

**To ‘the most distant parts of the Globe’: Trade, Politics, and the Maritime
Frontier in the Early Republic**

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Abstract
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This dissertation explores how capital-poor American traders harnessed navigational information and commercial knowledge to expand the geography of American foreign commerce from the late colonial period to the close of the Napoleonic Wars. American traders like those in the mid-level port of Salem, Massachusetts, who form the focus of this project, recognized that overcoming their knowledge deficit about navigation and foreign markets would be faster than overcoming their capital shortages or the economies of scale in larger ports like Boston, and they structured the geography of their maritime commerce to maximize the acquisition of market and route-based information. By the 1780s, Salem traders drew on their longstanding Atlantic commercial strategies to trade in new Indian Ocean markets as they had traded for centuries in the Caribbean, on circuitous voyages that they modified *en route* as they gathered new information about surrounding markets. They deliberately constructed broad and diverse commercial geographies not tied exclusively to British, French, or even European markets. This work redraws the map of early American foreign commerce, particularly American neutral trade, by foregrounding American circuitous trade across regions and across political boundaries and by highlighting American dependence on hubs of commercial information like Mauritius in the Indian Ocean that fell outside of major and well-studied shipping centers like London or Calcutta. Protecting access to information as a means to enhance the ability of American traders to compete and capitalize on new commercial opportunities, rather than simple Anglophilic or Francophilic sentiment, lay at the core of American commercial interests throughout the colonial and early national periods, particularly as places like Mauritius became the contested spaces in the American debate over neutrality and the union’s place in international geopolitics. This commercial context and this new explanation of how American neutral trade operated provides essential background for understanding the meaning and the stakes of early national debates over American political economy that lay at the heart of the union-building project.

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Abbreviations

AAS	American Antiquarian Society, Worcester, Massachusetts
JSPCL	Joseph Story Papers, Clements Library, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, Michigan
JSPLOC	Joseph Story Papers, Library of Congress, Washington, DC
MHS	Massachusetts Historical Society, Boston, Massachusetts
NARA	National Archives and Records Administration, Washington, DC
NARA-Waltham	National Archives and Records Administration, Waltham, Massachusetts
NDAR	<i>Naval Documents of the American Revolution</i>
PEM	Peabody Essex Museum, Salem, Massachusetts
PFB1	<i>The Papers of Governor Bernard, Volume 1</i>
PRO	British National Archives, Kew, London, United Kingdom
TPP	Timothy Pickering Papers, Massachusetts Historical Society

Introduction

To ‘the most distant parts of the Globe’: Trade, Politics, and the Maritime Frontier in the Early Republic

In early nineteenth-century Salem, Massachusetts, common lore held that Salem ships did so much business in the Indian Ocean and South China Seas that foreign merchants in those regions thought Salem the great “continent” of the west and Boston one of Salem’s subsidiary ports.¹ From the imperial crisis of the British Atlantic in the 1760s through the end of the Napoleonic wars, American maritime communities experienced a long period of commercial adaptation and exploration as they sought to re-establish their commerce with the Atlantic World and the global marketplace after declaring independence from Great Britain. Salem was a booming port during this period, one of the United States’ fastest growing cities, but it remained a second-tier port relative to major shipping centers like Boston and later New York. Salem found its commercial advantage by seeking out new markets for American ships not yet subsumed by its larger competitors. In the 1780s, the Salem mercantile community began to specialize in trade beyond the Cape of Good Hope, to the Indian Ocean, and on to China. Due to Salem’s particular contribution to extending the maritime and commercial frontier to the East Indies, members of the Salem mercantile community considered themselves on the vanguard of the union-building project. Knowing the contempt and often indebtedness that came with being a subsidiary port, as Salem had long been to Boston, Salem traders reveled in the prominence their port enjoyed through the East Indies trade. In 1878, poet and Salem native Charles Brooks reflected on his Salem childhood and put this common story of Salem’s former commercial grandeur to verse:

Some native merchant of the East, they say,
(Whether Canton, Calcutta, or Bombay),

¹ Charles T. Brooks, “Poem,” in *Essex Institute Historical Collections* XV (1878), 206.

Had in his counting-room a map, whereon
Across the field in capitals was drawn
The name of Salem, meant to represent
That Salem was the Western Continent,
While in the upper corner was put down
A dot, name Boston, Salem's leading town

By building their communities into repositories of commercial knowledge and expertise, early American ports like Salem engaged with and flourished in the global economy through vast commercial geographies that far exceeded the town's small footprint in Essex County, Massachusetts. These maritime Americans recognized that overcoming their knowledge deficit about navigation and foreign markets would be faster than overcoming their capital shortages or the economies of scale in larger American ports, and they structured the geography of their maritime commerce to maximize the acquisition of market and route-based information. In contrast to capital or broad knowledge about an entire region, route-specific information and descriptions of single markets was easy to acquire from newspapers, conversation, observation, or written directions. As they sought to sustain and expand their overseas commerce in the years after the American Revolution, maritime Americans focused their trade on hubs of commercial information, particularly free ports in the Caribbean and the Indian Ocean where the circulation of trade turned these entrepôts into outlets for commercial news and information about the mechanics of trade in surrounding markets. Americans traded circuitously across political boundaries, and they deliberately constructed broad commercial geographies not tied exclusively to British, French, or even European markets.

Exploring how maritime Americans in the early republic traded, competed, and engaged with the global marketplace offers a new explanation for how American neutral trade operated and provides essential background for understanding the meaning and the stakes of early national debates over American political economy at the heart of the union-building project. Protecting

access to information as a means to enhance the ability of American traders to compete and capitalize on new commercial opportunities, rather than simple Anglophilic or Francophilic sentiment, lay at the core of American commercial interests throughout this period. The commercial geographies that connected maritime Americans to the American union, the Atlantic world, and the global economy shaped their understanding of the organization of the American republic and America's place within the international system of states. Entrepot markets like Mauritius in the Indian Ocean that had helped propel American commercial expansion in the 1780s, became in the 1790s and early 1800s the contested spaces in the debate over American neutral trade. International war heightened the risks of circuitous, information-driven trade and favored those who could trade directly with large markets like London or Calcutta and who could survive the loss of an occasional ship to seizure. Communal stakes in international geopolitics turned town meetings, seaport wharves, and local newspapers into vibrant forums for debating the American political economy that would support a community's particular role in the American and the international economies. When imperial and later federal commercial policies like the 1764 Sugar Act or the Jay Treaty, or foreign trade restrictions like British Orders in Council during the Napoleonic wars prohibited Americans from the markets where they traded not only goods but information, traders like those in Salem responded in protest. For maritime Americans, whose lives and livelihoods existed in an Atlantic and even global context, ideas of political economy were critically linked to actual practices of trade.

Despite the conventional state-based political narrative of the early American union—thirteen distinct and often jealous states joining together as one—the commercial geography of American mercantile communities redraws the map of the early American union as it was perceived by maritime Americans. As debates over the new American union began in the 1770s

and carried on throughout the early national period, many North Americans were already accustomed to perceiving of union on a continental scale and in an international context. Maritime Americans in particular had extensive experience trading and partnering with merchants in other continental markets as they sought to maximize their access to local knowledge and commercial news. Trade between Salem and Pennsylvania, Virginia, or South Carolina, for example, formed some of the port's most common trade routes in the 1770s. Massachusetts coastal towns each constructed distinct commercial geographies through foreign and domestic markets often to compete against one another, as was the case between Salem and Boston. As these maritime hinterlands often crossed state borders and quickly became channels to share political information and form political allegiances, many New England coastal communities grew more familiar with distant markets like Charleston, South Carolina or Baltimore, Maryland than with their in-state neighbors. For Massachusetts towns, functioning together as Massachusetts in state or federal government often revealed and perpetuated deep rifts and distrust among Massachusetts communities. On a high level, the process of creating an American political union after 1776 was about bringing together thirteen distinct governing bodies into a single sovereign alliance, but on the ground, many North Americans already lived and worked within commercial and social networks that regularly crossed state and regional borders.

As a colonial port town and later a burgeoning entrepôt of the early American republic, Salem maintained an essential link to the sea and the maritime frontiers of early American commercial enterprise. After independence Americans in maritime centers envisioned a republic bolstered by foreign commerce, and many in Salem believed their commerce served both a local and a national interest. From the later colonial period to the 1820s, traders in Salem were active

participants in shaping a new geography of American commerce in the global economy. From the 1760s through the 1790s, Salem was the second largest port in New England behind Boston. Located on the north shore of Massachusetts, Salem was a shipping center for the northern New England fishery in the colonial period. With the loss of many of the town's fishing vessels during the American Revolution and the prohibitions on American trade to many of Salem's traditional markets in the Caribbean and in southern Europe, Salem traders used their Atlantic trading strategies to quickly pursue new patterns of trade in both the Atlantic and Indian Oceans after the peace of 1783.

Salem merchants found advantage in trading along the edges of the American maritime frontier, and they built their port into a hub for commercial information to lower trade risks, particularly for new, entrepreneurial commerce. While trade to India for cloth goods became the specialty for some Salem merchants, many others initiated trade to non-Indian and particularly non-British markets in Indonesia, the Mascarene Islands, and modern-day Yemen and Oman for pepper, coffee, and other goods. Meanwhile, Salem traders also pursued strategies to reinvigorate their Atlantic trade, either by constructing circuitous trade routes that linked new markets beyond the Cape of Good Hope with trade to continental Europe, by venturing to new markets in the West Indies, or by forging new commercial contacts within the United States through an expanded domestic coasting trade. Once a colonial provisioning port, by 1807 Salem sent ships across the globe, and its customs duties generated five percent of all federal revenue.²

The maritime frontier was a political economic process. While maritime Americans learned how to trade in new markets, sail in new waters, and form new trading partnerships after 1776, they also engaged in the project of establishing an American union that would best govern

² Dane Anthony Morrison, "Salem as a Citizen of the World," in *Salem: Place, Myth, and Memory*, ed. Dane Anthony Morrison and Nancy Lusignan Schultz (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 2004), 109.

these new forms and geographies of commerce. These two interests—union and trade—existed in constant tension with one another from the late colonial period through the first decades of the nineteenth century. Questions of extending, protecting, and governing the maritime frontier animated politics in the early national period. Within the international system of states, the United States sought to declare its own sovereign rights to global commerce, while the American federal government sought a uniform commercial policy to govern a union of very different interests. Trading strategies in maritime communities like Salem shaped and were shaped by American commercial policy and changes in the global marketplace. The debate over American political economy that played out in colonial and early national Salem, where residents had personal stakes in policy outcomes, reveals the defining characteristic of early American politics as the interplay between broad structural changes and local circumstances.

Salem's commercial expansion and its moment of prominence in American maritime trade mirrored developments in other early American ports. These communities participated in a similar culture of competitive enterprise, even if they had different commercial specializations or different patterns of trade, and they pursued many of the same commercial strategies, particularly trading circuitously across political borders, often through the lucrative re-export trade. Recapturing Salem's commercial perspective on global markets and understanding how Salem merchants restructured their trade in the early federal period thus offers critical insight into the broader history of early American commerce and ideas of political economy. Salem's rise as a post-Revolution boomtown was especially similar to ports like Baltimore, and its efforts to enter new East Indian markets, for example, paralleled developments in major ports like Philadelphia and New York. Not only Salem's successes, but also its moments of commercial failure and its eventual decline as a shipping center by the mid-nineteenth century illuminate the increasing

difficulty of American mid-size ports to compete as centers of foreign commerce after the rise of the American System and the new initiatives for internal improvements and national tariffs.

Recent scholarship on the early modern Atlantic has underscored the trade networks and human migrations that transcended political and geographic boundaries and, for some historians, defined the historiographical “Atlantic World.” In their 2009 critique of Atlantic history, Jack Greene and Philip Morgan highlighted the field’s need for more port histories. The maritime sector was one of the “leading edges” of the Atlantic world that “deserves single and sustained attention” for understanding the changing contours of Atlantic exchange, they claimed.³ This study of Salem’s development is an Atlantic study, one that explores not only American encounters with other people and cultures of the Atlantic, but also the political, economic, or cultural implications of these interactions for Salem’s local community. Daniel Vickers’s earlier work on Essex County, Massachusetts offered evidence that Salem is a worthy candidate for this Atlanticized research. For the farmers, fisherman, and sailors of Salem and the surrounding Essex County, going to sea or bringing goods to port destined for the Atlantic economy were such common practices that residents considered them unexceptional during the colonial and early federal periods; Atlantic experiences were a natural extension of the local community and economy.⁴

³ Jack Greene and Philip Morgan, eds., *Atlantic History: A Critical Appraisal* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 12.

