could provide financial security to families who might not otherwise be able to make a decent income. Seafaring fostered social and financial independence for the less-fortunate of costal communities. Many sailors also hailed from solid, educated families with a seafaring history.

Throughout most of his monograph, Vickers de-romanticized oceangoing professions. At the turn of the nineteenth century, however, seafaring became an occupation that laborers entered into for wealth, prestige, and patriotic honor.<sup>13</sup> As opportunities for ambitious seamen diminished with the embargoes and blockades of the Revolutionary War, men seemed to go to sea for reasons other than breadwinning. Young men sought out the sea as a way to satisfy an adolescent desire for thrills and to jump on the patriotic bandwagon.

Americans maintained a real fear of succumbing to the English monarchy during the early years of the American Republic. The American privateering industry peaked with the War of 1812. As young men continued to flock to the seacoast to join privateers, American privateersmen felt they held a stance of moral and political superiority over the British. They reflected this attitude when they encountered enemy British brigs. American ships often tried to convince English vessels to surrender in order to avoid brutal hand-to-hand combat. To many privateersmen, a sense of honor trumped individual wishes for wealth, as American sea fighters aimed to avoid unnecessary conflicts, instead of mercilessly and unnecessarily taking prizes.<sup>14</sup>

Thirty percent of Salem's seafarers between the ages of twenty and thirty died at sea. Young men must have joined crews with the knowledge that the probability of their return would

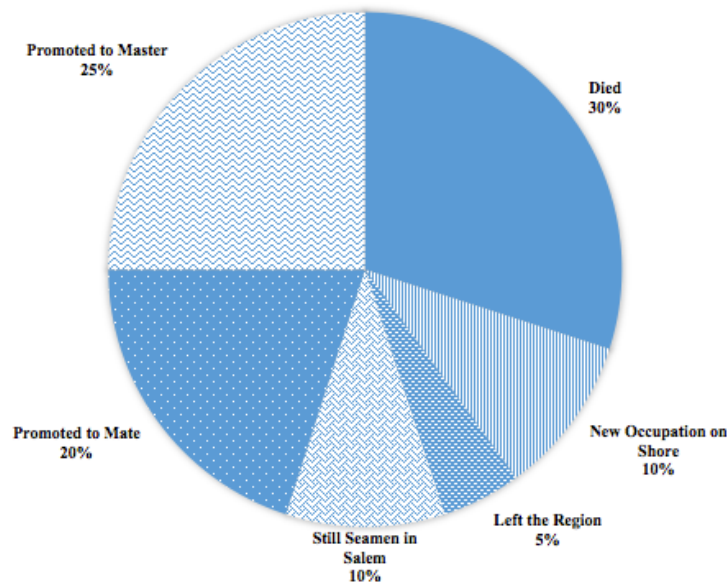
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<sup>13</sup> Vickers and Walsh, *Young Men and The Sea*, 188.

<sup>14</sup> Bolster, W. Jeffrey. "Privateers," *Violence in America: An Encyclopedia* 3 vols. (NY: Charles Scribners & Sons, 1999), 2: 613-14.

be extremely slim. Fifty-five percent of Salem's seamen never left maritime life, though most remained residents of Salem. Five percent relocated to a different port. Ten percent of Salem's young men who went to sea retired ashore. This number did not decline until the Antebellum era. The graph below is taken from Vickers' *Young Men and the Sea*.<sup>15</sup>

**FATE OF SALEM SEAMEN, 1745 TO 1775**



In his book, Vickers discussed why so many young men went to sea despite the dismal realities and prospects of maritime careers on the Atlantic. Occupational opportunity and New England seaport tradition pushed sailors to work on sailing ships. Seaport economies that relied on oceanic commerce forced young men to enter seafaring service. To many young men, both black and white, the endless ocean provided opportunities impossible to resist. During the trying times of the Early American Republic, patriotism and a sense of duty pulled ambitious men to fight for the newly-formed United States. Scholars already know why young men went to sea. It is much more difficult, however, to uncover how they felt about life on the Atlantic Ocean.

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

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The pull for colonial seamen to join fighting ships began long before the Revolutionary War. During the middle of the eighteenth century, the Crown called for New England “able-bodied seamen” to join the Royal Navy and fight off enemy ships in order to interrupt French and Spanish shipping routes. Advertisements called potential mariners to become acquainted with the crew and rules of the ship before signing the articles. Captains wanted their relationships with mariners to seem cooperative, and held “orientations” prior to commitment.<sup>16</sup>

The opportunity for social and economic independence appealed not only to members of the lower socio-economic classes, but to African Americans as well. Although life aboard sailing ships remained strictly regimented, black and white seamen of lower-ranks shared many common experiences.

During the revolution, the fight for American liberty rallied blacks to fight for their freedom and escape both plantation slavery and house-hold slavery. Many African Americans, both enslaved and free, fought in the American Revolution to protect the rights of “life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.” Although slaves would not gain their freedom for almost a century, the Revolutionary War gave many African Americans their first taste of freedom.<sup>17</sup> To some northern slaves, naval service or a career on a privateer bought blacks their freedom. Naval service and privateering became a way to fight for their liberty, their country’s freedom, and honor. Service in the Continental Army, Navy, and aboard privateers bought freedom for nearly

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<sup>16</sup> "NEWS, The New-York Mercury." *New-York Mercury* (New York, New York). 1756. Accessed February 15, 2016. America’s Historical Newspapers, 1690-1922.

<sup>17</sup>Bolster, W. Jeffrey. *Black Jacks: African American Seamen in the Age of Sail*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997. 153.

60,000 African Americans by the year 1783.<sup>18</sup> To many black New Englanders, military service provided the passage to freedom during the Revolutionary War and the War of 1812.

Possibilities for economic independence pulled New England's freed slaves and poor whites to the sea. From 1803 to 1820, an average of 20.75% of crewmembers outfitted from Providence, Rhode Island, were black.<sup>19</sup> Work on merchant ships provided young black and white men with necessities for survival. Food, clothing, and shelter gave sailors a sense of comfort they may not have experienced at home. Work aboard a privateering vessel lured even more men to the sea. In addition to everyday necessities, sailors were promised a portion of the spoils captured by the privateering ship. Although class and racial divisions still existed, life at sea provided opportunities for social and economic advancement. Despite the extreme dangers posed by a career at sea, young men saw the social and economic benefits of seafaring opportunities to outweigh the possibility of a shipwreck or death in battle.

In *Black Jacks*, W.J. Bolster showed that sailors, both white and black, understood the damning possibility of navigational error, toxic water, scurvy, and ruthless captains.<sup>20</sup> Although African Americans understood the dangers of seafaring, the possibility of a life at sea lured black sailors oppressed by eighteenth-century racial policies on land. Runaway slaves ran to the harbors to find work on ships in search of hardworking men.

Even before the American Revolution, enslaved men persuaded their masters to put them to work at sea. In the 1740's, Briton Hammon escaped plantation slavery by entering maritime life. The case of Briton Hammon proves that some slaves had the power to negotiate with their masters in order to improve their own conditions. Hammon persuaded his master, John Winslow,

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<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

<sup>19</sup> Bolster, *Black Jacks*, 235.

<sup>20</sup> Bolster, *Black Jacks*, 29.

that a career at sea would be more profitable than his stagnant work during the dismal winter months in Marshfield, Massachusetts.<sup>21</sup> Yes, Winslow made a greater profit by shipping his assets out to sea. To Hammon, work at sea was a chance to see the world. Hammon's persuasive abilities echoes other examples of slave negotiation with their masters. This negotiation suggests that slaves not only actively sought to improve their living conditions, but they looked to the sea to escape the dreary North Atlantic seacoast. The stories in his memoir *Narrative of Uncommon Sufferings, and Surprising Deliverance of Briton Hammon, a Negro Man*, proved that Hammon and his African American comrades were "citizens of the world."<sup>22</sup> To an enslaved man, an endless horizon over open water offered a sense of freedom.<sup>23</sup>

Work aboard privateering vessels also seemed a logical choice by comparison with a position in the British Navy or a life on a plantation in the Caribbean. Although prejudice and racist practices never disappeared completely from maritime life, work aboard a ship provided black men with opportunities to advance themselves socially and occupationally, as white and black sailors alike performed many of the same duties on the ship.<sup>24</sup>

Sometimes, dangerous social conditions aboard ships caused sailors to "give the slip" to their captain or other officers. While ashore at a port, sailors "slipped," or cut the anchor cable in order to flee with the rest of their crew. While "slipping" seemed to be one of the more dramatic methods of escaping injustice at sea, many seamen deserted their crews not only to escape racial prejudices, but to enhance their social and economic status. Free black seamen deserted their crews in order to work for higher wages aboard other ships.<sup>25</sup> Specifically during the

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<sup>21</sup> Bolster, *Black Jacks*, 22.

<sup>22</sup> Bolster, *Black Jacks*, 22-23.

<sup>23</sup> Bolster, *Black Jacks*, 28.

<sup>24</sup> Bolster, *Black Jacks*, 69.

<sup>25</sup> Bolster, *Black Jacks*, 86.



Revolutionary War and the early 1800's, "slipping" provided black sailors with an opportunity for revolt unimaginable to the regular plantation slave.<sup>26</sup>

Sailing also provided trading opportunities for African Americans. Many sailors of color profited from "petty trading" while stationed in port. Enslaved sailors in the Caribbean who fought for the right to grow and sell truck gardens on the shores of Jamaica during sailing hiatuses "moved along the edges of New World capitalism" by selling their produce in different ports.<sup>27</sup> The regimented life aboard a ship acted to suppress racist actions against African Americans, for captains saw a quarrelsome crew to be an unproductive ship.<sup>28</sup> Although racism still ran rampant among crews, sailing nevertheless gave Northern blacks the chance to be viewed as individuals by their colleagues, both white and black.<sup>29</sup>

What united black and white sailors, however, was not always positive. Maltreatment of sailors united both whites and blacks in an alliance against abusive officers. Being "stuck in the same ship," oppressed sailors of all colors developed a sense of togetherness. The strict hierarchy of a ship polarized the maritime management from black ship hands. Captains and mates usually conducted their ships without empathy for black seamen. The life of Olaudah Equiano illustrates the complexity of free and enslaved black sailors, especially in the Royal Navy. After promising Equiano his freedom, Captain Michael Henry Pascal sold Equiano to the *Charming Sally*, captained by James Doran in 1762. Although Royal Navy officers failed to support Equiano, many of his white fellow crewmembers aboard the *Aetna* fought for his freedom. Even some of his shipmates aboard the *Charming Sally* tried to comfort Equiano by promising that "they would

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<sup>26</sup> Bolster, *Black Jacks*, 85.

<sup>27</sup> Bolster, *Black Jacks*, 86.

<sup>28</sup> Bolster, *Black Jacks*, 98.

<sup>29</sup> Bolster, *Black Jacks*, 100.

get [him] back again; and that as soon as they could get their pay, they would immediately come to Portsmouth to get [him].”<sup>30</sup> Not until ten years later, amidst a legal case which reminded the Royal Navy that Parliament never legitimized slavery, did Olaudah Equiano gain his freedom.<sup>31</sup> Ship hierarchy did oppress black sailors, but it also blurred the color lines between poor white sailors and black seamen.

It is therefore evident that sailors, both white and black, developed fraternal relations that encouraged them to think and act in each other’s best interests. This attitude continued into the early nineteenth century. In the 1820’s, one Jamaican sailor stated that maritime occupations heightened a sense of social equality such that one sailor argued that “in the presence of the sailor, the Negro feels as a man.”<sup>32</sup> Racism existed on sailing ships. The degradation of white sailors to a similar rank as black sailors, along with crew companionship, led to an increased awareness of self-worth among African seamen.

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A lust for adventure often pushed young New England men to sign the articles of privateering vessels. In the 1890’s, privateering captured the interest of journalist Edgar Stanton Maclay, who crafted his *A History of American Privateers* in 1899. Maclay argued that mid-eighteenth-century Americans understood a privateer to be “a ship armed and fitted out at private expense for the purpose of preying on the enemy’s commerce to the profit of her owners, and bearing a commission, or letter of marque, authorizing her to do so, from the government.”<sup>33</sup> Possibility for personal profit drew many men to engage in armed maritime combat. Anger

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<sup>30</sup> Bolster, *Black Jacks*, 98.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

<sup>32</sup> Bolster, *Black Jacks*, 101.