⁴ Daniel Vickers, *Farmers and Fishermen: Two Centuries of Work in Essex County, Massachusetts, 1630-1850* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1994); Daniel Vickers, *Young Men and the Sea: Yankee Seafarers in the Age of Sail* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005). Vickers’s work also serves as evidence that the traditional New England town model for studying colonial settlement does not capture the historical perspectives of New Englanders towards the Atlantic economy and commercial exchange. His study of the movement of labor and goods between Essex County towns and Salem effectively highlighted the historical interconnections between urban and rural communities during this period, but tracing and recapturing Salem’s networks of maritime commerce reveals that Salem’s hinterland reached far beyond the surrounding communities of Essex County to include ports and markets around the United States and indeed the globe.

Salem traders expanded their commerce to the Indian Ocean after the American Revolution by applying their long-established Atlantic commercial practices to this new region for trade. This transfer of commercial practice between the Atlantic and Indian Oceans reveals historical commercial links that deserve greater study than they have thus far received. While most historians concede that connections did exist between these two oceans and that similar cosmopolitan and multicultural dynamics animated both regions, “Atlantic” scholarship has not yet found a method to integrate non-Atlantic spaces into the historical community of the Atlantic basin in a way that seems organic and meaningful rather than comparative and anecdotal. Scholarship on the expansion of early American trade to the Indian Ocean, for example, emphasizes the novelty of this trade, particularly in how the removal of British Navigation Acts after the American Revolution freed Americans to explore new arenas for trade in India and China, and interprets the Indian Ocean as a replacement for the Atlantic marketplace for American traders, not a continuation of it.⁵

By contrast, an in-depth study of Salem’s commercial history, taking into account mercantile practice and strategies of trade, demonstrates that for Salem traders the Indian Ocean

⁵ Many scholars have asked how novice American merchants expanded their commerce so successfully to the Indian Ocean by 1800, and the answers have ranged from exalted claims of American adventurism, to the commercial opportunities that war created for neutral carriers, to recent revelations of the commercial cooperation between British and American merchants, particularly in India. For American exceptionalism and adventurism see James Duncan Phillips, *Salem and the Indies: The Story of the Great Commercial Era of the City* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1947); alternatively, other historians have done important work to explain the merchant skills and culture of commercial enterprise that constituted early American merchant entrepreneurialism and enabled diversified commercial growth in the post-Revolutionary era. See Stuart Bruchey, *Robert Oliver: Merchant of Baltimore, 1783-1819* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1956) and Thomas M. Doerflinger, *A Vigorous Spirit of Enterprise: Merchants and Economic Development in Revolutionary Philadelphia* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1985). For the increased demand war created for American shipping and produce, particularly through the re-export trade, see Douglass C. North and Robert Paul Thomas, eds., *The Growth of the American Economy to 1860* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1968); Cathy Matson, “The Revolution, Constitution, and New Nation,” in Stanley L. Engerman and Robert E. Gallman, eds., *Cambridge Economic History of the United States*, Vol. 1 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000). James Fichter argues against the neutral trade thesis and offers instead a claim that Anglo-American cooperation facilitated American commercial success in the Indian Ocean and transformed both American capitalism and British trade policy in Asia. James Fichter, *So Great A Profit: How the East Indies Trade Transformed Anglo-American Capitalism* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2010).

was a continuous extension of the Atlantic marketplace. Using resources at hand such as small ships and diverse cargoes of Atlantic provisions, Americans traded in new markets in Europe and the Indian Ocean as they had traded for centuries in the Caribbean, on short, circuitous voyages that they modified *en route* as they gathered new information about surrounding markets. For American merchants, most of whom lacked significant capital or specie, free ports like the French island of Mauritius offered them not only a place to sell Atlantic products in exchange for the goods and specie that they could then use for trade in India and China, but also a market for commercial information about surrounding ports.

Salem built its own unique geography of commerce that extended far beyond tidy boundaries set by state or national jurisdictions. Instead of a hinterland of adjacent towns, farms, and markets, the Salem mercantile community constructed for itself a maritime hinterland that spanned the Atlantic in the colonial period and became global by the 1780s. In Salem's trade to the Indian Ocean, for example, Baltimore, Charleston, New York, and Lisbon supplied the grain, rice, and dollars that Salem vessels carried to markets beyond the Cape of Good Hope. When Salem ships returned from the Indian Ocean, Salem merchants looked to these and other markets to sell their imported goods. The imports and consumer demand from all of these ports helped to keep Salem's circuitous cycles of trade in operation.⁶ While commercial connections to the "home market," or surrounding region, remained critical for American seaports during this period, Salem's reliance on distant ports to supply goods for outfitting its ships demonstrates that

⁶ April Hatfield demonstrated the importance of the colonial coasting trade in the movement of goods, people, and information among the North American colonies in *Atlantic Virginia: Intercolonial Relations in the Seventeenth Century* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004). This dissertation builds off of Hatfield's insight to reveal not only how the early American commercial community in Salem was connected to foreign markets, but also the importance of Salem's domestic coasting trade to the finance of the port's foreign trade and to political association.

historians must rethink and redefine the hinterland concept to include commercial connections both on land and at sea.⁷

The geography of Salem's maritime hinterland shaped Salemites' sense of their town's particular interest within the British empire, the global marketplace, and the political economy of the American union. The process of political mobilization within Massachusetts and then within the United States revealed the divergent commercial geographies, and therefore the potentially divergent commercial interests, of American maritime communities. Cities acted as centers for political mobilization, but understanding the strategies that urban communities undertook to spread their political geographies requires understanding their relationship, and often competition with, their urban neighbors.⁸ During the imperial crisis, for example, Salem merchants maintained significant trade with southern Europe and to non-British markets in the West Indies. Boston, meanwhile, managed much of the province's direct trade with London, while Newburyport, furthermore, specialized in shipbuilding and exchanging these vessels for British manufactured goods in England.

The overlap, divergence, or competition among these commercial geographies invigorated and shaped the colonial protest as changes to the political economy of the British empire affected each commercial geography differently. Salem traders pushed back against

⁷ For the critical relationship between Philadelphia and its "home market" see Diane Lindstrom, *Economic Development in the Philadelphia Region, 1810-1850* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1978). There is already an emerging framework for studying port-hinterland relations that moves the hinterland idea beyond strict geographical limits tied to land. For some examples see Robert Lee, "Configuring the Region: Maritime Trade and Port-Hinterland Relations in Bremen, 1815-1914," *Urban History* 32 (2005), 247-287; Richard Drayton, "The Globalisation of France: Provincial cities and French expansion c. 1500-1800," *History of European Ideas* 34 (Dec. 2008), 424-430; Frederick Wallace Morgan, *Ports and Harbours* (London: Hutchinson's University Library, 1952).

⁸ For cities as sites of political mobilization, see Gary Nash, *Urban Crucible: Social Change, Political Consciousness, and the Origins of the American Revolution* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1979); Carl Bridenbaugh, *Cities in Revolt: Urban Life in America, 1743-1776* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1955); Benjamin L. Carp, *Rebels Rising: Cities and the American Revolution* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007).

imperial revenue measures like the Sugar and Townshend Acts that restricted their Atlantic trade and, therefore, their ability to compete as a commercial hub against Boston, the provincial metropolis. On the other hand, Salem's growth sparked resentment from the port's smaller neighbors, where these mercantile communities were similarly working to increase the commercial independence of their own ports. Marblehead minister Thomas Barnard recalled that when he had come to town in 1714, Marblehead lacked its own market and vessels for Atlantic trade and imported everything through the region's larger ports. "The people contented themselves to be the slaves that digged in the mines, and left the merchants of Boston, Salem, and Europe to carry away the gains." By 1766, he rejoiced, Marblehead traders had started sending their fish to markets on their own vessels, first to the West Indies and then to Europe. "Now we have between thirty and forty ships, brigs, snows, and topsail schooners engaged in foreign trade," he reflected, and "from so small a beginning the town has risen into its present flourishing circumstances, and we need no foreigner to transport our fish."⁹

Politics in Salem became a commercial strategy to lower risks of trade and protect the port's commercial geography. As entrepreneurial traders, many Salem merchants grew accustomed to trading in markets and regions without American military or diplomatic assistance, but they nonetheless recognized that federal policy had real ability to shape their trade, by opening new markets through diplomatic efforts, by setting duties due on goods once they arrived back in port, or by declaring peace or war. The historical relationship between commerce and politics within the Salem community reveals that the contribution of maritime Americans in the early republic was not simply to advance the forms of American business toward capitalism, but to expand the bounds of American commerce so that trade required new

⁹ Qtd. In Daniel Vickers, ed., *The Autobiography of Ashley Bowen (1728-1813)* (Toronto: Broadview Press, 2008), 128-129.

political strategies of governmental protection.¹⁰ Writing on similar dynamics during the colonial period, historian David Hancock wrote in 2006 that future studies in this field must recognize the historical interconnections between politics, economic, and culture.¹¹

Political parties emerged in Salem and in seaports across the United States in large measure as methods to debate and distinguish between ideas of republican political economy.¹² Commerce was life in this port town, and personal experience within Salem's vast networks of trade as merchants, sailors, correspondents, or shippers gave Salem residents direct insight into the worlds of the Atlantic, Indian, and Pacific Oceans. Voting participation was high and the town political parties maintained sophisticated infrastructures of ward committees and caucuses to build a party base and win elections. As participants in far-reaching commercial networks, American traders made early American seaports into lively distribution centers for the communication of economic and political ideas.¹³ Commercial participation informed Salem's

¹⁰ For the American mercantile contributions to capitalism, see Doerflinger, *A Vigorous Spirit of Enterprise*; Gary Lawson Browne, *Baltimore in the Nation, 1789-1861* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1980); Lindstrom, *Economic Development in the Philadelphia Region, 1810-1850*. For mercantile vessels and mercantile communities as places of class tensions and a working class proletariat, see Peter Linebaugh and Marcus Rediker, *The Many-Headed Hydra: Sailors, Slaves, Commoners, and the Hidden History of the Revolutionary Atlantic* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2000); Gary Nash, *Urban Crucible*; Seth Rockman, *Scraping By: Wage Labor, Slavery, and Survival in Early Baltimore* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2009); Sean Wilentz, *Chants Democratic: New York City and the Rise of the American Working Class, 1788-1850* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1984). Charles Beard also identified a class of elite urban men who sought to profit from the new federal structures of government. Charles Beard, *An Economic Interpretation of the Constitution of the United States* (New York: Free Press, 1935). Alternatively, as T.H. Breen's work suggests, networks of trade and consumption could shape a shared sense of culture and political interest. T.H. Breen, *The Marketplace of Revolution: How Consumer Politics Shaped American Independence* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004).

¹¹ David Hancock, "Rethinking *The Economy of British America*," in *The Economy of Early America*, ed. Cathy Matson (University Park, PA: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2006), 96.

¹² Here this dissertation engages with historiographical debates over the first party system. The vigorous debate over political economy in the early federal period and the robust political infrastructure that emerged in places like Salem contrast with claims by historians like Sean Wilentz who interpret the political dynamic of the early republic as a contest between egalitarian Jeffersonians and antidemocratic Federalists, or historians like Ronald Formisano and Joanne Freeman who question the very existence of a first party system. Sean Wilentz, *The Rise of American Democracy: Jefferson to Lincoln* (New York: Norton, 2005); Ronald P. Formisano, *The Transformation of Political Culture: Massachusetts Parties, 1790s-1940s* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1983); Joanne B. Freeman, *Affairs of Honor: National Politics in the New Republic* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002).

¹³ By studying the relationship between commercial and political networks, this dissertation also offers a new way to move beyond class-based arguments about political mobilization such as Arthur Schlesinger, Jr.'s interpretation of

popular discussion of the rights of Salem's commerce within the British empire, the American union, and the global marketplace. Disagreement over how best to protect and expand American commerce through government action ushered people into the political process.

Local circumstances provide critical context for understanding the politics of the imperial crisis and the early national period since they existed in a constant interplay with broad changes in the British empire, the American union, or the global economy. All politics were local, though local politics were more than petty squabbles between neighbors or personality clashes and isolated power struggles that people acted out in federal or state elections. Town meeting helped to cultivate a sense of Salem's corporate political interest, which aligned with ideas of Salem's particular commercial interest garnered through Salem's commercial specialty in trade to the Indian Ocean and its competition as a unitary port with neighboring Boston. In Salem, where spiked cannons—"trophies of many a naval victory"—served as common street posts, a very blurred line separated imperial, national, and local matters when it came to the maritime world. Salemites embraced the political endeavor to build an American union within the international system of states as their own work, and they saw their port at the vanguard of this union-building project.¹⁴

Historians of economic and political thought in this period have highlighted the key debates among elite politicians over how American commerce should operate and the role, if any, of the American government in facilitating this trade.¹⁵ These studies are crucial for

conservative versus radical merchant interests in the run-up to the American Revolution. Arthur Schlesinger Jr., *The Colonial Merchants and the American Revolution, 1763-1776* (New York: F. Ungar Publishing Co., 1957).

¹⁴ Charles T. Brooks, "Poem," 206.

¹⁵ John Crowley, for example, discusses the enduring interest in the early republic to maintain close commercial ties with Britain. John E. Crowley, *The Privileges of Independence: Neomercantilism and the American Revolution* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993). Cathy Matson and Peter Onuf explore the challenges during the Confederation and ratification periods of balancing state and private interests with the need for a stronger centralized government to aid the flailing American economy. Cathy Matson and Peter Onuf, *A Union of Interests: Political and Economic Thought in Revolutionary America* (Lawrence, KS: University of Kansas Press,

establishing the broad framework of political and economic thought in early America, but the debate over American political economy in Salem involved a broader community than elites and was critically linked to local circumstances. In this vein, Cathy Matson's study of colonial New York merchants depicted economic and political thought within a diverse mercantile community of middling merchants and wholesalers. These traders still associated commerce with values of justice and liberty and were very engaged in contemporary debates over the political economy of empire.¹⁶ Matson's work demonstrated that ideas over how an economy and government should operate were shaped in part by trading experiences, not simply by contemporary political and economic theories like mercantilism and free trade. In the early republic, then, far reaching trade networks opened this commercial activity to diverse participants. As experiences in both the domestic and global economies changed, participants adapted their commercial strategies and their understandings of political economy accordingly.

Unstable geopolitics and frequent wars from 1776 to 1815 galvanized political divisions in Salem, threatening to alter the commercial geography of the town. War created great commercial opportunities through privateering and neutral trade, but wartime threats of seizure and foreign restrictions on neutral rights infused many of Salem's transnational and transoceanic trade routes with prohibitive risk. As a port economy entirely dependent on maritime commerce for its subsistence and means to bolster itself against other commercial centers, restrictions on American foreign trade threatened Salem's very existence and the livelihoods of its residents. Salemites shared the same general understanding of the forms of commerce and federal policies

1990). John Nelson explores the political and economic thought of high-level politicians like Thomas Jefferson, Alexander Hamilton, and Albert Gallatin and how these ideas related to their governing strategies in the new nation. John R. Nelson, Jr., *Liberty and Property: Political Economy and Policymaking in the New Nation, 1789-1812* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1987).

¹⁶ Cathy Matson, *Merchants & Empire: Trading in Colonial New York* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998).

that benefitted their port, especially once entrepreneurial commerce and trade beyond the Cape of Good Hope became the port's commercial specialty starting in the 1780s. However, amid the uncertainties of building the union and the commercial risks of wartime, Salemites disagreed over what markets to protect through federal action and what markets, if any, to surrender, if only temporarily.

Political factions developed in Salem by the 1790s not over simple pro-British or pro-French sentiment, but over risk and reward calculations about the shape the American commercial geography should take to protect Americans from risk, allow commerce to thrive, and build Salem as a leading commercial center in the American union. By the 1790s, many Salem Federalists believed that the United States should take the opportunity to protect American trade in British markets offered through measures like the Jay Treaty because these markets were relatively reliable places for trade. Securing Anglo-American trade would secure at least some certainty in an otherwise volatile and risky global economy. Salem Republicans, who secured a majority in town by 1802, believed that the United States should only accept a definition of neutrality from foreign powers that allowed Americans access to all global markets and the freedom to trade among them. Otherwise, they claimed, the circuitous, transnational commerce that undergirded Salem's commercial prominence would become too risky to operate. This perspective drove their protests against the Jay Treaty and their support for both the 1807-1809 embargo and the War of 1812.

As Salem maintained a commercial presence around the globe through its shipping, government offices held by its residents provided valuable and strategic opportunities to promote and extend Salem's interest in federal government and the project of union building. Timothy Pickering served as Secretary of State and of War under President George Washington and later

represented Salem in the U.S. Senate and then the House of Representatives. Joseph Story practiced law in Salem and called the town home before serving as its representative in the U.S. House and eventually becoming the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court. Salem merchant Benjamin Goodhue served Salem in both the House and the Senate. Members of the Crowninshield family, who ran a very prominent merchant house in Salem, were particularly close to both Thomas Jefferson and James Madison. Congressman Jacob Crowninshield, who served in the House from 1802 until his death in 1808 was Jefferson's choice for Secretary of the Navy and maintained close correspondence with Secretary of State Madison dealing with commercial treaties and government strategies to protect American commerce during the Napoleonic Wars. Brother Benjamin Crowninshield served as President Madison's Secretary of the Navy.

Salem's maritime hinterland thrived under government support through drawbacks on re-exports and grew increasingly risky with faltering diplomatic efforts to protect American neutral trade by the 1790s. This maritime hinterland bolstered Salem's ability to compete with other ports, especially Boston. The commercial connections that Salem mariners built with other ports and foreign traders turned Salem into a mart for commercial knowledge and information and gave the Salem mercantile community the means to capitalize on new commercial opportunities faster and at lower risk than their competitors, both foreign and domestic. With the new tariffs and internal improvement initiatives following the War of 1812, however, Salem's reliance on a maritime hinterland to trade and distribute goods hindered the port's full incorporation into the new American economic system.

Salem's maritime hinterland expanded and took on new forms from the late colonial period to the early nineteenth century, and the reshaping of this commercial geography—the rise

and fall of Salem—reveals the changing political geography of the broader American union. As a colonial port, Salem invested heavily in trade to non-British markets in southern Europe and the West Indies, and they protested against British revenue measures that taxed or constricted this Atlantic trade. After independence, the routes of trade that facilitated Salem's commercial expansion into the Baltic, the Indian Ocean, or to Canton mapped the extent of neutral trade, which was such a critical and divisive political issue in the early republic. Without this commercial context and an understanding of how neutral trade operated, historians cannot fully understand the meaning and the stakes of early national debates over American political economy. The evolution of early American political economy defined the nature of political upheaval from the end of the Seven Years' War to the end of the Napoleonic Wars. Salemites participated in the rise of an American political economy and later a distinctive Jeffersonian political economy that shaped the livelihoods of Salem residents, their political outlooks, and the American republic's engagement with the world.

Chapter 1

For Town, Commerce, and Empire: The Atlantic Commerce of Salem, Massachusetts, 1763-1768

On December 26, 1763, the merchants of Salem, Massachusetts received notice from the port's Custom House that officers there would finally take measures to enforce the Molasses Act of 1733. Since the passage of this Act, ships from British North America had routinely found means to trade to foreign plantations and to enter the goods from those plantations into British colonies without paying the proper duties prescribed under the Molasses Act. Now, by notice of the Surveyor General of Salem, all ships returning to port would have a Customs officer board the ship as it entered port to make sure that the Act of 1733 was “fully carried into execution,” and the full duty on foreign goods paid to the King.¹ Further, the colonists learned that a new Sugar Act would go into effect in September 1764 that would renew the Molasses Act of 1733 with stricter enforcement measures and new duties on trade, thereby creating “perpetual” alterations to New England's engagement in the British Atlantic.²

When news of the Sugar Act reached Massachusetts, Boston papers began publishing lengthy opinion pieces on the threats this new legislation posed to the customary practices and Atlantic-wide system of trade in which Massachusetts had a particular interest.³ The Act increased duties on wine imported from Madeira and required lumber shipped from North America to European markets to pass first through Great Britain. It lowered the duty on foreign molasses, one of New England's most significant imports from the West Indies, in order to

¹ The full announcement was soon printed in Boston newspapers. At the time Salem did not have its own newspaper. *Boston Evening Post*, January 1, 1764.

² Text of the 1764 Sugar Act available online. The Avalon Project: Documents in Law, History, and Diplomacy. “Great Britian : Parliament - The Sugar Act : 1764.” Accessed November 26, 2014. http://avalon.law.yale.edu/18th_century/sugar_act_1764.asp.

³ *Boston Evening Post*, November 21 and 28, 1763.

lessen the incentives to smuggle, while it expanded the documentation required from ship captains and increased the oversight of trade by customs officers. As Salem and other maritime communities in New England protested the measure, they reviewed and collected information from customs books and from their own business records to outline the many interconnected branches of their Atlantic commerce that they believed would be harmed, or at worst ruined, by the Act. The renewed Act would effectively increase duties on the goods that undergirded New England's Atlantic trade, including molasses and sugar from foreign islands in the West Indies and wine from Madeira, and, by proposing rigorous enforcement, prohibit the importation of goods otherwise outlawed, like fruit or wine from southern Spain.⁴

A different interpretation and application of the Sugar Act's predecessor, the Molasses Act of 1733, operated in New England than in London or in the West Indies. Under the traditional system, New England Customs officials, many of whom came from the same communities they regulated, accepted fees for entering cargoes in lieu of scrutinizing and then taxing imports based on their British or non-British origins.⁵ The traditional reduced duties were "indulgences," New Englanders believed, implemented with the sanction of Customs collectors and of London to compensate for the onerous and expensive exigencies of conducting commerce in distant corners of the British Atlantic, especially the Nova Scotia fishery.⁶ The region's

⁴ For background on the British initiatives to standardize and systematize the collection of duties and the production of a revenue as this background related to the Seven Years' War see Fred Anderson, *Crucible of War: The Seven Years' War and the Fate of Empire in British North America, 1754-1766* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2000). Historians disagree over the effect of the British navigation acts on the British North American colonies. Oliver Dickerson, for example, argued that these acts worked to the favor of North American trade. Oliver M. Dickerson, *The Navigation Acts and the American Revolution* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1951). Thomas Barrow, by contrast argued that the navigation acts never worked in British North America because they were so regularly disobeyed. Thomas C. Barrow, *Trade and Empire: The British Customs Service in Colonial America 1660-1775* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1967).

⁵ Customs officers generally took a fee of a penny and a half per gallon of molasses. The duty on foreign molasses under the Molasses Act of 1733 was 6 pence. Robert Middlekauff, *The Glorious Cause: The American Revolution 1763-1789* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982), 58-59.

⁶ Many Atlantic historians have identified smuggling as a means for opportunistic traders to enter and profit from Atlantic commerce due to the large scale of the Atlantic marketplace, the difficulty in enforcing trade laws, and the

distinctive contribution to the British interest as shippers, provisioners, and consumers in the British Atlantic, they argued, necessitated these indulgences to strengthen the overall imperial project.⁷ Although London officials and West Indian planters viewed this commerce as illegal trade, New Englanders practiced it widely, openly, and out of loyalty, they believed, to the British empire.⁸

Britain had tacitly deployed the pragmatic strategy of what recent scholarship has called “legal pluralism” to extend empire over diverse populations, interests, and geographies in the early modern period.⁹ Adopting different legal practices for different communities, as long as they were not repugnant to English laws, could serve both monarch and subject, with the hope that the overall wealth and security of greater Britain would improve by allowing British Atlantic communities to use their particular circumstances and resources to the best and most natural advantage.¹⁰ Many constituent interests comprised the extensive British empire, and allowing

high demand for goods in Atlantic settlements. Bernard Bailyn, *Atlantic History: Concept and Contours* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2005), 86-91; For the infiltration of English merchants into trade with Spanish America see Stein, Stanley J. and Barbara H. Stein, *Silver, Trade, and War: Spain and America in the Making of Early Modern Europe* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2000); For smuggling by opportunistic Portuguese merchants see Stuart B. Schwartz, “The Economy of the Portuguese Empire,” in Francisco Bethencourt and Diego Ramada Curto, eds., *Portuguese Oceanic Expansion, 1400-1800* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 30-34. The large scale of the Atlantic and its settlements and resources created openings for opportunistic traders to profit off of both illegal and legal commerce. See David Hancock, *Citizens of the World: London Merchants and the Integration of the British Atlantic Community, 1735-1785* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1995); Alison Games, *Web of Empire: English Cosmopolitans in an Age of Expansion, 1560-1660* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008).