<sup>33</sup> Maclay, Edgar Stanton. *A History of American Privateers*. New York, NY: D. Appleton and Company, 1899. 7.

against Great Britain, which no longer protected the United States against acts of piracy or privateering, drove men to seek revenge through attacks on English ships sailing open waters. British presence in Quebec and along the Atlantic coastline put increasing pressure on the colonies to cooperate with British rule. Revolutionaries therefore outwardly reacted to maritime issues prior to openly resisting on land, as hostilities suggested that British squadrons would attack American trade routes, seaports, and fisheries in order to assert British supremacy.<sup>34</sup>

American privateers believed they held a stake in American independence, as the first overt act of defiance against Great Britain occurred over water.<sup>35</sup> Angered by British acts of illicit trade off the coast of Rhode Island, colonists sailed to Goat Island off the coast of Newport and opened a “fire of defiance” against the British Man-of-War *Squirrel* in 1764.<sup>36</sup>

The Continental Navy began to develop in March of 1772. Outraged at British Lieutenant William Dudingston of the ship *Gaspe* for stopping “all vessels, including small market boats, without showing his authority for doing so,” and sending the “property he had illegally seized to Boston for trial,”<sup>37</sup> colonists felt compelled to take action. Captain Benjamin Lindsey of the packet *Hannah* immediately planned the destruction of Dudingston’s enterprises. Lindsey recruited eight longboats from the harbor in Narragansett Bay to carry commander Abraham Whipple, lieutenant John Burroughs Hopkins, and other seamen to launch an attack on the *Gaspe*. Disguised in untraditional clothing and acting with a “real sailor-like profanity” extremely uncharacteristic of Whipple and Hopkins, the “State Navy” pirated and destroyed the

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<sup>34</sup> Dudley, William S. “Navies, Great Powers,” *The Oxford Encyclopedia of Maritime History*, edited by Hattendorf, John J. Oxford University Press, 2007.  
<http://www.oxfordreference.com/view/10.1093/acref/9780195130751.001.0001/acref-9780195130751>.

<sup>35</sup> Maclay, *A History of American Privateers*, 43.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid.

<sup>37</sup> Maclay, *A History of American Privateers*, 43.

*Gaspe*. Four years later, frustrated by British “anti-smuggling policies” and suppression of transatlantic trade, Rhode Island became the first state to renounce allegiance to Great Britain.<sup>38</sup>

In 1774, colonists decided that “in order to maintain their rights” and protect their economic freedoms, they must participate in hostile reactions to British attacks. Soon, “every seaport had its quota of privateers scouring the seas or hovering the coasts on the enemy.”<sup>39</sup> The Continental privateering industry ultimately gave birth to the Continental Navy in 1775,<sup>40</sup> as “some sixty” commanders of American privateers eventually became captains in the United States Navy.<sup>41</sup> While government-sponsored “war vessels steadily diminished in number in force,”<sup>42</sup> private-armed vessels and their crews increased drastically.<sup>43</sup> Privateering proved profitable not only for the United States government, which ultimately funded and issued the letters of marque to the privateers, but the privateersmen as well. Although dangerous, the privateering profession provided exciting and sometimes profitable careers.

Although the Continental Congress granted the right for the government to issue letters of marque in 1776, many Americans, both patriots and Tories, still questioned the righteousness of attacking British ships at sea, possibly still scared of the treatment of many British privateers at

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<sup>38</sup> John B. Hattendorf. "Newport," *The Oxford Encyclopedia of Maritime History*, edited by Hattendorf, John J. Oxford University Press, 2007.  
<http://www.oxfordreference.com/view/10.1093/acref/9780195130751.001.0001/acref-9780195130751>.

<sup>39</sup> Maclay, *A History of American Privateers*, 69.

<sup>40</sup> John B. Hattendorf. "North Atlantic Regional Navies," *The Oxford Encyclopedia of Maritime History*, edited by Hattendorf, John J. Oxford University Press, 2007.  
<http://www.oxfordreference.com/view/10.1093/acref/9780195130751.001.0001/acref-9780195130751>.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>42</sup> Maclay, *A History of American Privateers*, 113.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*

the beginning and middle of the eighteenth-century. Should the United States lose the war, the consequences for American privateersmen would be dire and deadly.

Despite such fears, on March 9, 1777, John Hancock and George Washington distributed advertisements for privateersmen to newspapers and Continental agencies throughout the colonies. Labeled as a “great encouragement for seamen,”<sup>44</sup> the advertisements called for colonial men to “make their fortunes” and “distinguish themselves in the glorious cause of their country.”<sup>45</sup> In order to outfit the *Ranger*, the Continental Congress looked to communities in southern Maine, Portsmouth, New Hampshire, and Boston’s North Shore. The *Ranger* set sail from Portsmouth, New Hampshire under the command of a little-known John Paul Jones.

The author of the advertisement appealed to young men looking for adventure and a sense of honor. By climbing aboard the *Ranger*, young men would be met with “every civility they could possibly expect.”<sup>46</sup> Sailors would be entering an honorable service, that “for a further encouragement [depended] on the first opportunity being embraced to reward each one agreeable to his merit.”<sup>47</sup> In order to persuade sailors to join the Continental navy, the Continental Congress offered initiatives to those who joined. Resolved on March 29, 1777, the Continental Congress decreed “that the Marine Committee be authorized to advance every able seaman, that enters into the Continental Service, any sum not exceeding forty dollars, and to every ordinary seaman or landsman, any sum not exceeding twenty dollars.”<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> Hancock, John, and United States Congress. “Great Encouragement for Seamen: All Gentlemen Seamen and Able-bodied Landsmen Who Have a Mind to Distinguish Themselves in the Glorious Cause of Their Country.” Early American Imprints. 1st Series; No. 15648. (Danvers, MA) Found by E. Russell, at the House Late the Bell-Tavern., [1777]. Phillips Library, Peabody Essex Museum. Call Number PS504 .E275 no.15648 1776.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid.

After the creation of the Continental Navy in 1775 and before the ratification of the United States Constitution, frustration with lack of British support against foreign enemies gave continental privateers a *casus belli* to issue their own letters of marque. According to one New England newspaper, the British broke maritime trust after an English vessel attacked an American ship, ironically named the *Resolution*,<sup>49</sup> belonging to the colonial company Brantlight and Son in 1781.<sup>50</sup> The journalist asserted that British privateers illegally attacked the American vessel in the West Indies, as the King never authorized the attack. The attack clearly heightened tensions with England, as the Admiralty Court of Pennsylvania brought the claim to the Federal Court of Appeals in August 1781. The author contemplated the morality of declaring whether or not the colonies should follow in the British example by attacking English ships. The journalist's debate on possible retaliation suggests that many Americans questioned the wisdom of militarily attacking Great Britain on the ocean. Land warfare provided a forum which confined fighting. Embarking on a naval battle, however, meant traveling into international waters in order to fight a war between an infant nation and Great Britain.

The case of the capture of a British ship in 1781 represents an interesting dichotomy in American military offensives against England. Many Americans saw the attack as a "piratical act."<sup>51</sup> Was Great Britain innocent because the Crown had not commissioned the attack against the American ship? Or, did the fact that the perpetrators sailed under British colors add cause to the continental fight? The author contemplated these questions within the article, asking,

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<sup>49</sup> Syllabus to *Miller et. al. Libellants and Appellants v. The Ship Resolution, and Ingersoll, Claimant and Appellee*, 2 U.S. 1 (1781)

<sup>50</sup> "NEWS, The New-York Mercury." *New-York Mercury* (New York, New York). 1781.

<sup>51</sup> Dallas, Alexander James, and Grotius. *Reports of cases ruled and adjudged in the courts of Pennsylvania, before and since the Revolution*. vol. 2. Philadelphia, PA, 1790-1807. Early American Imprints, Series 1, no. 33588.

“But shall America violate the rights of neutrality because another nation has done it? Or, which is the present case, because a subject, without authority from his nation, has done it? Did the ship cease to be a neutral ship by capture, and did the cargo cease to be British property?”<sup>52</sup>

If the ship had, however, been a neutral ship, then “Great Britain (had) not acceded to the rights of neutrality, and therefore the property on board a neutral vessel ought not to be protected.”<sup>53</sup> Although Americans questioned whether or not this attack justified a call for naval forces against the Crown, “the ordinance of Congress” ultimately did not excuse Great Britain.<sup>54</sup> The ordinance of Congress did not create a call for privateers against British vessels; however it proved to be a turning point in American approaches to becoming a maritime power. The Continental Congress not only recognized the need for naval protection, but declared yet another injustice at the hands of the British.

With the ratification of the Constitution in June 1788, members of the Philadelphia Convention upheld the statute that “the Congress shall have power to... define and punish piracies and felonies committed on the high seas, and offences against the Law of Nations... (and) to declare war, grant Letters of Marque and Reprisal, and make rules concerning captures on land and water.”<sup>55</sup> The United States Constitution also declared the need for a national navy. Clauses Ten and Eleven of Section Eight of Article One of the United States Constitution legitimized the United States as an admiralty power, justified sailor’s lust for profits, and called for a surge in American patriotism and defiance against increasingly-hostile England. Through maritime warfare, privateersmen raided British and other foreign vessels in search of a substantial income and honor for their young country.<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> Ibid.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid.

<sup>55</sup> U.S. Constitution, art. 1, sec. 8, cl. 10-11.

<sup>56</sup> Bolster, “Privateers,” 613-14.

Eighteenth-century and nineteenth-century New Englanders consistently considered privateering to be a profitable economic option in times of war. Coastal citizens increasingly welcomed an economy established on the attainable option of a speedy profit as conditions worsened throughout New England towards the end of the eighteenth-century.<sup>57</sup> The ability for a privateer to function, however, virtually disappeared in the first decade of the nineteenth-century, as the British blockades along coastal New England effectively prohibited international trade and privateering exploits.

Economic struggles pushed local seamen into the privateering industry, as sailors received prize monies for plundering enemy vessels. As the new American Republic refined its laws, legislators standardized the rules for prize money distribution. A law enacted on April 13, 1800, mandated that “when the prize is of equal or superior force to the vessel making the capture, it shall be the sole property of the captors. If of inferior force, it shall be divided equally between the United States and the officers and men making the capture.”<sup>58</sup> The government also encouraged bravery among American privateers, and pledged that “the surplus (of prize monies) is to go to the comfort of disabled mariners, or such as may deserve the gratitude of their country.”<sup>59</sup> For young men, privateering provided a forum in which they could exercise their bravado while turning a respectable profit.

In addition to the British blockade, the people of Portsmouth felt the devastating impact of the Embargo Act, passed by Thomas Jefferson in 1807. By forbidding all exports from the United States, the Embargo Act ravaged the local economy and the positive attitudes of coastal

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<sup>57</sup> Winslow, III, Richard E. *Wealth and Honor: Portsmouth During the Golden Age of Privateering, 1775 to 1815*. Portsmouth, NH: Portsmouth Marine Society, 1988. 131.

<sup>58</sup> Maclay, *A History of American Privateers*, 8.

<sup>59</sup> Maclay, *A History of American Privateers*, 9.



citizens. Composed by Henry Mellen, Esquire of Dover, New Hampshire, the song *Embargo* suggests a collective attitude of disappointment in President Jefferson for the Embargo Act.<sup>60</sup> Esquire Mellen wrote of the disappointing affects of the Embargo Act on the once flourishing coastal economy, claiming that,

“Our ships, all in motion,  
Once whiten'd the ocean,  
They sail'd and return'd with a *cargo* ;  
Now doom'd to decay,  
They have fallen a prey  
To Jefferson, worms, and *Embargo*.”<sup>61</sup>

Lacking the prosperity of a time when ships “sail’d and return’d with a cargo,” New Englanders felt “doom’d to decay” by the Embargo Act. The song also indicated that locals recognized the need for trade overseas in a society that had once so heavily depended on its ability to craft ships, employ captains and crewmembers, and capture prizes that would in turn circulate money in the local economy. The rebellious attitudes towards the Embargo Act reflect a local identity that honored independence and economic stability. The people of Portsmouth also adopted the social and economic slogan “Free Trade and Sailors’ Rights,” a trademark that boasted New England independence against the British Empire.<sup>62</sup> The people of Portsmouth and Boston’s North Shore therefore believed that the blockade not only hindered New England’s prospects for commercial success and overseas trade, but that the “way of life” for maritime families would decline due to the embargo.