⁷ Benjamin Pickman and Samuel Gardner to John Rowe, December 24, 1763, Ezekial Price Papers, Massachusetts Historical Society, Boston, Massachusetts. [cited hereafter as MHS]

⁸ Ian R. Christie and Benjamin W. Labaree, *Empire or Independence 1760-1776: A British American Dialogue on the Coming of the American Revolution* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1976), 92.

⁹ See Lauren Benton and Richard Ross, eds., *Legal Pluralism and Empires, 1500-1850* (New York: New York University Press, 2013); Lauren Benton, *Law and Colonial Cultures: Legal Regimes in World History, 1400-1900* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002). See also the work of Christopher Tomlins on colonial charters and the cultural variety and legal pluralities that characterized the English settlement of North America. He writes: “Migration and resettlement, that is, resulted in the reestablishment in English America of distinct regional legal cultures with origins in differing metropolitan locales, bred up there by distinct institutional trajectories, histories, and local practices.” Christopher Tomlins, *Freedom Bound: Law, Labor, and Civic Identity in Colonizing English America, 1580-1865* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 189.

¹⁰ On the term Greater Britain to describe Britain’s overseas expansion see David Armitage, “Greater Britain: A useful Category of Historical Analysis?” in *The American Historical Review* Vol. 104, No. 2 (Apr. 1999):427-444. On the transatlantic constitution between Britain and her colonies in which colonial communities created divergent,

law to operate under a metropolitan framework but according to local custom eased transatlantic administrative conflict and helped unite disparate interests under a common sense of Britishness.¹¹ New Englanders interpreted the Sugar Act of 1733, for example, as a product of the undue influence of West Indian planters on Parliament. But the practice of legal pluralism in the British Atlantic and the accompanying colonial ideas of British political economy helped to square, in New England minds, the particular operation of the law in New England with the interest of the broader British imperial project. The end of the Seven Years' War, however, brought about a new standardization of imperial law, particularly in the collection of Customs revenue from the North American colonies to pay off debts and fund the increasingly militarized administration of British North America and the West Indies.¹²

Legal standardization across the British Atlantic, exemplified in 1764 with the renewal and enforcement of the Sugar Act, was a destabilizing force as it played out in North American communities like Salem. The impetus to generate commercial revenue and monitor its collection brought into renewed conflict the divergent interpretations of the Sugar Act among New England traders, West Indian planters, and imperial officials in London. In his 1738 *History of the British Plantations in America*, British political economic thinker William Keith argued that “trade is a Child of Liberty, which either may be reared and nourished by Indulgence, or

or local, laws that could not be repugnant to English law, see Mary Bilder, *The Transatlantic Constitution: Colonial Legal Culture and Empire* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2004). See also Jack P. Greene, *Peripheries and Center: Constitutional Development in the Extended Politics of the British Empire and the United States, 1607-1788* (New York: W.W. Norton Publishing, 1990).

¹¹ For the conflict among interest groups in the politics and operation of the Anglo-American world in the eighteenth century, particularly for the strength of the West Indian interest in Parliament after 1763, see Michael Kammen, *Empire and Interest: The American Colonies and the Politics of Mercantilism* (Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott Company, 1970).

¹² In March 1763, the British government decided to station 10,000 British troops in North America. Edmund Morgan and Helen M. Morgan, *The Stamp Act Crisis: Prologue to Revolution* (New York: Collier Books, 1962), 36-37; Allen Johnson, “The Passage of the Sugar Act,” in *The William and Mary Quarterly* Vol. 15 No. 4 (Oct., 1959): 507-514.

depressed and sunk under an Awe of a too severe Restraint.”¹³ Expansive colonial trade increased the importation of British manufactures into the colonies, Keith argued, and New Englanders could point to this thinking in their claims that indulgences under the Sugar Act expanded New England trade to the benefit of the British empire. But Keith had made his claims about nourishing trade in reference to trade in colonial products carried to Great Britain, not the trade with French markets or in non-British goods that New Englanders sought to protect.¹⁴ By 1763, New England claims about the benefits of their broad Atlantic commerce to the British interest fell on deaf ears in London.

Framing the imperial crisis in terms of the conflict over imposing standardization on a pluralistic imperial regime, particularly in terms of commercial policy, offers one path to revive economic interpretations of the coming of the American Revolution. Historians crafting economic interpretations of the American Revolution have long focused on economic self-interest, class interest, and conspiratorial profit motives as the central concerns that shaped colonial perspectives on the imperial crisis, particularly among North American merchants.¹⁵ As

¹³ Qtd. in Roy N. Lokken, “Sir William Keith’s Theory of the British Empire,” in *The Historian* vol. 25 no. 4 (1963), 412.

¹⁴ P.J. Marshall has explored the distinction that colonial British Americans made between expansion and rule, and their efforts to preserve transatlantic expansion while resisting imperial authority. Peter James Marshall, *The Making and Unmaking of Empires: Britain, India, and America c. 1750-1783* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 5.

¹⁵ The classic argument presented by historians such as Charles Mclean Andrews and Arthur Schlesinger, Jr. is that colonial merchants had a narrow economic protest about the new trade regulations of the 1760s, not a constitutional argument or a fundamental conflict with British governance. That is, they sought reform not rebellion. They did not want to pay additional duties on their trade, and protested accordingly without any interested in addressing the larger constitutional arguments about the authority of colonial assemblies or representation that later revolutionary “radicals” promoted and that ultimately undergirded the independence movement. Charles Mclean Andrews, *The Boston Merchants and the Non-Importation Movement* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1917). Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., *The Colonial Merchants and the American Revolution, 1763-1776* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1917). For other merchant studies that have maintained the conservative-radical binary see Virginia Harrington, *The New York Merchant on the Eve of the Revolution* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1935); Benjamin Labaree, *Patriots and Partisans: The Merchants of Newburyport, 1764-1815* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1962). For class conflicts in the revolutionary era see Gary Nash, *The Unknown American Revolution: The Unruly Birth of Democracy and the Struggle to Create America* (New York: Viking, 2005); Woody Holton, *Forced Founders: Indians, Debtors, Slaves, & The Making of the American Revolution in Virginia* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1999).

a result, as David Waldstreicher has recently pointed out, the reticence of historians to claim economic motivations for American responses to new imperial policies and eventually for the American independence movement has left economic interpretations in need of a revival.¹⁶ In North American maritime communities like Salem, practices of trade informed broader ideas about the political economy of the British Atlantic that clashed both within British North America and with views from London, animating the imperial crisis by the 1760s.¹⁷

Because North American protests against the Sugar Act centered on a defense of the practices of colonial trade rather than constitutional claims against Parliament's right to tax the colonies, historians have downplayed the importance of the Sugar Act to the imperial crisis. Instead, many interpretations frame the Sugar Act as an initial but minor controversy with an

¹⁶ Staughton Lynd and David Waldstreicher, "Free Trade, Sovereignty, and Slavery: Toward an Economic Interpretation of American Independence," in *The William and Mary Quarterly* Vol. 68, No. 4 (October 2011), 597-630. For a call for historians to examine the economic ambitions of colonial American society see Jack Rakove, "An Agenda for Early American History," in *Historically Speaking* Vol. 6 No.4 (March/April, 2005), 30-31. On the enterprising spirit of merchants see Thomas Doerflinger, *A Vigorous Spirit of Enterprise: Merchants and Economic Development in Revolutionary Philadelphia* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1985).

¹⁷ In David Hancock's 2006 assessment of the historiography of the early American economy, he writes that future studies in this field must recognize the historical interconnections between politics, economic, and culture. "As historians," he writes, "we are not finished our task until we have reintegrated the pieces....cultures, including discourses, are embedded in economic contexts that affect how, and how well, people are able to make their living, how they organize themselves to compete or cooperate." David Hancock, "Rethinking *The Economy of British America*," in *The Economy of Early America*, ed. Cathy Matson (University Park, PA: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2006), 96. Recent work that has focused on ideas of political economy as they emerged out of trading and commercial practices includes Christopher Magra, *The Fisherman's Cause: Atlantic Commerce and the Atlantic Dimensions of the American Revolution* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009). For work on ideas of liberty and commercial rights held by American sailors see Paul Gilje, *Liberty on the Waterfront: American Maritime Culture in the Age of Revolution* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004); Jesse Lemisch, "Jack Tar in the Streets: Merchant Seamen in the Politics of Revolutionary America," in *The William and Mary Quarterly*, Vol. 23, No. 3 (July, 1968), 371-407; Marcus Rediker, *The Many-Headed Hydra: Sailors, Slaves, Commoners, and the Hidden History of the Revolutionary Atlantic* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2000). For a study of ideas of political economy among elite political leaders rather than merchants, see John Crowley, *The Privileges of Independence: Neomercantilism and the American Revolution* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993). The resistance to British regulatory changes was in the minds of British North Americans in so far as these changes infringed on their conceptions of political economy. But these ideas of political economy emerged out of actual trading practices, and British regulatory changes had very real and significant ramifications for colonial trade and government. For the importance of ideas in the revolutionary period see Bernard Bailyn, *The Ideological Origins of the American Revolution* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1967); Gordon Wood, *Radicalism of the American Revolution* (New York: A.A. Knopf, 1992). For a study on how British policies, specifically the Stamp Act, intervened with the economic and political practices of British North Americans see Edmund Morgan and Helen Morgan, *The Stamp Act Crisis: Prologue to Revolution*. (New York: Collier Books, 1963).

uncoordinated and limited response in the larger story of the imperial conflict that really began during the Stamp Act with ideas of “no taxation without representation” in 1765.¹⁸ Nonetheless, as the imperial crisis evolved, the Sugar Act was a critical moment for revealing to British North Americans that London could have very different understandings of their role within the British Atlantic, even as the Act’s repeal and replacement with the Free Port Act of 1766 seemed to confirm for British North Americans the validity of their own views. Mapping the patterns of Salem’s colonial commerce by 1763 reveals Salem’s particular role in the Atlantic economy and the British imperial project that was shaped in large part by local adaptations of imperial Navigation Acts and that was, in turn, put under real threat by the new regulatory regime of 1764. In Salem, new commercial regulations clamped down on the self-organizing and enterprising elements of the port’s maritime trade, and in doing so violated Salem’s culture of commerce established through longstanding practices.¹⁹

II

¹⁸ Middlekauff, *Glorious Cause*, 62, 66-69.

¹⁹ Instead of a culture of commerce, Marc Egnal discusses colonial merchants’ desire for economic sovereignty and their desire to “control their own economic destiny.” Marc Egnal and Joseph Ernst, “An Economic Interpretation of the American Revolution,” in *The William and Mary Quarterly*, Vol. 29, No. 1 (Jan., 1972), 24, 28. For the self-organizing aspects of merchant trade see David Hancock, *Citizens of the World: London Merchants and the Integration of the British Atlantic Community, 1735-1785* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1995). Patrick Griffin’s work on the Ohio Valley in the revolutionary period reveals a parallel, though very dark, example of a society organizing itself and fashioning its own customs to meet the needs of that society and preserve its success and survival. His focus on frontier violence reveals the same dynamic of communities forming their own practices of governance in the absence of authority from patrons or high government officials. Patrick Griffin, *American Leviathan: Empire, Nation, and Revolutionary Frontier* (New York: Hill & Wang, 2007).

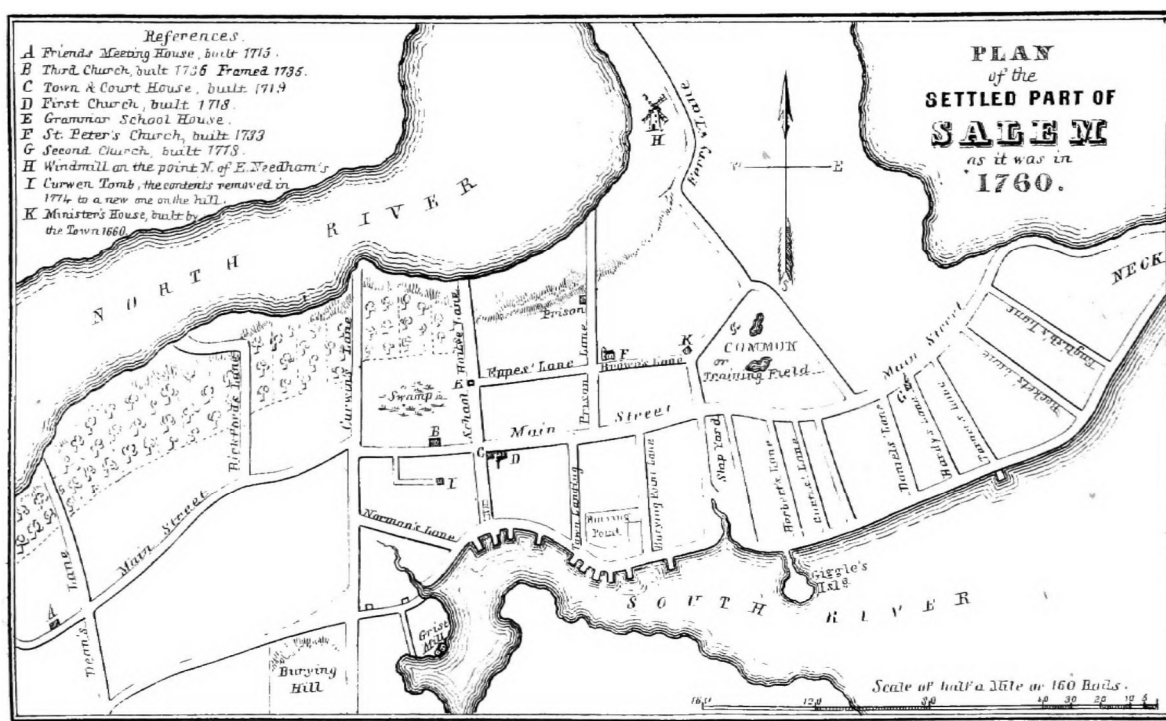


Figure 1.1: Map of Salem, 1760.

Source: Joseph Felt, *Annals of Salem*, 2 vols. (Salem: W. & S. B. Ives, 1845-1849), 1:282.

Commerce in fish turned the physical space of the town and the Salem community into a bustling Atlantic trading center.²⁰ At the eastern end of town were the drying racks and other infrastructure for the fishery. Mariners for the town's fishing fleet and trading ships lived scattered throughout the town. Essex Street ran east to west as Salem's main thoroughfare connecting the town's many maritime industries, homes, and shops.²¹ Salem traders shipped the highest quality fish to Southern Europe, while they sent lower-grade fish, or refuse fish, to the West Indies as food for enslaved populations on those islands. Though many Salem merchants owned vessels both for the fishery and the transatlantic fish trade, by the mid- and late-eighteenth century, Salem commerce was increasingly engaged in the shipment of fish rather than the

²⁰ For an outline of New England's Atlantic fish trade, see Magra, *The Fisherman's Cause*.

²¹ Vickers, *Young Men and the Sea*, 132.

fishery itself. As they shipped fish across the Atlantic, Salem merchants also shipped goods like lumber and provisions. The goods that Salem traders received in return— sugar, salt, bills of exchange, etc.— they similarly transported back through Salem for resale throughout the Atlantic. This broad participation in the Atlantic economy linked trade across regions, just as it linked trade in British and non-British markets as a customary practice of trade. By the 1740s, Salem merchants had established their own networks of customers, creditors, and trading partners throughout the Atlantic so that they could engage in a very broad transatlantic fish trade direct from Essex County and not through Boston.²²

At the conclusion of the Seven Years' War, Salem was the second largest port in New England, with a population of 4,754 people.²³ British officials designated Salem as the headquarters of the customs district that included all of the ports of Essex County, and the town served one of the regular locations for sessions of the Massachusetts Superior Court. Town meetings organized Salem's local government and decided on town representatives to the Massachusetts General Court, while local church parishes also provided organization for social life in Salem. Most of the community's energy, however, was directed out to sea.²⁴ As Salem emerged from the Seven Years' War, customs records for 1763 record the breadth of Atlantic markets where Salem ships engaged in trade. Of the 14,436 tons of Salem shipping that cleared from the Salem customs district in 1763, 46% cleared for islands in the West Indies. Following the West Indies were markets in Southern Europe, including Lisbon, Cadiz, Bilbao, Gibraltar,

²² On the increase in the fish carrying trade relative to the fishery and to Salem's commercial independence from Boston, see Jacob Price, "Economic Function and the Growth of American Port Towns in the Eighteenth Century," in *Perspectives in American History* VIII (1974), 146.

²³ Population figure from 1765. For comparison, Boston's population that year was 15,520. *Journals of the House of Representatives of Massachusetts, 1764-1765* (Boston: Massachusetts Historical Society, 1971), xi.

²⁴ For the connection between Salem, Essex County, and maritime trade and life see Daniel Vickers, *Farmers and Fisherman: Two Centuries of Work in Essex County, Massachusetts, 1630-1850* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1994) and *Young Men and the Sea: Yankee Seafarers in the Age of Sail* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005).

and the Madeira and Azores islands, that absorbed 24% of the district's total outward clearances. North American colonies, particularly Virginia and South Carolina, absorbed an additional 21% of the district's clearances (See Figures 1.2 and 1.3).²⁵

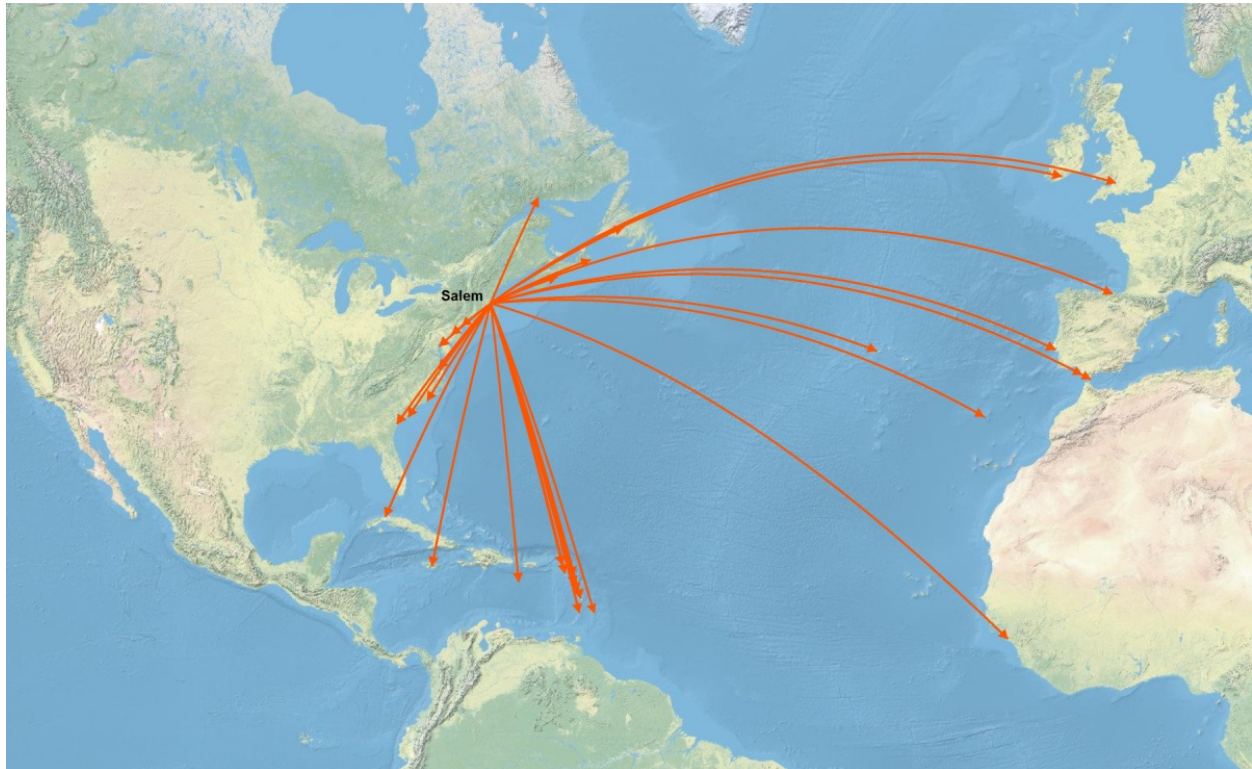


Figure 1.2: Destinations of ships clearing from the Salem & Marblehead Customs District, 1763. Source: CO 5/850, Massachusetts Shipping Statistics, PRO.

²⁵ All figures compiled from lists of ships entered into and cleared out from Salem & Marblehead for 1763, Colonial Office Records, CO 5/850, Massachusetts Shipping Lists, 1762-1765, The National Archives, Kew, London, United Kingdom [previously named Public Records Office, cited hereafter as PRO]. A copy of these records are in the collections of the MHS. Among the North American colonies, Virginia was the most popular destination for Salem ships both in the number of ships clearing for that colony- 31- and tonnage- 1,238 tons. South Carolina was the second most visited colony, with fifteen ships, or 746 tons, clearing from the Salem district for that destination in 1763.

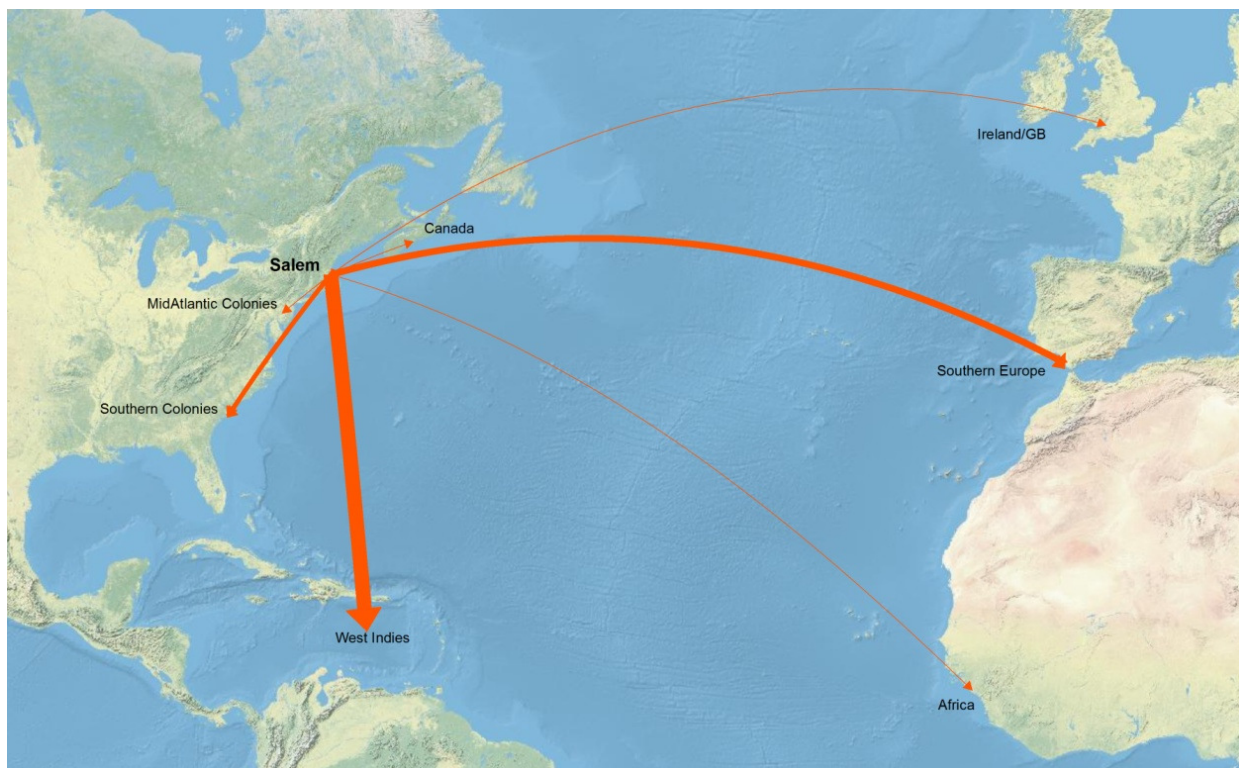


Figure 1.3: Salem clearances by region, scaled according to tonnage, 1763
Source: CO 5/850, Massachusetts Naval Office Shipping Lists, PRO.