American privateers did, however, take every opportunity to assert their discontent with the British as tensions continued to grow after the American Revolution. During a rendezvous

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<sup>60</sup> Winslow, *Wealth and Honor*, 113.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid.

<sup>62</sup> Winslow, *Wealth and Honor*, 127.

with a British ship during the War of 1812, an American privateersman repurposed a cannon shot on his deck as a love note to one of his British pals on the other side of the cannon. With a piece of chalk, sailor inscribed, “postpaid and returned with the compliments of Yankee Doodle,”<sup>63</sup> and proceeded to launch his spherical chalkboard into the sideboards of the enemy’s ship. American privateers stole well over thirteen hundred vessels throughout the War of 1812, which allowed the American maritime military to be seen as an extremely strong naval power.<sup>64</sup>

Never formally trained as a historian, Maclay’s *History of American Privateers* nevertheless is a valuable source for interpreting the importance of privateering in the Early American Republic. His work reads with an exciting and patriotic tone, and reflects the nationalistic and progressive attitudes of turn-of-the-century Americans. It is important to note, however, that Maclay did not include footnotes. He credited the previous example to a legend told Governor Charles Goldsborough, who died twenty-nine years before Maclay’s birth. The validity of his authorship is questionable, however his enthusiasm for the subject proves that the legends of Early American privateering were intertwined with the development of the United States.

The privateer *Grand Turk* set sail against British forces in the War of 1812. Despite a quarrelsome crew and many internal conflicts, the *Grand Turk* captured twenty-eight enemy vessels throughout the War of 1812. Hindsight proves that joining the crew of the *Grand Turk* would have been a profitable enterprise. To many ordinary men, life aboard the *Grand Turk* would have looked like a promising and lucrative career choice. Unlike work ashore, sailors aboard the *Grand Turk* would receive “any materials needed for survival,” including medicine,

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<sup>63</sup> Maclay, *A History of American Privateers*, 24.

<sup>64</sup> Bolster, “Privateers,” 613-14.

food, and compensation for injuries.<sup>65</sup> The commissioners of the privateer also incentivized their crew to fight with bravery while on board by offering an “extra twenty dollars for the first to spot a sail, and an extra half share for the first man to board an enemy ship.”<sup>66</sup> Work on the privateer also offered sailors an early example of life insurance, as they would “give any dead man’s shares to his legal representatives.”<sup>67</sup>

Privateersmen also received comfort in the fact that should they die a tragic death at the hands of the enemy, their families would be reimbursed for their troubles. In the case of an unfortunate death, “the widows (or orphans, where the wife is dead) of those persons who may be slain in any engagement with the enemy, on board such vessels, will be entitled to pension certificates.”<sup>68</sup> Financial support saved seaport families from disaster.<sup>69</sup> Government pensions provided the reassurance to distraught homemakers that should their husbands unfortunately perish, their families would receive reimbursement.

No matter the reason for enlisting on a fleet of brash, ambitious young seamen, the younger generation of New Englanders flocked to join American privateers during the Revolutionary War and the War of 1812. American sailors argued that the “aggressive British impressment on the high seas, several years before the war, had caused the development of a

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<sup>65</sup> *Grand Turk* (Brig). "Grand Turk (Brig) Logbook Extracts, 1814." *Log 1193*, 1814. Phillips Library, Peabody Essex Museum.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid.

<sup>68</sup> Maclay, *A History of American Privateers*, 27.

<sup>69</sup> John B. Hattendorf. "Communities: Seafarers Wives and Children," *The Oxford Encyclopedia of Maritime History*, edited by Hattendorf, John J. Oxford University Press, 2007. <http://www.oxfordreference.com/view/10.1093/acref/9780195130751.001.0001/acref-9780195130751>.

fleet of American merchant ships which soon proved to be a terrible scourge in the hands of the daring and skillful American skipper.”<sup>70</sup>

During the War of 1812, the people of the Portsmouth area utilized their expertise in shipbuilding and maritime businesses to challenge Britain and elevate the newly created United States to a position of power. Privateering also undoubtedly promoted patriotism and American supremacy during a time of uncertainty. After the capture of the feared British brig the *Liverpool Packet*, New Hampshire citizens experienced a surge of American nationalism as the assault against the British Navy seemed to highlight New Hampshire’s maritime power.<sup>71</sup> The appeal of privateering for security reasons also increased through the British blockade along the Isles of Shoals, which not only devastated the coastal economy, but frightened local citizens with the possibility of a British invasion.<sup>72</sup>

The prospect of a British offensive seemed very real after the Battle of Rye Harbor during the War of 1812. The fear of British assault on the coastal people of New Hampshire created a widespread awareness of vulnerability. The collective sense of vulnerability during segments of the War of 1812 created a community-wide desire for a revival in privateering.<sup>73</sup> Privateering affected the local identity of the New Hampshire seacoast by providing a forum in which Americans could actively and defiantly defeat the British enemy. New Hampshire’s practice of privateering further established the state, and the country’s independence by denying the supremacy of England.

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<sup>70</sup> Maclay, *A History of American Privateers*, 21.

<sup>71</sup> Winslow, *Wealth and Honor*, 168.

<sup>72</sup> Winslow, *Wealth and Honor*, 174.

<sup>73</sup> Winslow, *Wealth and Honor*, 188.

On July 25, 1812, the *Portsmouth Oracle* published an article that argued that privateering provided the American army with supplies, and reinforced American prestige and supremacy against England and France. In “The Blessings of Privateering,” the author stated that American Privateers had the ability to greatly “injure the commerce of England.”<sup>74</sup> The author also reported an attack out of retaliation against the British military, which supplied “the fortunes of a host of patriots.”<sup>75</sup> In another article published on August 3, 1812 by the *Democratic Republican*, it was reported that New Hampshire Privateers continued to attack British ships in response to an English attack on American vessels, stating that the “vigilant privateers have commenced the retaliation system upon the British.”<sup>76</sup> On August 10, 1812, the *Democratic Republican* published an article in defense of privateering. The author argued that despite accounts of privateering to be inhumane and “degrading upon the British,” the practice of privateering protected and supplied the American Army during the American Revolution.<sup>77</sup> The author also stated that Americans have always “spoken of the success of the depredations of the English commerce.” The author concluded his defense of privateering by arguing that Americans felt compelled “by endless injuries,” and that privateering proved to be “the best method of defense, and it is to be hoped that Americans shall encourage and never abandon it.”<sup>78</sup> The act of privateering against enemy ships as retaliation for enemy atrocities proves that the Americans

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<sup>74</sup> “Blessings of Privateering,” *Portsmouth Oracle* (Portsmouth, NH). July 25, 1812. Accessed February 15, 2016. America’s Historical Newspapers, 1690-1922.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid.

<sup>76</sup> “Privateering,” *Democratic Republican* (Walpole, NH). August 3, 1812. Accessed February 15, 2016. America’s Historical Newspapers, 1690-1922.

<sup>77</sup> “Privateering,” *Democratic Republican* (Walpole, NH). August 10, 1812. Accessed February 15, 2016. America’s Historical Newspapers, 1690-1922.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid.

not only viewed the War of 1812 as a defensive war, but they also regarded the privateers as patriots for the American cause.

Many New Hampshire residents joined privateering crews, despite the great danger involved in plundering enemy fleets along the Atlantic coast. The will of Daniel Lindbled, written in 1812, consists of the wishes of Mr. Lindbled, a privateer “belonging to the Schooner Thomas.”<sup>79</sup> In his will, Lindbled requested that “do considering the dangers” to which he “may be exposed, and the uncertainty of life,” the state of New Hampshire would “make ordain and publish this instrument.”<sup>80</sup> The document suggests that men felt willing to commit themselves to such a dangerous service in the War of 1812.

Signed on March 29, 1813, the contract for the privateer *Governor Plummer* bound a crew of thirty-six men to the responsibilities and voyages of the ship. The twelve articles of the contract cover the responsibilities of the crew, punishments for theft, mutiny, and assault, and the payment of the crew. The articles of the privateer *Governor Plummer* prove the sophistication of the privateering industry, and the legitimacy of Portsmouth as a center for privateering.

A “true privateersman” consisted of “a sort of half horse, half alligator, with a streak of lightning in his composition –a man-of-warsman, but much more like a pirate – with a superabundance of whisker, as if he held, with Samson, that his strength was in the quantity of his hair.”<sup>81</sup> After the Peace of Paris in 1783, the new-born United States wanted to assert their military prowess and moral superiority over Great Britain. In the 1780’s, captains decided to rebrand their vessels as “gentlemen privateers.” Many seamen boasted the conduct of American

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<sup>79</sup> Lindbled, Daniel. "Privateering Will." August 14, 1812. Anonymous Donation, The Portsmouth Athenaeum.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid.

<sup>81</sup> Maclay, *A History of American Privateers*, 13.

privateers to be “not only daring, but gentlemanly.”<sup>82</sup> Shipping records suggest that many privateers also proselytized the Christian religion while aboard. In December 1814, a London paper published that the many men “who are zealous in spreading the Divine Gospel all over the Earth” are American privateersmen “who are willing to unite with us in sending missionaries to all parts of the globe.”<sup>83</sup> Although many outside sources portray American privateersmen as pious individuals invested in the goodwill of the commonwealth, a careful inspection of shipping logs suggests that the armed mariners did not always maintain this facade.<sup>84</sup>

Prizes captured by privateers further stimulated the local economy through auctions. During the War of 1812, the abundance of auctions for merchandise captured on British ships by American privateers drew collectors not only by the physical value of the items themselves, but by the patriotic means by which the privateers captured the prizes. In 1814, the community church in Durham, New Hampshire housed one of the largest privateer auctions in state history. The possibility of a British naval invasion also drew consumers to the auctions. The auction proved to be a huge success due to the value of British articles and the patriotic implication of bidding on items from an enemy ship.<sup>85</sup>

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Beginning in the mid-seventeenth century, Royal officers advertised seafaring as a profitable enterprise and an approach to “fighting his majesty’s enemies.” Seafaring gave less-fortunate Yankees, black and white, the opportunities for freedom. Throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, sons and husbands seeking social and economic independence sailed on

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<sup>82</sup> Maclay, *A History of American Privateers*, 14.

<sup>83</sup> Maclay, *A History of American Privateers*, 15.

<sup>84</sup> *Grand Turk* (Brig).

<sup>85</sup> Winslow, *Wealth and Honor*, 149.

merchant and fighting ships. Young men recruited by John Hancock and General Washington sailed to have a stake in American independence. Privateering during America's infancy and the War of 1812 provided seamen with a probable significant source of income and adventure. The New England coast sustained a supply of sailors for centuries. An unsatisfied entrepreneurial spirit, lusty aspirations and a fear of commitment, a longing for a sense of brotherhood, and an inner call to duty answered the question, *why the sea*, for the lost in the Atlantic.



## II

### Oceanic Melancholy

Poetry about the dismal realities aboard sailing ships from 1745 to 1815 seem to accurately portray the attitudes of sailors frustrated by long voyages, lack of communication with their families, and the hardships and heartbreak of fighting a naval war with Great Britain. Colonial and Early American seamen endured physical and emotional misfortunes that are rarely mentioned in monographs and textbooks. Why is it important to recognize the personal state of sailors in order to better understand why so many New England men went to sea? Emotions complicate human decisions. An analysis of sailor feelings may not be able to provide a single answer to why so many men went to sea, and certainly does not discount any economic and patriotic motivations to go to sea. Writings of extreme melancholic experiences on the Atlantic Ocean add texture to seafaring experiences, and remind modern students of the emotional complexity of maritime men.