The provisioning trade to the West Indies undergirded New England's maritime trade, and Salem's along with it, because the low entry costs to this commerce suited New England traders who were often capital-poor. Despite their competing political or commercial interests, the North American and Caribbean colonies existed in a symbiosis of trade in the eighteenth century. The island populations created a strong demand for the diversity of provisions, livestock, and artisanal goods produced in North America. Diverse cargoes from North America were cheaper and quicker for American shippers to acquire than single-item, specialized cargoes, and the relatively low volume of any one good mitigated trade risks by protecting ships against glutted Caribbean markets.²⁶ The journey to the Caribbean was short relative to European

²⁶ Richard Pares, *Yankees and Creoles: Trade Between North America and the West Indies before the American Revolution* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1956), 38.

voyages, and American traders, even those of middling means, could sail to the Caribbean and back in small vessels they could afford to build, buy, or outfit. Caribbean products like sugar, molasses, and rum, met a high demand in North America and could be re-exported to other Atlantic markets. Profits from the sale of American goods in the Caribbean and the sale of Caribbean goods in North America or Europe helped to offset the debts North Americans owed to British creditors, particularly through the acquisition in the Caribbean of specie and of bills of exchange on London.²⁷

Salem ships departed with provisions for West Indian settlements and returned with the products of West Indian plantations. Fish comprised the largest volume of any export from Salem for the West Indies in 1763 at nearly seven million dry pounds.²⁸ Lumber was another significant export from New England to the West Indies, and 71% of the lumber that left Salem in 1763 went to the Caribbean.²⁹ In addition, Salem ships to the West Indies carried livestock—horses, sheep, oxen, and fowl—foodstuffs like onions, apples, potatoes, and corn. They carried 98 pipes of wine, which was just under 50% of the wine exports reported from Salem in 1763. Salem ships also cleared the district with the products of Massachusetts artisans, including house frames, oars, desks, and tables.³⁰ Salem ships returned from the West Indies with sugar, molasses, rum, cocoa, other agricultural products of that region, and bills of exchange on London. Although North American merchants were known to underreport the amount of sugar and molasses that they carried back to northern colonies, particularly those goods from foreign

²⁷ Pares, *Yankees and Creoles*, 146, 153-154.

²⁸ In 1763 Salem exported a total of 61,641 quintals of fish. This volume would have been roughly equivalent to 6,903,792 dry pounds, although the lack of standardization of shipping containers makes any conversion approximate. CO 5/850; For a conversion table of weights and measures, see James G. Lydon, *Fish and Flour for Gold, 1600-1800: Southern Europe in the Colonial Balance of Payments* (Philadelphia: Library Company of Philadelphia, 2008).

²⁹ CO 5/850; Helen Louise Klopfer, *Statistics of Foreign Trade of Philadelphia, 1700-1800* (Ph.D. Diss., University of Pennsylvania, 1936), 183.

³⁰ CO 5/850.

islands of the West Indies, the customs records for Salem list a total of 796,530 pounds of sugar imported from the West Indies in 1763. Of that total, traders listed only 5,674 pounds as foreign sugar.³¹

Salem merchants with the financial means and the commercial connections to trade to southern Europe received higher prices for better grade fish in those markets than they could get for refuse-grade fish in the West Indies.³² By the eighteenth century, British Navigation Acts allowed fish and lumber products to be exported directly from North America to the Azores and Madeira Islands and to ports in southern Europe.³³ Population growth on the Iberian Peninsula increased demand for fish, making southern Europe a lucrative and relatively dependable market for New England fish traders. New Englander's share in this commerce relative to British fish traders from Newfoundland had risen from the 1710s, with the end of Queen Anne's War, to the 1770s.³⁴ In this same period, Salem traders began to surpass their Boston counterparts in volume of trade to the Iberian Peninsula.³⁵ The two ports maintained different commercial geographies in the southern European trade, as Salem traders concentrated most of their trade on the Iberian mainland, and Boston traders sent more ships to the wine islands and to the ports along the

³¹ Molasses imports recorded for Salem from the West Indies came to 344,370 gallons in 1763, 15,250 gallons of which was listed as foreign. The entirety of recorded imports of coffee, cocoa, and cotton into the Salem customs district for 1763 came from the West Indies, along with 49% of Salem's total imports of salt. Traders from the Salem district also came back from the West Indies with 73,319 gallons of rum. CO 5/850, PRO.

³² For a study of New England trade to southern Europe in the colonial and revolutionary period, a particularly the important role this trade played in balancing North American trade with Great Britain, see Lydon, *Fish and Flour for Gold*.

³³ Lawrence Harper, *The English Navigation Laws* (New York: Octagon Books, Inc., 1964), 401.

³⁴ Cod arrived at the New England fisheries earlier than the Newfoundland fisheries and could be cured and transported to southern Europe before the Newfoundland catch. Lydon, *Fish and Flour*, 65-72, 94. The Treaty of Utrecht in 1713 and then the Treaty of Paris in 1763 decreased and then excluded the French from most of the North Atlantic cod fishing grounds and thus opened up new fishing grounds for New Englanders. On the history of the cod fishery and competition over North Atlantic fishing grounds, see Harold Innis, *The Codfisheries: The History of an International Economy* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1940).

³⁵ James G. Lydon, "North Shore Trade in the Early Eighteenth Century," in *The American Neptune* XXVIII (1968): 261-274.

Mediterranean Straits, including Malaga, Barcelona, and Gibraltar.³⁶ By 1763, Salem's trade to southern Europe was a growing enterprise, while Boston's stayed steady with a gradual decrease. Boston merchants, in consequence, continued to invest heavily in the West Indies trade and increased their trade in provisions to Nova Scotia and Newfoundland.³⁷ In Bilbao, Spain, where Salem traders provided a majority of the fish entering that market, Spanish firms had begun to replace English firms in the fish wholesale business, and after the Seven Years War Salem shippers did most of their trade with the Bilbayan merchant house of Joseph Gardoqui.³⁸

As in New England's commerce to the West Indies, New Englanders and southern European traders established a symbiotic commercial relationship. The Iberian Peninsula was not only a familiar market for Salem merchants, captains, and sailors—a single New England ship could sail there up to three times in one year, and some captains made upwards of twenty voyages to southern Europe during their maritime careers—it was a lucrative market for cod and a valuable source of cash. In 1763, Salem ships sent fifty-three vessels to markets in southern Europe, only four of which cleared for the wine islands, filled with roughly 80,000 quintals of fish. Boston, in contrast, shipped just over 14,000 quintals that year.³⁹ Salem ships also brought lumber, a small amount of rum, and other provisions on these voyages. In the fish trade alone, Salem ships in 1763 earned a surplus of £81,418 after deducting shipping charges, while Boston ships earned £14,649.⁴⁰

³⁶ Lydon, *Fish and Flour for Gold*, 73-74.

³⁷ Lydon, *Fish and Flour for Gold*, 70, 76, 91-92.

³⁸ Bilbao was a particularly strong market for fish because the port had an exceptionally good road system to transport goods into interior markets. Further, in this period Bilbao did not have an English consul, which may have made easier the exportation of illegal items like wine, fruits, or oil. From 1770-1774, 189 New England vessels arrived in Bilbao, 184 of which were from Salem and Marblehead. Lydon, *Fish and Flour for Gold*, 92-93, 95.

³⁹ Lydon, *Fish and Flour for Gold*, 70, 73. Lydon calculated the volume of fish exported from Salem to southern Europe in 1763 at 80,908 quintals. My review of CO 5/850 put this total at 76,558 quintals of fish, the rough equivalent of 8,574,496 dry pounds.

⁴⁰ Lydon, *Fish and Flour for Gold*, 79.

Trade to southern Europe gave colonial commerce elasticity, particularly since returns from this trade often came as cash payments or helped finance colonial trade with Great Britain. When trade to southern Europe flourished, it became a source of expansion in the colonial economy, but when it faltered, the consequent decrease in specie circulating through the colonial economy brought on inflation and limited growth.⁴¹ Salem traders could invest the surplus from this trade in a return cargo, and at Bilbao especially, the lack of an English consul would have eased the exportation of illicit items like Spanish wine, fruits, or oil. Salem ships often procured work freighting iron for cash from Bilbao to Cadiz, Lisbon, or another Iberian port where they could then purchase salt. Under the British Navigation Acts, salt could be directly imported from Europe to British North America for use in the fisheries.⁴² If they returned from Madeira or the Azores, Salem ships brought back wine, though only a few Salem merchants engaged in this trade in 1763.⁴³ One of the most valuable aspects of this trade for Salem shippers was that they could transfer the proceeds to London. Credits or bills of exchange on London could purchase insurance, purchase manufactured goods, or cover expenses on future voyages if captains arrived back in southern Europe and found that the poor state of the fish market left them with insufficient funds to purchase a return cargo.⁴⁴

To the southern colonies in North America, shippers out of Salem primarily sent the goods of their West Indies trade, particularly sugar and molasses, as well as large quantities of rum, most of which New England distilleries had produced using imported sugar from the West

⁴¹ Lydon, *Fish and Flour for Gold*, 220.

⁴² Customs records for 1763 put the total amount of salt imported into Salem from this region that year at 11,475 hogsheads. CO 5/850, PRO; Harper, *The English Navigation Laws*, 401.

⁴³ In 1763, merchants out of Salem exported 76,558 quintals of fish to these markets, the rough equivalent of 8,574,496 dry pounds. CO 5/850. For information on the colonial American wine trade and the participation in this trade by Salem merchant Richard Derby see David Hancock, *Oceans of Wine: Madeira and the Emergence of American Trade and Taste* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009).

⁴⁴ For one example see Richard Derby to Lane & Booth, July 30, 1764, Derby Family Papers, Peabody Essex Museum, Salem, Massachusetts. [cited hereafter as PEM]. Lydon, *Fish and Flour for Gold*, 96, 217, 220.

Indies. Salem shippers sent fish to the southern colonies, particularly to Virginia, along with salt, potatoes, raisins, and wine. They returned with foodstuffs like grain—a total of 88,450 bushels in 1763 primarily from Maryland, Virginia, and North Carolina—and naval stores like pitch, turpentine, and tar. Ships returning from the Carolinas carried 483,750 pounds of rice back to Salem, along with pork, peas, and beans.

Within each particular region of the Atlantic economy, Salem ships engaged in circuitous, multilateral trade. Of the 137 ships that cleared from Salem for the West Indies in 1763, for example, 119 returned from a different Caribbean port than the one they first visited. The British island of Barbados was the most common destination in the West Indies for Salem ships departing from the district in 1763, while St. Martin was the most common port in the West Indies from which Salem ships returned home that year.⁴⁵ In southern Europe, Lisbon and Bilbao were the most common destinations for ships leaving the Salem Customs district in 1763, while most ships returned to Salem from Cadiz. In Salem's trade with the other North American colonies, many ships that departed in 1763 for Virginia returned to Salem from Maryland.⁴⁶ Insurance records from the period also reflect the multilateral trading practices that Salem shippers pursued within specific regions of the Atlantic. Samuel P. Savage, a Boston merchant who also supplied insurance to New England shippers, routinely insured Salem vessels under policies that gave them liberty to trade to several ports within a single region. Salem merchants sending ships to Gibraltar or Spanish ports regularly sought permission to make stops at Madeira, Tangier, or alternative ports in the Iberian Peninsula. Salem merchants with ships in

⁴⁵ Still, these ports did not maintain a huge lead over other islands in the region as ports of arrival or embarkation for Salem ships. Of the 137 ships that left Salem for the West Indies in 1763, 36 declared that they were sailing for Barbados, while 27 listed St. Christophers (St. Kitts), and 24 listed Dominica. Of the ships returning to Salem from the West Indies, St. Martin was listed in the "from whence" column 39 times, followed by Barbados (14), Dominica (13), Guadeloupe, Grenada, and Anguilla. CO 5/850, PRO.