While under imperial rule, colonists felt that England's focus on foreign enterprises depleted protection of coastal regions. A journalist for the *New Hampshire Gazette* in 1759 lamented that although the British Navy was enormous and protective "according to his own maritime head [Secretary of Admiralty], it is the easiest thing in the world to invade" British North America.<sup>86</sup> The journalist continued to express his discontent with the conduct of navy officers and portrayed British officers as inconsiderate, rude, and unworthy of sporting the English colors aboard their ships. The writer stressed that the absence of "men of milder tempers

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<sup>86</sup> "My next Reason Against Mr. P-t, Is Because He Has Meanly Complied." *New-Hampshire Gazette* (Portsmouth, NH). 1789. Accessed February 15, 2016. America's Historical Newspapers, 1690-1922.

and of a more reasonable and moderate way of thinking”<sup>87</sup> created a budding source of contention between American colonists and British seamen. The personal hostilities between colonial seamen and their officers and the abuses of the British Navy caused the writer to resent the growing influence of England’s transatlantic power. In short, he feared the consequences of Great Britain’s globalizing navy. It is clear that American colonists recognized corruption within the British Navy, and the danger and potential calamities that came with an enormous global seafaring force.

Between the Revolutionary War and the War of 1812, bitterness between the newborn United States and Great Britain greatly increased the possibility of imprisonment for continental attacks on English ships. The likelihood of impressment into a British naval squadron also terrified seamen. No longer armed with the protection of the British Navy, the Continental Navy had to protect the coastal regions of the United States. Mariners had to defend themselves against British ships on the high seas. Wartime greatly increased the dangers of a seafaring career. Some sailors no longer saw privateering to be a profitable solution for cravings of wealth and wanderlust.

On April 23, 1782, the *Pennsylvania Packet* (later the *General Advertiser*) released a list of American sailors confined in London’s infamous Mill Prison.<sup>88</sup> As of April 23, 1782, a total of 173 men from New England sat in Mill Prison. Seventeen other men had been impressed by the British, but somehow escaped the confines of Mill Prison. Five men captured by the British died before the report was published. Though life in New England continued, the absence of 193

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<sup>87</sup> Ibid.

<sup>88</sup> "List of American Prisoners Confined in Mill-Prison, in England, during the Present War." *The Pennsylvania Packet or the General Advertiser*. (Philadelphia, PA). April 23, 1782. Accessed February 15, 2016. America’s Historical Newspapers, 1690-1922.

men, sent across the Atlantic to Mill Prison in London, England, must have had an impact on the emotional stability of communities on shore. In this case, romantic poetry regarding the cheerless conditions on land were probably accurate. Nevertheless, the absence of so many men must have cautioned potential sailors against a maritime career during the late-eighteenth and early-nineteenth centuries.

American sailors not only feared imprisonment from British ships, but impressment. British naval officers forced American seamen to join their ships fighting against the United States. British impressment deeply outraged the United States government, as England clearly failed to recognize American independence.<sup>89</sup>

On December 13, 1803, the *General Aurora Advertiser* of Philadelphia, Pennsylvania warned the public of the dangers of impressment into the British Navy. Published originally as a statement written by Secretary of State Edward Bass, the article covered forced British Naval impressment during the Revolutionary War. Widely practiced before the *Declaration of Independence*, impressment continued into the early nineteenth century. Secretary Bass stated that the British Navy impressed a young man caught “without a custom house protection” just after his initial release from British impressment.<sup>90</sup> Secretary Bass stressed the injustice of British impressment, as English mariners impressed another “two seamen, citizens of the United

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<sup>89</sup> Dudley, William S. “The 19<sup>th</sup>-Century U.S. Navy,” *The Oxford Encyclopedia of Maritime History*, edited by Hattendorf, John J. Oxford University Press, 2007.  
<http://www.oxfordreference.com/view/10.1093/acref/9780195130751.001.0001/acref-9780195130751>.

<sup>90</sup> "Abstract of Impressments of Farmer Belonging to American Vessels, by Agents of Foreign Nations." *Aurora General Advertiser*. (Philadelphia, PA). 1803. Accessed February 15, 2016. Early American Imprints, Series 2, no. 3837.

States, and possessed of protections as such, which they shewed to the British officers,” immediately “after she had passed the territorial line of the United States.”<sup>91</sup>

British impressment of American sailors and naval officers suggested that Great Britain disrespected or failed to recognize American jurisdiction and independence. Impressment was a direct threat to the United States, and a mockery and complete denial of American sovereignty. British impressment and imprisonment undoubtedly heightened tensions between the United States in the country’s infancy, and contributed to the Congressional decision to declare war once again against Great Britain nine years later on June 12, 1812.

British vessels impressed a disturbing number of American sailors. In that context, privateering voyages became even more dangerous for seamen. The crew of the ship *Prudent* used humor to cope with the stresses of maritime life and impressment. The whole crew probably did not have the same sarcastic sense of humor that the bookkeeper, Holton J. Breed, had. Breed’s random poems and drawings liven the otherwise depressing and anxiety-filled account of a ship that endured British piratical attacks and impressment.

The inside of the front cover of Breed’s journal greets the reader with a lovely portrait of a man sporting a voluptuous hour-glass figure and a long dress.<sup>92</sup> Although the portrait is not labeled and therefore the man cannot be identified, one can assume that Mr. Breed, or someone eventually possessed the journal, had ill feelings towards a member of the crew. The log refers to the crew’s disorderly conduct and discontented feelings towards an officer and the captain.<sup>93</sup> The sketches possibly provided a “frustration outlet” for the artist. Doodles of men unclad and

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<sup>91</sup> Ibid.

<sup>92</sup> *Prudent (Ship)*, and Holton J. Breed. *Prudent (Ship) Logbook, 1804-1806*. Phillips Library, Peabody Essex Museum. Call Number Log 60.

<sup>93</sup> Ibid.

dressed as women appear in the margins of subsequent pages, bringing the “anything but prudent crew” of the ship *Prudent* to life.

The majority of songs in ship logs are wistful. A number of the songs transcribed in the *Prudent*, however, are light-hearted and comical. Composed by Mr. Breed aboard the *Prudent*, the new Yankee Doodle “had a wife, she was hard of hearing, she (he) put a swivel on her back and sent her a-privateering.”<sup>94</sup> Breed’s writing style provides a glimpse of the cultural contexts aboard sailing ships in the early nineteenth century.

Long, cramped voyages caused conflicts among crews. The *Grand Turk* is remembered as one of the most successful privateers in the War of 1812. The bickering caused by unacceptable noise levels and the Great Cheese Fiasco of 1814, however, reveal another side of the *Grand Turk* that Vickers and other historians failed to touch. Records of conflicts aboard the ship reveal much about the interpersonal dynamics of shipmates, maritime culture aboard privateers, and one early nineteenth century man’s diabolical sense of humor.

The *Grand Turk* endured an extremely eventful first month. On February 21, 1814, crewmember Samuel Goodwin fell overboard and was lost amidst a severe storm. On March 2, 1814, the *Grand Turk* captured the Spanish Ship *Two Brothers*, and confiscated 1800 boxes of sugar, brandy, and coffee. March 3, 1814 entailed a conflict between the boatswain and crewmember Daniel Faye that rocked the privateer. Because Faye was late for his watch, the boatswain threatened to “cut him [Faye] down”<sup>95</sup> from the fore top should he be late again. Faye stole the boatswain’s knife in retaliation. Although the conflict eventually resolved itself, the dispute strained crew relationships.

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<sup>94</sup> Ibid.

<sup>95</sup> *Grand Turk* (Brig).

Days later, Faye and the boatswain complained to the captain about the unacceptable noise levels below deck.<sup>96</sup> After failing to address the issue, sailors began to resent the captain for his lack of leadership. Frederick Francis, the cabin steward, told the captain that he overheard sailor Antonio Deririus refuse to comply when called to muster.<sup>97</sup> He also heard two sailors utter the word “mutiny.” On a ship with roughly seventy men, any remark about “mutiny” had to be taken seriously. The situation elevated when two men did not show up to their muster stations when commanded. The commander demanded that the entire crew gather on deck. The commander asked, “Would you like to continue with this cruise?” The crew solemnly nodded their heads “yes.” The commander continued with a speech about how the conduct of his sailors disappointed him. Later, Prize Master Daniel Boardman heard a sailor below deck say they would shoot overbearing officers.<sup>98</sup> Prize Master Boardman wrote that the officers should not fear mutiny due to the strict conduct of the ship.<sup>99</sup> Officers therefore took potential threats seriously. Sailors, on the other hand, saw the tensions as an opportunity to lampoon officers of higher rank.

Days later, the *Grand Turk* confiscated hundreds of cheese wheels after successfully capturing the *Indian Lass*.<sup>100</sup> An unidentified merrymaker made the Dutch cheese the punchline of his pranks over the next three months. It became apparent three days after the capture of the *Indian Lass* that a particular shipmate stole a crate of Dutch Cheese. Prize Master Boardman

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<sup>96</sup> Ibid.

<sup>97</sup> Ibid.

<sup>98</sup> Ibid.

<sup>99</sup> Ibid.

<sup>100</sup> Ibid.

lamented that his crew made “the old proverb true, ‘the better you treat a sailor, the worse they behave.’”<sup>101</sup>

Three weeks later, Lieutenant Sinclair discovered that mate Benjamin Pike hoarded cheese underneath his bed and demanded to know the location of the rest of the cheese. Pike pointed his fingers at Peter Saucy and John M. Randalls, who had some cheese, but not all of the cheese.<sup>102</sup>

On May 9, empty cheese waxes began to appear outside of officers’ doors. A small sailor clique wanted the rest of the crew to know that not only did they have the cheese, but constantly ate the cheese without the rest of the crew knowing. The Great Cheese Fiasco of 1814 continued well into late spring, when crew members found 16 hampers of cheese and 184 blocks of cheese stored in the room of Fredrick Francis. Francis, the cabin steward, originally tattled on Antonio Deririus for his mutinous jokes. Francis denied eating the cheese and mischievously placing the waxes in obvious places at night to anger his fellow shipmates. Perhaps Deririus framed Francis. No one will ever know the villain who stole the Dutch cheese and made cabin steward Francis their little red herring, or if Francis wanted to make an anonymous and imagined man his own little scapegoat.

Why are sketches of cross-dressed crewmembers and the Great Cheese Fiasco of 1814 important to the understanding of why men went to sea? The passive-aggressive saga aboard the *Grand Turk* allows historians to better comprehend sailing culture and ship hierarchies. It is clear from the log that the captain knew about the stolen cheese, as one entry is written by the captain himself about the pains of conducting a quarrelsome crew. The log suggests that he never openly

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<sup>101</sup> Ibid.

<sup>102</sup> Ibid.

confronted the issue to the crew. He could have imposed punishments to the entire crew, should the thief not confess, in order to completely halt all bickering over the stolen cheese. Why did the captain choose not to do this? Perhaps the captain understood that conflict within the close confines of a sailing ship would be inevitable. Perhaps the crew would channel their angsty energy towards wheels of fancy cheese instead of personally attacking each other.

Sailors also had to find ways to cope with the dismal realities of life at sea. Sailing buffoons made other crew members into humorous scapegoats for their unhappiness. Inappropriate sketches in a book that would be forever preserved by law in the customs house gave sailors the last word when in a dispute with higher officers. Eventually the trivial concerns of Daniel Faye became more serious during the months of April and May, when rambunctious Faye and Thomas Hatfield died from their wounds after battle with a British privateer.<sup>103</sup>

Although the Great Cheese Fiasco of 1814 focused sailors' attention away from disasters and disappointments at sea, the "moonlight acts" aboard sailing ships constantly reminded seamen of their probable sailor fate.

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Scribbles in the margins and drawings on back covers of ship logs humanize seamen. Virtually every emotion is recorded somewhere in mundane daily logs or in open spaces on a deteriorating page. Life at sea may not have been pleasant or easy; however, the writers' clear senses of humor transcend two centuries of human cultural development. It is possible to conclude that due to the extremely sarcastic nature of many of the sailor narratives, seamen found more faults than advantages in a career at sea.

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<sup>103</sup> Ibid.



More than slapstick humor, sailors infused their poems with sardonicism. The cynicism in British Poet Laureate Robert Southey's poems undoubtedly connected with colonial and American sailors during the late eighteenth century. His dialogues between John, Samuel, and Richard portrayed the crude and heartbreaking conditions that young men endured at sea. Pulled between bravery and heartbreak, Southey's sailors repressed their feelings of distress and sadness in order to appear to be strong and make a profit off of fighting ventures.

The following is an analysis of Southey's dialogue between John, Samuel, and Richard, published in Boston in 1799.

Samuel: "I have march'd, trumpets founding - drums beating - flags flying,  
Where the music of war drown'd the shrieks of the dying."<sup>104</sup>

The first line describes a similar call to sea analyzed in Chapter One. The valiant and patriotic decision to join a privateer for the well-being of one's homeland excited men about the possibility of going to sea. Here, the privateering occupation is romanticized. Although Southey lived in England, American seafarers would have been aware of his poetry. The second line suggests that the pageantry of war disguised the realities of sea battle. The "music of war," initiated by nationalism and a lust for adventure, not only caused the deaths of hundreds of men, but "drown'd the shrieks of the dying." Maritime warfare killed and dehumanized young maritime men.

Samuel: "When the shots whizz'd around me all dangers defied,  
Push'd on when my comrades fell dead at my side...  
Fought, conquer'd and bled, all for sixpence a day."<sup>105</sup>

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<sup>104</sup> Southey, Robert. *Poems by Robert Southey*. Second edition. (Bristol, England). [1797]. Eighteenth Century Collections Online. Gale. University of New Hampshire.

<sup>105</sup> Ibid.

Sailors may have felt infallible as adrenaline pumped through their bodies. With “all dangers defied,” it would be easy to focus on plunder and prizes. The first line suggests that adrenaline automatized sailors. After being desensitized by war, Samuel continued to fight for prizes even as his mates “fell dead at [his] side.” Samuel therefore sold his soul for “sixpence a day.”<sup>106</sup> Although Samuel mourned the loss of his friend and undoubtedly experienced remorse for normalizing the death of his friend, working aboard a fighting ship was probably essential to supporting his family on shore. Men did go to sea because of necessity and opportunity; however, the psychological impacts of a life at sea undoubtedly added unwanted emotional complexity to a seaman’s everyday work life.

John reacted similarly to Samuel. Survivor guilt would have ravaged the consciences of British and American privateers and sailors alike.

John: “And I too, friend Samuel! Have heard the shots rattle,  
but we seamen rejoice in the play of the battle,  
tho’ the chain and the grape-shot roll splintering around,  
with the blood of our messmates tho’ slippery the ground.”<sup>107</sup>

John felt ashamed to be deadened to the deaths of his messmates. Perhaps other sailors felt ashamed of the effect that adrenaline had on their decision to focus on plunder instead of comforting their comrades. The sea lured young men through promises of fortune and pride. Maritime warfare encouraged sailors to ignore the “blood of [their] messmates tho’ slippery the ground.”<sup>108</sup>

John: “The fiercer the fight, still the fiercer we grow,  
we heed not our loss so we conquer the foe,  
and that hard battle won, if the prize be not sunk,  
the Captain gets rich, and the sailors get drunk.”<sup>109</sup>

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<sup>106</sup> Ibid.

<sup>107</sup> Ibid.

<sup>108</sup> Ibid.

<sup>109</sup> Ibid.

Officers obviously expected sailors to be more militant than compassionate during battle. With each battle, mariners became more and more desensitized to the atrocities of ocean warfare. By writing “we heed not our loss so we conquer the foe,”<sup>110</sup> Southey suggests that men fought ruthlessly in order to distract themselves from the deaths of their shipmates. Officers encouraged sailors to ignore losses and their emotions. Should “the prize be not sunk,” the only compensation for the deaths of their comrades would be that “the captain gets rich, and the sailors get drunk.”<sup>111</sup> Southey’s ironic comparison between the romantic patriotism of privateering and dehumanized sailors highlighted the dismal realities of a life at sea.

Although men went to sea for glittering prospects of wealth, glory, and patriotic honor, the actual happiness of sailors is much contested. Weeks, months, and years spent away from a mariner’s family caused many sailors to develop severe cases of anxiety and depression.

Letters, songs, and poetry scribbled on the inside covers of ship logs suggest that sailors dwelt in a melancholy state of faraway memories of family, lovers, and children. Some seamen avoided familial ties to the land in order to evade the distress and downheartedness that often developed from separation. Brothers, sons, friends, lovers, husbands, and fathers desperately missed their loved ones on land.

The emotional trauma that seafaring sometimes caused undoubtedly would have discouraged young men from going to sea. Amidst the day-to-day descriptions of squalls, wind-bearings, armory exercises, and crew conflicts, seamen expressed their feelings towards their loved ones at home through literary devices.

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<sup>110</sup> Ibid.

<sup>111</sup> Ibid.

Maritime life terrified some men. In poetry, songs, letters, and ship logs, sailors and authors chose the word “anxiety” to label their seafaring fears. Men raised in coastal communities understood well the dangers of domestic and transatlantic voyages. Atrocities at sea, whether caused by weather, crew conflicts, or enemy ships, disenchanted seasoned and potential seamen. Maritime workers risked their lives daily to make a profit.

A native of New Haven, Connecticut and hero of the Continental Army, David Humphreys wrote poetry regarding the dangers of the whaling and maritime industries. Adrenaline and victory are constant motifs in writings revolving around life at sea. The following is an analysis of excerpts from David Humphreys’ *A poem, on the happiness of America; addressed to the citizens of the United States*.

“From him alone th’ attentive youths await,  
a joyful vict’ry, or a mournful fate.  
The panting crew a solemn silence keep,  
stillness and horror hover o’er the deep.”<sup>112</sup>

Whalers understood the danger of disaster when approaching their prey. Melville came generations too late for Humphrey’s men.

“The wounded monster plunging thro’ the’ abyss,  
makes uncoil’d cords in boiling waters hiss,  
and oft the boat drawn headlong down the wave,  
leads trembling seamen to their watry grave.”<sup>113</sup>

Adrenaline turned to fear when the whale beat the wits of his captors. Humphreys suggests that the sailors’ greed and lust for adventure caused the deaths of their fellow seamen, who the whale led “oft the boat drawn headlong down the wave.” Yes, capturing a whale would

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<sup>112</sup> Humphreys, David, “A poem, on the happiness of America; addressed to the citizens of the United States.”

<sup>113</sup> Ibid.

have brought the sailors' families a steady income and honor. Too many a whaling exhibition, however, ended in terror.

“Prolific source of pleasure, care and woe!  
Ne'er may our sons for heaps of useless wealth,  
exchange the joys of freedom, peace, or health,  
must make ev'n riches to their weal conduce,  
and prize their splendor by their public use!”<sup>114</sup>

Humphreys' poetry is filled with cynicism. The poem openly advised young men not to go to sea. He hoped that “ne'er may our sons for heaps of useless wealth, exchange the joys of freedom, peace, or health.”<sup>115</sup> Humphreys even suggested that greed and lust for adventure were the principal calls for seamen, as young men “must make ev'n riches to their weal conduce, and prize their splendor by their public use!”<sup>116</sup> To Humphreys, a life at sea equated to unnecessary pride, greed, and sadness.

“Tis thus our youth thro' various climes afar,  
from toils of peace obtain the nerves of war – but what dark prospect interrupts our joy?  
What arm presumptuous dares our trade annoy? Great God!  
The rovers who insult thy waves have seiz'd our ships and made our freemen slaves.”<sup>117</sup>

Humphreys believed that a life at sea was a life enslaved to the needs of the ocean. Poets romanticized the unpredictability of maritime life in order to convey feelings of inevitable disaster and downheartedness.

Some narratives include boisterous accounts of bravery, patriotism, and honor. Most narratives, however, expressed complicated feelings towards a sailor's life at sea. There is something remarkably human about a young man's anxiety upon returning to a lover, an aging

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<sup>114</sup> Ibid.

<sup>115</sup> Ibid.

<sup>116</sup> Ibid.

<sup>117</sup> Ibid.

mariner's marriage advice to younger promiscuous men, and the heartbreaking letter to a father's forthcoming orphan written on the inside cover of a privateering log.

A tragic number of men died at sea. The crew buried the majority of men that died during voyages at sea in order to prevent the body from decaying aboard.<sup>118</sup> The sail maker wrapped the deceased sailor in an old sail, and placed a cannon ball at his feet to ensure that he descended feet first.<sup>119</sup> The captain held a service while the sail master stitched up the sides of the sail around the body. Finally, the sail maker stitched the "last stitch" through the sailor's nose.<sup>120</sup> The crew tilted the grating of the ship<sup>121</sup> and slid their crewmember into the sea while their captain or chaplain held a memorial service.<sup>122</sup>

Very rarely did crew members bring a dead man back to shore to their families.<sup>123</sup> If the ship could be in port generally within a week, sometimes the crew buried a deceased man on land. Captain Moses Rolfe of Newburyport, Massachusetts was fatally wounded in a confrontation with a Spanish privateer in September 1762. The crew hurried to shore and buried his body on an island in the West Indies.<sup>124</sup>

On Sunday, July 22, 1781, the writer of the *Belisarius*' ship log William Drowne wrote of the death of his mate Bowen. Drowne wrote that the "sea burial service was reading, appeared

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<sup>118</sup> Bradley, G. P. "Burial Custom Formerly Observed in the Naval Service". *The Journal of American Folklore* 7, no. 24. (1984). University of Illinois Press, 67-9.

<sup>119</sup> David J Stewart. "Burial at Sea: Separating and Placing the Dead during the Age of Sail." *Mortality* 10, no. 4 (November 2005): 276-85. EBSCO Host.

<sup>120</sup> Ibid.

<sup>121</sup> Ibid.

<sup>122</sup> Ibid.

<sup>123</sup> Ibid.

<sup>124</sup> Captain Moses Rolfe. "Newburyport, Sept. 30, 1762. : Captain Moses Rolfe of This Town, Sailed from Hence for the West Indies the 28th of Last May ... His Body Was Brought to This Town, and Buried Last Monday Evening." Phillips Library, Peabody Essex Museum. Call Number F1621 .N493 1762.

one and all, suitably affected at the solemn occasion... day after spent in decent, sober, sadness.”<sup>125</sup> Frequent deaths and burials constantly reminded sailors of the dangers they faced every single day at sea.

Ship logs turned to journals as voyages turned into months and years. Sailors dreamed about the possibility of finding a female mate and settling down ashore. Throughout June and July of 1781, William Drowne of the ship *Belisarius* must have felt lonely and in need of a partner. During these months, Drowne wrote numerous poems about finding love on land.

Although these poems may be romantic and charming in nature, there are underlying notes of helplessness and heartache. On Monday, June 18, 1781, Drowne wrote,

“Thus let me pass the load of life, a constant friend, an easy wife,  
tho’ cheerful, yet demure, in hoping others’ truly blest,  
then gently sink at last to rest and find my bliss secure.”<sup>126</sup>

This passage is important to understanding what men believed to be women’s roles in seaport communities. Men wanted women to comfort them after long voyages, to be “cheerful, yet demure,” and to help her husband find his “bliss secure.”<sup>127</sup> While many eighteenth and nineteenth century men found marital support to be extremely significant, this wishful ideology probably rarely came to fruition in seaport towns. Consistency in marriages was difficult for seaport families. Vickers recognized that susceptible to misfortune, maritime families continuously battled uncertainty.<sup>128</sup> Half of all maritime marriages from 1690 to 1775 failed in Salem, Massachusetts, mostly from the death of a spouse. Seventy-one percent of all

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<sup>125</sup> *Belisarius (Ship)*, and William Drowne. "Belisarius (Ship) Journal Typescript, 1781." Phillips Library, Peabody Essex Museum. Call Number Log 1317.

<sup>126</sup> *Belisarius (Ship)*.

<sup>127</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>128</sup> *Ibid.*

discontinued marriages terminated due to the deaths of husbands at sea.<sup>129</sup> For this reason, men would have over-fantasized about a stable life on land.

Aboard the *Belisarius*, Drowne's poetry became increasingly depressing as the month continued. On Friday, June 22, 1781, Drowne wrote,

"I'll give my passion to the winds,  
love unreturn'd soon, dies."<sup>130</sup>

One would think that four days could not completely devastate a young man's hope to one day find love. As seamen realized the realities of their limited opportunities for family life, men refocused on the physical hardships at sea, rather than the emotional effects of being thousands of miles away from their homelands.