⁴⁶ CO 5/850, PRO.

the West Indies trade sought the same liberties to visit multiple markets. Some requests for insurance mapped out a specific string of Caribbean ports their captain might visit, such as a stop first in St. Martin and from there to either Guadeloupe or St. Eustatius. Other merchants simply requested coverage for the initial stop and “one more island.”⁴⁷

In the Caribbean in particular, New England traders relied on quick, circuitous trade, most often across national borders, to find the best markets for their goods and maximize their returns. North Americans in the Caribbean traded from island to island, and their small vessels usually under 100 tons made them well suited to capitalize quickly on new commercial information in short, impromptu voyages between ports.⁴⁸ The cargoes New Englanders sought for their return voyages to North America were not always available at the same ports where they sold their original cargoes, and the small markets of the Caribbean further meant that prices could fluctuate from island to island.⁴⁹ Many New England ships made initial stops at regional entrepôts like Barbados or Jamaica as they began their voyages through the Caribbean. These British islands with large populations offered good opportunities to quickly sell North American provisions, gather commercial news, and acquire trading permits and freighting contracts.⁵⁰ Free ports like Dutch St. Eustatius and Curacao and Spanish Monte Christi offered similar benefits, in

⁴⁷ Samuel Savage’s record book of insurance requests includes numerous requests from Salem merchants for insurance, along with the rates at which Savage supplied, or at least offered, the insurance policies. This document was Savage’s personal record of insurance requests and does not include signed or official copies of the finalized insurance policies. Samuel P. Savage Papers, American Antiquarian Society, Worcester, Massachusetts. [hereafter AAS]

⁴⁸ In 1768, the average size of ships trading at Jamaica was 91.2 tons. James F. Shepherd and Gary M. Walton, *Shipping, Maritime Trade, and the Economic Development of Colonial North America* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1972), 196.

⁴⁹ Pares, Pares, *Yankees and Creoles*, 58.

⁵⁰ Since Barbados was the windward-most Caribbean island, winds and currents also naturally made Barbados the first stop for ships coming from North America. Pares, *Yankees and Creoles*, 48.

addition to providing a market for non-British goods, and saw similarly heavy North American shipping activity.⁵¹

Ship owners gave their captains wide latitude to sail to multiple ports and find the best markets in their Caribbean trade. Sailing orders to captains most often contained recommendations for markets to visit or cargoes to purchase, but also instructions for captains to gather intelligence about local markets and trade in the best interest of the owners.⁵² “If you should fall in with Dominica,” Salem ship owner Timothy Orne wrote to Captain Jacob Crowninshield in August 1763, “we think it will be best for [you] to stop there first & enquire the markets and the state of the times.” Each stop offered a captain the chance not only to make sales, but to learn about surrounding market conditions and discover the means, often in the form of permits and permissions, to engage in circuitous trade to foreign islands.⁵³ The nationality of the market did not matter as long as the trade was safe and profitable, and the *Betsey*’s owners hoped that a stop at British Dominica would be a gateway to lucrative trade in the nearby French islands of Martinique or Guadeloupe through the acquisition of permissions. By October 1763, Crowninshield had landed in Martinique where he had sold his fish and boards, and he traveled by land between the ports of Trinity and Saint-Pierre to find the cheapest price for a return cargo of molasses. He reported back to the *Betsey*’s owners the various other Massachusetts vessels in

⁵¹ Pares, *Yankees and Creoles*, 49, 84, 154; Thomas Truxes, *Defying Empire: Trading with the Enemy in Colonial New York* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008), 3, 59.

⁵² As one example, Timothy Orne of Salem and his fellow owners of the brig *Betsy* concluded their sailing instructions to Captain Jacob Crowninshield in 1763 with the phrase, “In all cases & circumstances do that which shall be most for our Interest.” Timothy Orne et al to Jacob Crowninshield, August 23, 1763, original in the Papers of Timothy Orne, PEM. Printed in Harriet Tapley, ed., *Early Coastwise and Foreign Shipping of Salem: A Record of the Entrances and Clearances of the Port of Salem, 1750-1769* (Salem: The Essex Institute, 1934). See also Pares, *Yankees and Creoles*, 66-67.

⁵³ Pares, *Yankees and Creoles*, 60.

port with him at this French island.⁵⁴ In May 1764, Crowninshield returned to Salem in the *Betsey* by way of British Dominica.⁵⁵

Salem traders used their port as an entrepot market, where imports came in and were re-shipped out to other markets. Most Salem merchants of this period used shuttle voyages, not triangular trade, as their predominant method of commerce, meaning that ships left for and returned from the same Atlantic region.⁵⁶ They never expected to operate on the scale of a port like London, but they could mimic London's commercial operations, particularly in the importation and then redistribution of Atlantic goods. Salem became the hub for their trade, not London, and not Boston. As Salem ships brought their cargoes from the West Indies, from southern Europe, or from North American markets back to Salem, the port served as a transshipment center where goods moved from one region of the Atlantic to another. New England fish and lumber went from Salem to both the West Indies and to southern Europe and the wine islands. The returns circulated back to Salem and then often out to other Atlantic markets. Salem merchants purchased wine in southern Europe and at the islands of Madeira and

⁵⁴ Jacob Crowninshield to Timothy Orne, October 24, 1763, printed in Tapley, *Early Coastwise and Foreign Shipping*, 145.

⁵⁵ Tapley, *Early Coastwise and Foreign Shipping*, 17.

⁵⁶ This claim is based on a comparison of ship clearance and entry lists to track Salem voyages in the customs records. In a shuttle voyage, a ship left Salem for a single market or region and returned from the same. The triangular trade from North America to the West Indies and on to Europe, for example, was very rare for single voyages. Of the 271 Salem clearances in 1763, only eight returned from regions of the Atlantic for which they did not clear. Of these 271 clearances, 79% returned to Salem and were recorded in the customs records. Incidents of unaccounted for ships were distributed evenly across the major trading regions in Salem's commercial geography. Sources for tracking Salem clearances were CO 5/850, Massachusetts Shipping Lists, 1763-1765, British National Archives; *Early Coastwise and Foreign Shipping of Salem: A Record of the Entrances and Clearances of the Port of Salem, 1750-1769* (Salem: The Essex Institute, 1934). Helen Klopfer also found the predominance of shuttle voyages in her study of colonial Philadelphia. See Klopfer, *Statistics of Foreign Trade of Philadelphia*, 142-144. For the predominance of shuttle voyages in New England colonial commerce see also Shepherd and Walton, *Shipping*, 50-51. For the predominance of shuttle trade in New York City see William I. Davisson and Lawrence J. Bradley, "New York Maritime Trade: Ship Voyage Patterns, 1715-1765," in *The New-York Historical Society Quarterly* LV, No. 4 (October 1971): 309-317.

Fayal, for example, and they then sold it throughout the North American colonies, British Canada, and the West Indies (see Figure 1.4).⁵⁷

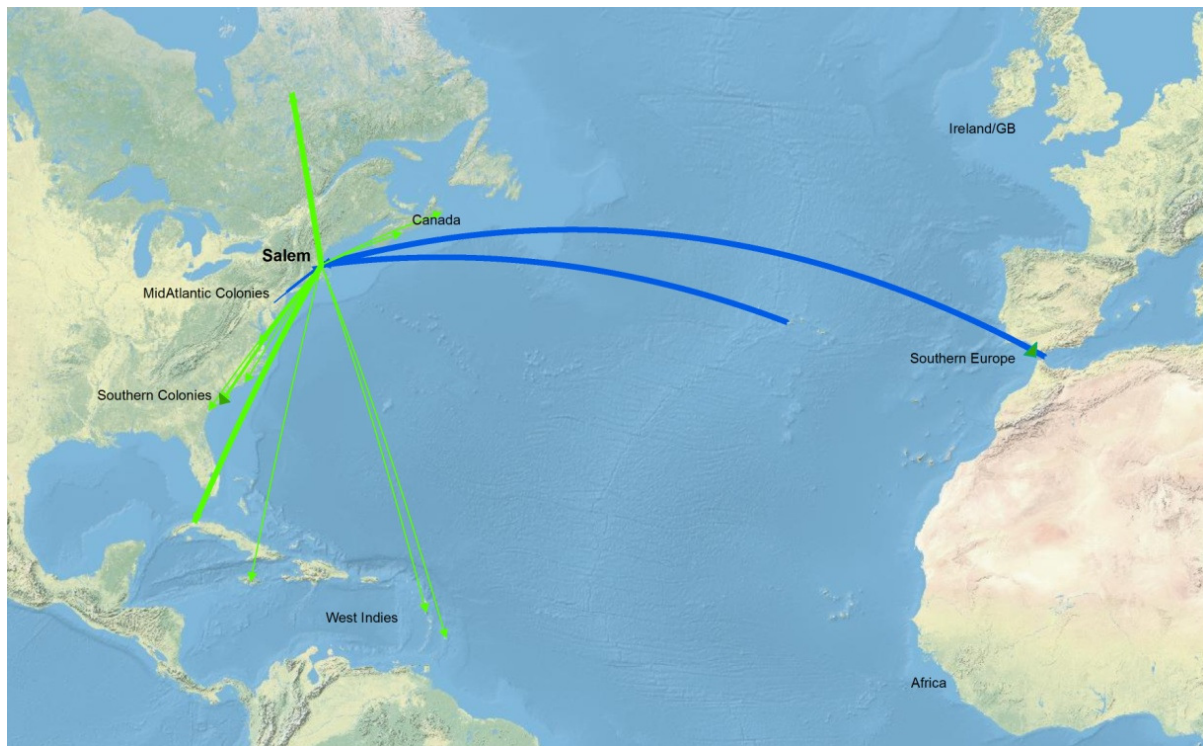


Figure 1.4: Salem wine trade, 1763, scaled by volume.

Blue: markets where Salem merchants purchased wine; Green: Markets where Salem merchants sold wine.

Source: CO 5/850, Massachusetts Shipping Lists, PRO.

Salem's trade in molasses and rum reveals the same broad transatlantic dimensions.

Salem merchants imported molasses from the West Indies, and New England distilleries made it into rum.⁵⁸ New England fishing vessels consumed some of this rum, but most of it was shipped

⁵⁷ Customs records almost certainly do not reveal the total extent of the Salem wine trade since North American merchants were known to smuggle in wine from France and Spain without recording these cargoes in the customs records to avoid having to ship these items through London. Richard Derby was Salem's biggest wine merchant, and he informed his captains to enter wine in as prize goods so that it could appear to be legally imported. Richard Derby to Captain Edward Allen, December 31, 1762 and Richard Derby to Calvin Gay, August 1, 1763, Derby Family Papers, PEM. See also David Hancock, *Oceans of Wine*, 203.

⁵⁸ See Richard Derby's account with Jeremiah Hacker, a rum distiller, 1768-1770, in *Early Coastwise and Foreign Shipping*, 76.

out to markets around the Atlantic (see Figure 1.5).⁵⁹ Its sale paid for the purchase of new goods to be shipped back to Salem, thereby keeping the cycle of trade in motion.