Drowne wrote his next poem on Saturday, July 15, 1781. Moving on from daydreaming about the possibilities of love, Drowne turned his attention to more practical problems. Drowne wrote,

"A glorious chaceing breeze, but nothing to be seen,  
indeed we've took so little that we've almost got the spleen."<sup>131</sup>

Here, Drowne's frustration epitomizes the disgruntled shipmate at sea. The failure to capture any prizes resulted in near-starvation. Profits and provisions usually only came with plunder. Privateers relied on violence in order to feed themselves, and possibly make a profit. It is shocking that such a high-risk occupation pulled young men to the sea for hundreds of years, as Drown complained,

"And non we hope who plough the main, will have worse luck than me,  
who, in two months, ranging to and fro, have took but prizes three,  
and those so very small, that faith sometimes almost with the Devil had em' all."<sup>132</sup>

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<sup>129</sup> Vickers and Walsh, *Young Men and The Sea*, 149.

<sup>130</sup> *Belisarius* (Ship).

<sup>131</sup> Ibid.

<sup>132</sup> Ibid.



Drowne seems to begin to lose faith in the privateering industry. The previous stanza suggests that mariners interacted with one another while at sea, as he acknowledged that many crews had “worse luck” than those aboard the *Belisarius*. The infrequency of successful plunders is a recurring theme in sailor poetry. This gambling mindset does fit with the stereotypical adventure-seeking young sailor. Peaceful times at sea could actually be detrimental to a seaman’s survival, especially if the crew’s provisions came from enemy ships.

Perhaps seamen chose not to include exciting and promising tales of British booty and patriotic plunder in their records. Excitement was not the primary motif that ran through poetry written about maritime life or authored by sailors. Personal writings of seamen mostly revolved around women and woe.

Young men dreaded saying “goodbye” to their romantic partners. The majority of sailor poetry circles around dreaming of their beloved back on shore. It is difficult not to romanticize life at sea when sailors so heavily romanticized their records of their voyages. Without any modern entertainment and the confinement of a vessel with sixty men for months or years, young men turned to writing poetry and songs to pass the days, weeks, and years. Acting as personal journals for many log keepers, ship logs offer incredible insight to the emotional concerns of men at sea.

In 1812 a young sailor “bid a last adieu” to his “ever dear” Elisa. In an emotional poem titled “Dessert” written in the middle of a ship log for the ship *Polly*, the author begged his partner to “accept the tribute of a tear, sincerely paid to love and you.”<sup>133</sup> Lamenting that he must

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<sup>133</sup> *Polly* (Ship). “Log 913.” *Polly (Ship) Journal, 1812*, 1812. Phillips Library, Peabody Essex Museum.

go “across the wide Atlantic main, poor and unprepared,”<sup>134</sup> the author expressed guilt for leaving his romantic companion at home.

Later in the ship log, the same author worried about the state of his lover, waking up every morning alone.<sup>135</sup> The poem also addresses the prevalent issue of a significant other at home moving on. The author described that an acquaintance informed him that “many weep no more for me, she fishes her pillow and gently rise, her hand to ask who there might be.”<sup>136</sup> The author suggested that his lover had multiple other significant others during his time away at sea. The line “lay her down to sleep, her thoughts on dandy far at sea”<sup>137</sup> suggests that he wonders if his lover’s promiscuous behavior is due to her desire to see him. Sailing from Salem, Massachusetts to Haiti on a commercial shipping voyage, it is clear that the log keeper’s anxiety regarding his love for his significant other back intensified throughout his voyage. His thoughts probably consisted of concerns and fantasies regarding her condition during his absence from 1787 to 1788.<sup>138</sup>

How does love poetry deepen a young man’s decision to go to sea? This poem lays in the middle of the ship log. There are customary entries on either side of the poem. The poem is also written in the present tense, taking place months before the author actually wrote it. Clearly, the author continuously relived the moment he said “goodbye” to his lover throughout his months aboard the *Polly*. The emotional strain would have been miserable. The call to serve his country must have pulled the young man away from his home and to the sea.

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<sup>134</sup> Ibid.

<sup>135</sup> Note: the author appears to have the same or extremely similar handwriting.

<sup>136</sup> *Polly* (Ship).

<sup>137</sup> Ibid.

<sup>138</sup> Ibid.

Abijah Northey, a member of the prominent Northey family of Salem, Massachusetts, kept a detailed and personal log book on a journey from Calcutta, India to Salem in November 1806. Northey's deeply personal and emotional writings reveal considerable anxiety about being so far from home.

November 5, 1806 marked the seventeenth month of their voyage from Salem, Massachusetts to Calcutta, India. Without the distraction of "seven days' head winds on [their] passage out,"<sup>139</sup> Northey described how still waters and calm weather caused his head to spin. Northey wrote, "this length of time with the uncertainty of the state of our friends after such a long absence creates in our minds an anxiety that is more easily conceived of than described."<sup>140</sup> Hardships distracted seamen from the inevitability of facing their fates at home. With an ample amount of time for thinking, seamen's minds must have spun scenarios of what happened at home during their absences. Northey writes,

"We now have our faces turned towards home, and we have a longing desire to get there, where, in the imbraces of our dearest friends, we shall forget all the troubles we have met with."<sup>141</sup>

Here, Northey suggested that returning home would help him "forget all the troubles" he endured over the past seventeen months. Northey's poetry highlights the emotional paradoxes that a sailor encountered when nearing their home port. Northey's passages suggest that he felt excited to return to Salem, Massachusetts. Northey's following sentences, however, illuminate why so many sailors feared returning home. The captive power of the sea proved to be more effective than the pull to the shore. Abijah Northey wrote,

"That anxiety of mind we are now continually tormented with...  
We look forward with a longing desire mixed with fear, to that hour,

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<sup>139</sup> Argo (Ship), and Abijah Northey. *Argo (Ship) Logbook and Journal, 1806-1807*. Phillips Library, Peabody Essex Museum. Call Number Log 1291.

<sup>140</sup> Ibid.

<sup>141</sup> Ibid.

when we shall once more have our native town in view,  
when with a trembling heart and mind wound up to the highest pitch of anxiety,  
we ask the first person who puts his foot on board the ship,  
this most important question, ‘Is she well?’ (O, my God!)”<sup>142</sup>

Candid emotion is not as well preserved as legal documents. Historians regularly read ship logs to dissect the military history of privateers and their contributions to the Continental Army and the formation of the United States throughout and after the Revolution and the War of 1812. Abijah Northey’s candid analysis of his return home seems almost all too human. For months and months waiting to return to their families, the fear of stepping on land and learning that their loved ones had passed, or that they had moved on, proved to be real. Some seamen would not return for years at a time. A wife could learn that she became widowed years after her husband’s death. Life ashore seemed impossible, and ultimately caused consistent heartbreak. Many sailors, like Abijah Northey, returned to sea after discovering the new lives of loved ones ashore.

Finally, on February 1, 1807, Abijah Northey wrote, “And there ends a most tedious, fatiguing, uncomfortable voyage in the course of which we encountered dangers of almost every kind. Finis.”<sup>143</sup>

Possibly, young men felt afraid to face their lives on land. Life could have seemed less complicated aboard a sailing ship. Surrounded by water, life on board seemed simple. After their services, some men retired ashore with their families, or resided in “sailor houses.” Perhaps the sea kept some men captive. Perhaps ties to the mainland seemed too complicated and heart-breaking to manage. Nevertheless, the emotional complexity of a life at sea complicated a sailor’s return to life ashore.

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<sup>142</sup> Ibid.

<sup>143</sup> Ibid.

In *Young Men and the Sea*, Vickers noted that no maritime marriage followed a specific path. Few men settled down after marriage. Five years after his marriage in 1758, mariner Ashley Bowen retired from seafaring and spent the rest of his workable years as a ship rigger in Marblehead.<sup>144</sup> The majority of sailors would not have followed in Bowen's footsteps. Vickers stated that the majority of Salem's seafaring men married in their early twenties.<sup>145</sup> For the majority of New England seamen, husbands and wives rarely lived with each other. To some young sailors, like the seamen addressed in the following letter, marriage added another level of uncertainty to their already unpredictable lives.

Not every sailor thought that marriage only brought seamen depression and anxiety. An anonymous mariner on the ship *Adam* out of Salem, Massachusetts addressed a letter to "All You Young Men" on the inside cover of the ship log. In the letter, the author advocated for monogamous relationships and the emotional and physical benefits that come with having an exclusive partner. The fact that he felt he must defend his monogamous marital lifestyle suggests that most men on the ship did not have romantic ties for the mainland.

"I am marry'd and happy with wonder hear this, you... who laugh at my mention of congeal blessings... You may laugh but believe me you're all in the wrong... for to marriage the permanent pleasures in only, and in them we can only confide."<sup>146</sup>

In the defense of the young men he addressed, it would have been difficult to find someone on land that they could confide in. The author's use of their generational divide is almost charming. He assumed a fatherly role in addressing the love lives of younger sailors by warning the young men that "the joys which from lawless connections arise, are fugitive and never

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<sup>144</sup> Vickers and Walsh, *Young Men and The Sea*, 112.

<sup>145</sup> Vickers and Walsh, *Young Men and The Sea*, 117.

<sup>146</sup> *Adams (Ship)*. "Log 913." *Adams (Ship) Journal, 1804*, 1804. Phillips Library, Peabody Essex Museum.

given,” but instead “stolen with haste.”<sup>147</sup>

The author’s sarcastic attitude suggests that many men had romantic rendezvous when docked. Humorously chastising his crewmembers, the author tried to explain why fidelity was respectable. He argued that while life at sea proved extremely unpredictable, marriage provided stability on land. The mariner wrote the letter in order to explain why not only marriage is significant and conducive for a lonely seaman, but as a parental attempt to save his young comrades from potential future heartbreaks. The author advised against lusty trysts by writing,

“The love which ye boast of deserves not that name  
True love is with sentiment join'd  
But your's is a papillion a fleur, rich flame  
Raised without the content of mankind,  
When dreading confinement ye mistress her,  
With this and with that ye are loyal,  
Ye are led and misled by a false flattering her,  
And can oft by that her destroy'd.”<sup>148</sup>

The author patronized his young mates for falling for unattainable and promiscuous women. Heartbreak would only follow should they continue to pursue local women when docked. The author’s prescription for a broken heart is marriage. When asked “from whence [his] felicity flows,” the author’s “answer is short - from a wife, who her cheerfulness renew and good nature I chose.”<sup>149</sup>

How is this anonymous poem essential to understanding why young men went to and stayed at sea? The fact that the author had to defend himself for having a wife and being faithful to her suggests that the majority of seamen avoided conjugal commitments on land. One can imagine that it would be nearly impossible for a young man to marry and play an important role

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<sup>147</sup> Ibid.

<sup>148</sup> Ibid.

<sup>149</sup> Ibid.

in a family if he had worked at sea since the age of sixteen. Towards the end of the poem, the line “with this and with that ye are loyal, ye are led and misled by a false flattering her”<sup>150</sup> suggests that sailors felt weary of courting women ashore. The near impossibility of finding a stable mate after beginning a career at sea is probably an important reason why some men did not return to their home seaports. Trust troubled sea couples, and the dangerous nature of a job at sea probably would not have seemed appealing to potential mates. Lack of opportunity to settle down, along with the emotional and practical complications of long-distance relationships and marriages, kept seamen in seafaring professions.

Young men understood the dangers of going to sea. The type of sailing ship did not necessarily increase or decrease the chances of survival. A man needed to be brave in order to sail with the Continental Navy or on a privateer. Whaling and merchant ships also required able-bodied seamen. Any ship could hypothetically be attacked by an enemy vessel in times of war. When young men signed the articles on privateering ships and merchant ships, they knew that the probability of their return would be slight. Perhaps blinded by adolescent invincibility, young men still boarded ocean-going vessels with excitement.

A young poet of the War of 1812 wrote,

“Each hero’s breast at war end’s name shall glow,  
And strike fresh terror to the foe,  
While for his loss his native land shall mourn.”<sup>151</sup>

In the midst of the dangers of life at sea, many sailors thought about life on land and about women. When this young man wrote his thoughts in the ship log, he did so amidst feelings of inevitable melancholy. Some men never returned home because they chose not to return

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<sup>150</sup> Ibid.

<sup>151</sup> Ibid.

home. Hundreds of men never returned because they did not live to walk ashore one more time. Our poet understood his probable sailor fate. He took comfort in knowing that “the patriot’s tear shall his bathe sacred,” and turn him to “the immortal body, the immortal soul.”<sup>152</sup>

Buried in Log 193 and bound in tandem with the records of the brig *Adam*, the following poem captures a dying father’s love for his child.

“On yonder bloody battle field, where late the deadly bullet flies,  
When all is gay and merry, is seen and known by stains of blood,  
Of mothers, wives, and infants stain, beneath a brown and naked truth.  
By winter’s angry blast made brown.  
Stood fair Elisa, a [loss] to the storm.  
She perished...  
Hush little darling baby. Hush. My little orphan child.”<sup>153</sup>

As the author, it feels nearly impossible to appropriately honor those who die at sea. I cannot fathom how a young man felt as he knew he would soon be slipped, wrapped in a sail, feet first, into the Atlantic. One cannot understand the growing anxiety of a mother who knew not when her son would return or a child’s heartbreak wondering if their father lay at the bottom of the sea or neared their home port. Many men are only remembered in ship logs. It is important to share their stories to somehow, in some cosmic way, offer condolences and closing to so many young men and their families who are only remembered in the boxes of the Phillips Reading Room in Peabody, Massachusetts.

Many young seamen did not experience the adventurous, lustrous, fulfilling career that many history books portray. Neither were young mariners solely militaristic and profit-minded. Scribbled in the inside covers and empty margins in eighteenth and nineteenth century ship logs, personal writings, letters, songs, and poetry suggest that literary culture lived in sailing ships.

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<sup>152</sup> Ibid.

<sup>153</sup> Ibid.



These raw, emotional texts provide sobering insight into the minds and motives of New England seamen.

### III

#### Fantasies of Home and Realities on Shore

Ships and men lost to the sea distressed seaport communities for centuries. Familial separation was common but not easy. Writers composed verse and prose that related to the despondency of separated maritime families. The didactic nature of psalms and hymns for seamen written for public worship suggest that families dealt all-too frequently with deaths at sea. Marine and fire insurance companies compensated monetarily for material possessions lost to the sea or enemy ships, but not the lost income of a spouse or heartbreak that often accompanied life and death at sea.

On February 27, 1785, Reverend John Murray of the Presbyterian Church in Newburyport, Massachusetts delivered a sermon in memorial of Captain Jonathan Parsons. "In the 50th year of his age,"<sup>154</sup> Parsons died on December 29, 1784 at sea. Reverend Murray used maritime metaphors to relate the gospel to Captain Parsons' life at sea. Reverend Murray argued that for souls both aboard and ashore, "the hope of the gospel may be said to serve that ship as her sheet anchor."<sup>155</sup> Despite the instability and the dangers of Captain Parsons' career at sea, his faith undoubtedly anchored him with God. Although there are metaphorical parallels to a ship and a soul, Reverend Murray stressed that no concrete "parallel can be run" between a vessel

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<sup>154</sup> Murray, John, 1742-1793. "The Happy Voyage Completed, and the Sure Anchor Cast. : A Sermon, Occasioned by the Universally Lamented Death of Capt. Jonathan Parsons, Who Departed This Life at Sea, Dec. 29, 1784, in the 50th Year of His Age : Preached at the Presbyterian Church in Newburyport, February 27, 1785. Published at the Request of the Marine Society There. / By John Murray, A.M. Pastor of Said Church. ; [One Line from Virgil]." [Newburyport, Mass.] : Reprinted. Newburyport: From the Press of E.W. Allen. December, 1806. (Sold at the Bookstore of Thomas & Whipple, Market Square.), [1806]. Philips Library, Peabody Essex Museum. Call Number: E M982.2 1806.

<sup>155</sup> Murray, "The Happy Voyage," 5-6.

“fashioned by human skill,” and a “spirit created immediately at the hand of the almighty.”<sup>156</sup>

Reverend Murray’s sermon encompassed the feeling of communal sadness experienced in New England seaport towns. Although families on shore may have felt grounded in their faith in God, the uncertainty and instability of a sailor’s life at sea provided the ever-lingering concern about losing a family member. Stating “We have, I fear, but few such mariners now to lose,”<sup>157</sup> Reverend Murray evoked the constant uneasiness of seafaring families. Reverend Murray prayed that “the giver of life spare that happy few”<sup>158</sup> from the depths of the Atlantic.

In eighteenth and early-nineteenth-century New England, heartbreak ashore ran rampant as a result of the absences and deaths of fathers and sons. Probably part of the reason for the romantic notion of maritime life is due to a literary explosion created by familial heartbreak. In *A Poem, on the Happiness of America; Addressed to the Citizens of the United States*, David Humphreys tackled the emotional impact of a mariner’s absence on his family. Wives never knew how long their husbands might be at sea. For many women on shore, saying goodbye to her husband and sons almost seemed to be the equivalent of being widowed. Humphreys’ poem, however, captures the excitement and utter relief of a fleet’s return.

“In fond embraces strain’d the captive clings, and feels and looks unutterable things!  
See there the widow finds her darling son!  
See in each others arms the lovers run, with joy tumultuous their swoll’n bosoms glow,  
and one short moment pays for years of woe!”<sup>159</sup>

The widow mentioned in Humphreys’ poem rejoiced at the sight of her dearly-missed son. The identification of his main subject as a “widow,” and not a “mother,” suggests that this

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<sup>156</sup> Ibid.

<sup>157</sup> Ibid.

<sup>158</sup> Ibid.

<sup>159</sup> Humphreys, David. “A poem, on the happiness of America; addressed to the citizens of the United States.” (London, England). [1786]. Eighteenth Century Collections Online. Gale. University of New Hampshire.

maritime family previously endured oceanic tragedies. As sailing careers continued through generations, the family reunion Humphreys described reflected the prayers of so many families in New England.

Ministers and poets published prayers in order to soothe the distresses of mourning children, wives, and mothers. In Boston, Massachusetts in 1796, Abiel Holmes wrote to comfort the parents of “Mr. J. F., apprehended to be lost at sea.”<sup>160</sup> Holmes wrote,

“Come, smiling hope! And with thy balmy hand  
Heal the deep anguish of a Mother’s woe;  
O’er a lone Father wave thy magic wand,  
Forbid the heart to throb, the tear to flow.”<sup>161</sup>

Most residents of seaport towns experienced the emotional impacts of a family member or friend lost to the ocean. Desertion, shipwreck, and death made coastal family life unpredictable and sometimes unstable. Citizens banded together in order to support community members whose lives disasters at sea destroyed.

It is heartbreaking that this family did not even know what happened to their son. He could be alive. Their son could have been impressed by the British Navy, deserted in the West Indies, or settled further down shore. No matter the fate of the young man, the family still grieved as if their son died at sea, and hoped that “some guardian-angel from above pointed his passage to the distant shore.”<sup>162</sup>

Although the prospects for the young man’s return seemed dismal, the poet still prayed for the return of their son.

“But if, regardless of a Parent’s cry,

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<sup>160</sup> Holmes, Abel, and Akenside. “A Family Tablet: Containing a Selection of Original Poetry.” (Boston, Massachusetts). [1796]. Eighteenth Century Collections Online. Gale. University of New Hampshire.

<sup>161</sup> Ibid.

<sup>162</sup> Ibid.

And deaf to Friendship's agonizing prayer,  
Hope from the haunts of sorrow still will fly,  
And yield the hapless sufferers to Despair."<sup>163</sup>

Sadly, coastal families living in the late eighteenth century understood the desolate probability of a loved one's return. The fact that the amount of men entering seafaring life in New England coastal communities did not decline until the mid nineteenth century does not mean that wives developed a numbness to worry, or waiting, became any easier.

Composed in 1799 and published in Boston, Massachusetts, a *Collection of Psalms and Hymns for Publick Worship* aimed to comfort seafaring families with husbands and sons away at sea. Psalm CIV, titled *For Seamen*, began by encapsulating the awesome power of the "vast unfathom'd main."<sup>164</sup> The psalm also reiterated the importance of seafarers in early American society. Families ashore recognized that sailors

"Father[ed] what thy stores disperse,  
Without their trouble to provide:  
Thou op'ft thy hand, the universe,  
The craving world, is all supply'd."<sup>165</sup>

Families hoped that prayers, along with their contributions to the well-being of the young United States, would in turn ensure the safe return of their family members.

In *The Pleasures of Hope*, poet Thomas Campbell described a woman waiting to spot "her lover's distant sail."<sup>166</sup> Campbell wrote,

"She, sad spectatress, on the wintr'y shore  
Watch'd the rude surge his shroudless corpse that bore,  
Knew the pale form, and, shrieking in amaze,

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<sup>163</sup> Ibid.

<sup>164</sup> *A Collection of Psalms and Hymns, for Publick Worship* (Boston, Massachusetts). [1799]. Eighteenth Century Collections Online. Gale. University of New Hampshire.

<sup>165</sup> Ibid.

<sup>166</sup> Campbell, Thomas. *The Pleasures of Hope, with Other Poems. By Thomas Campbell. To Which Is Added the Nurse*. (New York, New York). [1800]. Early American Imprints, Series 1, no. 37090.

Claspt her cold hands, and fix'd her maddening gaze:  
Poor widow'd wretch! 'twas there she wept in vain  
Till memory fled her agonizing brain..."<sup>167</sup>

Campbell's mariner wife seemed desperate, distraught, and miserable. Of course women at home would have missed their husbands terribly. The majority of poetry written by men follows this pattern, of a husband's absence decimating the emotional stability of his wife and children at home.

"Oft when yon moon has clim'd the midnight sky,  
And the lone sea-bird wakes its wildest cry,  
Pil'd on the steep her blazing faggots burn  
To hail the bark that never can return;  
And still she waits, but scarce forbears to weep  
That constant love can linger on the deep."<sup>168</sup>

Constantly engaged in building and sustaining a signaling fire for her seafaring husband, the sailor's wife seems to halt all life on shore to wait for her husband. With a "maddening gaze," she hoped that her "constant love [could] linger on the deep."<sup>169</sup>

The underlying sense of depression in poetry revolving around seafaring families does not necessarily provide a simple answer to why young men went to sea. Constant motifs of familial heartbreak and despair complicate any understanding of young men who committed their lives to such a dangerous profession. Maritime poetry's dispiriting character, however, suggests that the depth of a sailor's "call to the sea" must have been much deeper than pursuing a family business.

Unfortunately, few self-reflecting poems written by widows survive. Many male poets paint women waiting for their husbands on rocky New England cliffs. Folktales survive of

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<sup>167</sup> Ibid.

<sup>168</sup> Ibid.

<sup>169</sup> Ibid.

women pacing along “widow’s walks” atop seventeenth and eighteenth-century houses, waiting for their lovers. Whether or not these descriptions of women waiting actually reflect reality, however, is unknown.

Earlier in the seventeenth century, pirate ships offered pensions to individual sailors injured at sea and in battle. Later privateering vessels also gave compensation to the sailors for missing legs, blind eyes, and other injuries resulting from plunders and battles with enemy forces. Rarely did seaport families receive reparations for their sons’, fathers’, and husbands’ injuries or even deaths. After the American Revolution and before the War of 1812, the United States Congress issued laws to pay families on shore for the loss of their seamen family members.

On September 20, 1800, a severe storm swallowed the *USS Insurgent* in the West Indies. In 1800, family members of sailors aboard the *USS Insurgent* advocated for themselves to receive compensation for kin lost at sea. Widows Sarah Fletcher and Jane Ingraham petitioned to receive payments on behalf of the loss of their husbands. In response to the widows’ petition, the House of Representatives resolved,

“that it is expedient to grant the widows and children, as the case may be and of the officers, seamen and marines, who were lost at sea on board the ship *Insurgent* and brigantine Pickering, lately in the service of the United States, four months pay of their respective husbands, or fathers.”<sup>170</sup>

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<sup>170</sup> Homans, Benjamin, and United States Navy Department. *Laws of the United States, in Relation to the Navy and Marine Corps; to the Close of the Second Session of the Twenty-sixth Congress. Together with the Acts and Resolutions of Congress, Granting Medals, Swords and Votes of Thanks, or Having Reference to Special Objects: Also Private Acts, for the Relief of Individuals, Alphabetically Arranged: And a Table of Appropriations and Expenditures, for the Naval Service, from 1791 to 1840, Both Years Inclusive. To Which Are Prefixed the Constitution of the United States, and a Synopsis of the Legislation of Congress, Respecting Naval Affairs, during the Revolutionary War. With an Appendix, Containing the Laws Passed at the Twenty-seventh Congress. Pub. by Authority of the Navy Department.* (Washington, United States). [1843]. [www.archive.org](http://www.archive.org).

The Salem community therefore fought for the families of lost seamen. The United States Congress decided that the petitions reflected the need to respect and appreciate the families of men who dedicated their lives to the service of their country. On April 29, 1802, the United States Congress further resolved,

“That it is expedient to provide, by law, for the payment of five years half pay to the widows and children, as the case may be, of such officers in the naval service of the United States as shall be slain in battle, or die, when in the actual line of duty.”<sup>171</sup>

Financial compensations would not have eased the heartbreak of the loss of their loved ones. This congressional “Special Act,”<sup>172</sup> however, illustrates the government’s sense of duty to ease the burden on families left behind.

In 1833, the community of Salem, Massachusetts instituted an organization to ease the burden on women and children widowed and orphaned due to the maritime careers of their husbands and fathers. Many of the first recipients became widows during the American Revolution and the War of 1812. The association provided aid to sixty-six families in 1833, ninety-seven families in 1834, and 143 families in 1845. Eighty-four of the widows were over seventy years old.<sup>173</sup> On March 6, 1834, the association established an imperishable fund with \$400.00.<sup>174</sup> From 1833 to 1840, The Seamen’s Widow and Orphan Association of Salem, Massachusetts worked tirelessly to raise funds to provide struggling seaport families with financial compensations. Through donations and fundraisers, the account of the Seamen’s Widow and Orphan Association grew from \$685.00 in 1840 to \$1807.00 in 1850.<sup>175</sup> The

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<sup>171</sup> Ibid.

<sup>172</sup> Ibid.

<sup>173</sup> Seamen’s Widow and Orphan Association (Salem, Mass.). "Seamen’s Widow and Orphan Association (Salem, Mass.) Records, 1833-1960." *Acc 2011.008*. Phillips Library, Peabody Essex Museum. Call Number *Acc 2011.008*.

<sup>174</sup> Ibid.

<sup>175</sup> Ibid.



majority of the money went to aid aged and sick widows. The Seamen's Widow and Orphan Association continued to compensate the descendants of Salem's maritime families until 1926.

The women of New England seaport cities sought refuge in New England Christian communities that eased the stresses and sadness of life in a maritime village. Ministers and laypeople alike crafted and recited poetry, psalms, and sermons in honor of their loved ones at sea. Colonial and Early American families found stability in religion.

Financial assurance given to the families of seaport towns could not completely erase the emotional burden of a man's death or loss at sea. Before the Seamen's Widow and Orphan Association offered financial and material compensation, the association organized events to help surviving family members emotionally.

On Christmas Eve in 1833, the association comforted still-grieving widows and orphans through a sermon. The minister spoke of the bravery and righteousness of the sailors who died at sea. The minister stressed that "common sympathies, modified and controlled by circumstances," begin by springing "from the individual heart, as from a common centre, and then radiate through the continually enlarging circle of home, relatives, friend, neighborhood, community and country, until, at last, they embrace the whole family of man."<sup>176</sup>

The association called for the Salem community to support families affected by seafaring tragedy. The minister's sermons created an awareness of community and togetherness in order to comfort those who survived their family members lost in the Atlantic.

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Although few examples exist of poetry and prose authored by wives of seamen, their works read with a remarkably different tone than the majority of poems written about seafaring

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<sup>176</sup> Ibid.

families on shore. Not one woman described herself as a “widow’d wretch.” Late colonial and Early American poetry about the sea written by women focused on the wondrous power of the ocean, included references to classical literature, and advocated for their husbands and sons to serve the Republic in its infancy by going to sea.

The works of Ann Ward Radcliff entered Philadelphian society in 1800.<sup>177</sup> Mary Tighe’s *Psyche* first appeared in the United States in 1812.<sup>178</sup> The romantic nature of their writings about the ocean would have swept away maritime wives and daughters.

In *Captain Ahab had a Wife*, historian Lisa Norling describes how the whaling industry caused women to lead independent lives in their husbands’ absences on Quaker Nantucket. With almost a complete absence of men on the island, women created a unique evangelical community. Norling argues that throughout the eighteenth century, the Nantucket Quaker community developed a “collective sense”<sup>179</sup> of female authority and independence. Although women never boarded and cleaned ships in the manner that their husbands did, women managed businesses and family finances independently while their husbands worked aboard sailing ships.<sup>180</sup>

Norling also credits historian Margaret Hope Bacon, who argued that Nantucket bred “pioneer feminists.”<sup>181</sup> Due to the island’s “frequent absence of husbands and fathers on whaling

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<sup>177</sup> Radcliffe, Ann Ward. *The Mysteries of Udolpho, a Romance; Interspersed with Some Pieces of Poetry. By Ann Radcliffe, Author of The Romance of the Forest, &c. In Three Volumes. [Four Lines of Verse] Vol. I[-III]*. (Philadelphia, PA). [1800]. Eighteenth Century Collections Online. Gale. University of New Hampshire.

<sup>178</sup> Tighe, Mary. *Psyche, with Other Poems. By the Late Mrs. Henry Tighe*. (Philadelphia, PA). [1812]. Eighteenth Century Collections Online. Gale. University of New Hampshire.

<sup>179</sup> Norling, *Captain Ahab Had a Wife*, 53.

<sup>180</sup> Ibid.

<sup>181</sup> Ibid.

trips,” Nantucket “became a training ground for the development of strong Quaker women.”<sup>182</sup>

Norling therefore emphasized that Nantucket’s female Quaker community eased the stresses and sadness of life in a maritime village by channeling “women’s energies into sustaining families and a tightly knit community onshore.”<sup>183</sup>

Just as the War of 1812 pulled men to sea to fight for their country, women pushed their husbands to sea to protect American independence. Eliza S. True published her *Amaranth* in 1811 as a didactic “collection of original pieces, in prose and verse, calculated to amuse the minds of youth without corrupting their morals.”<sup>184</sup>

True evoked the bravery of Revolutionary War heroes in order to spark patriotism and pride in New England youth. She argued that the safety of the American Republic justified the inconveniences of war with the British and the Embargo Act of 1807. True stated that in exchange for the “darling fopperies and luxuries of European importation,” Americans “would tamely submit to see our ships piratically captured and lost, our seamen impressed, imprisoned and abused, [and] our merchants stripped of their lawfully acquired property.”<sup>185</sup>

True claimed that the American spirit rose above European temptations throughout the Revolutionary War. She urged Americans to live with the same righteous spirit, as a second war with Great Britain seemed inevitable. On land and at sea, True contended that only few “cold inanimate hearts never felt the generous glow of patriotism.”<sup>186</sup>

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<sup>182</sup> Ibid.

<sup>183</sup> Ibid.

<sup>184</sup> True, Eliza S. *The Amaranth: Being a Collection of Original Pieces, in Prose and Verse, Calculated to Amuse the Minds of Youth without Corrupting Their Morals. By Eliza S. True.* (Portland, ME). [1811]. Early American Imprints, Series 2, no. 24063. Preface.

<sup>185</sup> True, *The Amaranth*, 33.

<sup>186</sup> Ibid.

True argued that self-sufficiency would not only prohibit Americans from consuming British goods, but would create a stronger community on shore. True called for women to “suitably and forcibly recommend the manufacture of our own clothes, and like the electric touch, it will be communicated from class to class, until industry shall become both fashionable and affordable.”<sup>187</sup>

True advocated for young men to go to sea to protect the United States. Understanding the timing of her discourse is also essential to comprehending why maritime families encouraged their sons to go to sea during the early nineteenth century. Prior to the budding threat of a second war with Great Britain, prose and poetry about maritime families focused on the distress and sadness of the absences of their husbands. The threat of a British invasion justified this encouragement, and sparked a new generation of patriotic sailors.

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Men were pulled to sea at poignant times in the development of Continental America. The boom of transatlantic trade in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, nationalism of the mid-to-late eighteenth century, and tumultuous years of the early Republic called for able-bodied seamen. Brief spurts of patriotism, whether support for the King in the early eighteenth century, or to defend the United States in its infancy, propelled the merchant and privateering industries. While narratives of brave and patriotic sailors clouded the emotional trauma experienced by men at sea, poetry often over-romanticized depression on land in coastal communities. The heartbroken, distressed, “widow’d wretch” painted in poems written by men did not always accurately represent the sisterhood and religious communities ashore. Many women viewed seafaring to be their husband’s civic duty, not just a family business.

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<sup>187</sup> Ibid.

## Conclusions

The external motivations for a young man's decision to devote himself to the sea were deeply intertwined with economic and cultural developments in the Early American Republic. In Colonial America, rumors of the successes of royally-commissioned privateers would have pulled men in search of a profit. Later references to plunders of British ships in the War of 1812 in ship logs suggest that the promise of wealth lured young men to the sea. Literature based on maritime industries suggests that the possibility of grand financial rewards caused men to enter into deadly oceangoing professions. The security of eighteenth and nineteenth-century life and marine insurance eased the minds of potential sailors and their families, as insurance and community organizations promised compensation for any injuries or deaths during a seaman's time of service.

The American Revolution, along with the commissions of the first Continental War Ships in 1776, called for confident men in seaport communities. Not only would privateers have the opportunity to plunder British ships for spoils and prizes, but the Continental Congress regarded their service as honorable and patriotic. As maritime hostilities increased in the early years of the American Republic, an increasing number of young men joined privateers in order to proclaim American maritime power. Stories of the plunders and triumphs of the *Alfred* and the *Grand Turk* would have drawn men to the sea with the possibility of prizes including European goods forbidden by the British Blockade. Young men also recognized the protective call to duty to defend American coastlines.

Of course, some men might have entered seafaring careers simply to serve in the footsteps of their fathers and grandfathers. Legends developed throughout centuries, government

advertisements calling for privateers and seamen, and privateering logs suggest that wealth and patriotism pulled young men into the Atlantic Ocean.

Personal accounts written by women living in seaport communities painted a different narrative than the works of male poets. The works of Eliza True suggest that many women viewed maritime service to be their husbands' patriotic and civic duty. The shifting of social spheres resulting from the absence of men in coastal towns did not necessarily produce dismal conditions on land. Although the absence of their husbands undoubtedly saddened wives and daughters, the women of New England formed tight-knit and supportive communities that also contributed to the stability of the Early American Republic.

The personal writings of men at sea suggest why some seamen felt uneasy about returning to shore. With absences of months and years, many men simply lost their places in society on land. The sadness of many men who returned to lovers moved on, such as Abijah Northey, could have been too heartbreaking to bear. Some chose to stay at sea in order to avoid the unstable shore. This sadness still complicates the question, however, of why young men choose to go to sea initially if they knew of the emotional consequences of a career at sea.

Perhaps the one of the greatest complications to the original narrative of "hometown seafarers" lies in the literary circles aboard merchant and privateering vessels. Sailor poetry provides new significance to the emotional health of sailors in the traditional maritime narrative. It is imperative to recognize the failures and successes of seamen through their records and own words in order to fully respect their contributions to the growth of the United States. Historians remember the labor that seaport families contributed to coastal economies, celebrate the gumption of a sailor's wife who sustained a family business on shore, and the value of officers in the early American Navy throughout the Early Republic and the War of 1812. Historians must

also recognize, and remember, the tremendous emotional sacrifices that mothers, wives, daughters, sons, husbands, and brothers endured for centuries in coastal New England. Men lost in the Atlantic speak for themselves in ship logs bundled in the archives of port cities.

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