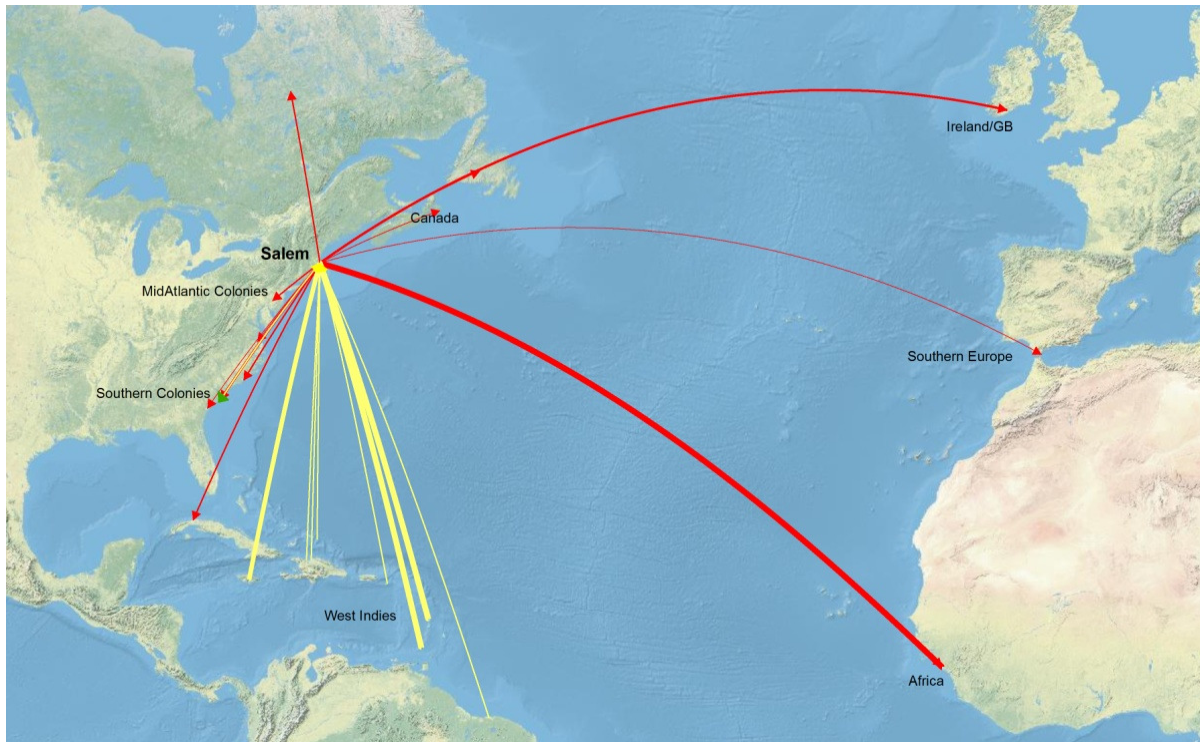


Figure 1.5: Salem molasses and rum trades, 1763, scaled by volume. Yellow: Molasses imported into Salem, 1763. Red: Rum exported from Salem, 1763. Source: CO 5/850, PRO.

Building Salem as an entrepot market put Salem in active competition over inland trade with other Massachusetts communities. As they sought to keep their Atlantic sea lanes open for their ships, Salem traders also worked to ensure that local roads and bridges funneled business and New England goods to their port and away from competing towns. By May of 1766, Salem town meeting gathered to address a petition from the neighboring town of Danvers to the Massachusetts General Court requesting that a bridge connecting Salem to Danvers be made a

⁵⁹ Salem merchants in 1763 estimated that a single fishing vessel consumed 50 gallons of rum during a season. For the breakdown of rum consumed in the fishery and rum exported out of Salem and Boston see Benjamin Pickman and Samuel Gardner to John Rowe, December 24, 1764 (enclosure), Ezekial Price Papers, MHS.

county bridge rather than a Danvers town bridge. The Danvers petition argued that a county designation would relieve the town from the expense of necessary repairs, but the Salem mercantile community had no interest in assisting with bridge maintenance since it diverted commerce away from Salem.⁶⁰ In their counter petition, Salem town meeting cited the recent emergence of manufactories and ship building yards in Danvers as a source of increased Danvers estate values and higher tax income that, despite the Danvers claims, could likely fund the needed bridge repairs without county help. These new industries also competed with those in Salem, and the bridge created an avenue for trade to shift to other markets. Salem petitioners noted with concern that prices for provisions had risen in Salem since the construction of the original bridge, “owing to the great number of Market People passing through the Town to another market, who used to stop and trade in Salem, before that Bridge was built.”⁶¹

As an entrepôt port where Salem traders transshipped goods from one market to another, Salem traders understood that their port was an alternative and competing market to Boston, the Massachusetts metropolis. Salem had its own wharves, warehouses, and Customs House. By the eighteenth century, its merchants had enough commercial experience and capital to operate extensive Atlantic trade not as the agents of Boston merchants, but on their own accounts and with their own trading associates.⁶² Over the course of the eighteenth century, Boston steadily

⁶⁰ Notice of this Danvers petition appeared in the Boston newspapers per order of the Massachusetts House of Representatives to alert the surrounding towns of Essex County to the Danvers petition and request feedback. *Boston Post-Boy & Advertiser*, February 24, 1766.

⁶¹ Salem Town Meeting Minutes, May 19, 1766, Salem City Clerk, Salem, Massachusetts. Barry Levy discusses how colonial Massachusetts towns defended and marshaled local labor and local resources in defense of town-based industries such as shipbuilding against the competition they perceived from other towns. Barry Levy, *Town Born: The Political Economy of New England from its Founding to the Revolution* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2009), 187-188.

⁶² Jacob Price, “Economic Function and the Growth of American Port Towns in the Eighteenth Century,” 146; David Hancock, “Markets, Merchants, and the Wider World of Boston Wine, 1700-1775,” in Conrad Edick Wright and Kathryn P. Viens, eds. *Entrepreneurs: The Boston Business Community, 1700-1850* (Boston: Massachusetts Historical Society, 1997), 65.

relinquished its near exclusive share of New England's registered shipping tonnage to growing ports in New Hampshire and Massachusetts, including to Salem. By 1768, 34% of ships registered in Massachusetts were registered in Salem.⁶³

Even as Salem emerged as a prominent port in its own right, important commercial links still connected Salem with Boston. Salem merchants purchased insurance for their voyages from Boston dealers, though they could also obtain coverage from sources in Salem and London.⁶⁴ There was very little direct shipping between Salem and London, so most imports of British dry goods destined for Salem entered first at Boston.⁶⁵ The coasting trade connected Salem and Boston, though fewer ships engaged in commerce between Salem and Boston than between Boston and ports like Marblehead or Gloucester or Falmouth, and the ships that did coast between the two ports were very small—15 or 30 tons.⁶⁶ The coasting trade between Boston and Salem and turned each port into a mart for the other. Salem merchant Benjamin Goodhue, for example, purchased the iron he required for his blacksmithing business from Boston merchant Henry Laughton. In return, Goodhue sent molasses to Laughton and earned credit through these sales with Laughton.⁶⁷

Still, Salem and Boston were competitors, and Salem merchants found a competitive advantage in their port's lower operating costs relative to Boston and in obtaining higher quality

⁶³ Jacob Price, "Economic Function," p.146. At the start of the eighteenth century, nearly 90% of Massachusetts shipping was registered in Boston (by tonnage and number of vessels). Bernard Bailyn, *Massachusetts Shipping, 1696-1714: A Statistical Study* (Cambridge: Belknap Press, 1959).

⁶⁴ For Salem merchants purchasing insurance from Boston merchants see the Samuel P. Savage Papers, AAS. For Salem merchants purchasing insurance from Salem see records of insurance underwriting in the Goodhue Family Papers, Business Papers, PEM.

⁶⁵ For the importation of dry goods by Salem merchants into Boston that were then freighted to Salem see the Papers of Samuel Flagg, AAS; see also advertisements in the Salem newspaper for dry goods importers who announced that their goods had come from Boston. *Essex Gazette*, August 2, 1768; *Essex Gazette*, March 14, 1769.

⁶⁶ Samuel Eliot Morison, "," in *Proceedings of the American Antiquarian Society* (April 1922), 24-51. Morison gathered this information on the Salem-Boston coasting trade using a Custom book from 1773 that he discovered in the basement of the Plymouth Custom House in the 1920s.

⁶⁷ Business Papers, Goodhue Family Papers, PEM.

goods. Salem shopkeepers put advertisements in the newspapers announcing that they sold drugs, dry goods, or India cloth “as low as can be bought in Boston.”⁶⁸ Wharfage and labor costs were lower in Salem than in Boston, and wharf hands and dock space were more plentiful, leading to quicker turnaround time for ships at a lower cost. Additionally, Salem was closer to the fishing ports of Essex County, which increased the quality and, consequently, the sale price of the fish Salem ships carried when they sold it in the markets of southern Europe.⁶⁹ Consumers considered the differences in the prices and quality of imports between the two ports. James Putnam of Worcester often wrote to his brother Ebenezer in Salem with requests for goods to purchase, and he compared his options between Boston and Salem. During a 1771 visit to Salem, James had learned from his brother that Ebenezer was expecting a shipment of good, cheap wine. “Tho I have lately purchased some at Boston,” James wrote to Ebenezer, “I should be glad of some other that is better, for this is but poor.... If yours is come, or when it does come, if it proves good and is at reasonable price you may save me 2 quarter casks of it.”⁷⁰ Making trade competitive with Boston and other New England ports organized much of Salem’s Atlantic commerce and cultivated a strong sense of Salem’s particular town interest.⁷¹

III

As Salem merchants debated their response to the impending Sugar Act in late 1763 and early 1764, they concerned themselves with how to protect these Atlantic dimensions of their local economy.⁷² The new duties and enforcement policies imposed by the Sugar Act directly

⁶⁸ *Imported in the last ships from London, by John Appleton, a fine assortment of English and India goods* (Salem, 1773). See also the advertisement of Phillip Godfrid Kast for his shop in Salem where he sold goods “as cheap as can be purchased in any Apothecary’s Shop in Boston, without exception.” *Essex Gazette*, August 2, 1768.

⁶⁹ Hancock, “Markets, Merchants, and the Wider World of Boston Wine,” 84-85.

⁷⁰ James Putnam to Ebenezer Putnam, August 12, 1771, Putnam Family Papers, AAS.

⁷¹ David Hancock argues that while the entrepreneurial spirit declined among Boston merchants, it grew vigorous by the late eighteenth century in Salem. Hancock, “Markets, Merchants, and the Wider World of Boston Wine,” 93.

⁷² Compounding alarm over the Sugar Act was the post-war depression in the wake of the Seven Years War and 1762 the contraction of British credit. This economic downturn, particularly after the prosperity of the war years, hit

affected trade in both southern Europe and the West Indies, the two biggest markets for Salem commerce. Changes in the duty on foreign molasses sparked some of the most heated opposition, even though the Sugar Act reduced the duty on foreign molasses from 6 pence per gallon, where it had been under the 1733 Molasses Act, to 3 pence per gallon. The Grenville ministry devised this strategy to make the importation of foreign molasses under the Sugar Act more comparable to customary payments under the former system, in which shippers generally paid a one penny per gallon fee on their foreign molasses to customs collectors. Additionally, the Sugar Act raised the duty on imported wine shipped directly from Madeira and the Azores, and it required lumber shipped from British North American colonies to be landed first in Great Britain before being shipped to any part of Europe, including the ports of Iberia.⁷³

New and more stringent methods of trade regulation would ensure that the Sugar Act would be enforced, including requirements that customs collectors reside at their port of assignment.⁷⁴ As a result, London expected that the duties would produce revenue. The Act empowered the British navy to assist in the enforcement of the new measures, and from August 1764 through the spring of 1765, the naval vessel *Jamaica* patrolled the waters off Salem, with intermittent cruises to other Massachusetts ports, stopping ships as they entered the harbor to inspect their cargoes.⁷⁵ In addition to requiring Customs officers to take oaths of office and to be in residence in their assigned port—two measures aimed at increasing their enforcement of trade laws—the Sugar Act put in place many new policies for monitoring the movement of ships and

the urban poor and laborers particularly hard. Gary B. Nash, *The Urban Crucible: Social Change, Political Consciousness, and the Origins of the American Revolution* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1979), 246-256.

⁷³ Text of the 1764 Sugar Act available online. The Avalon Project: Documents in Law, History and Diplomacy <http://avalon.law.yale.edu/18th_century/sugar_act_1764.asp>

⁷⁴ Other notable enforcement policies included paying customs collectors enough to dissuade them from taking fees from merchants and requiring captains to fill out lengthy new paperwork and give expensive bonds before their ships left port.

⁷⁵ Log of the ship *Jamaica*, ADM 51/3874, PRO.

goods.⁷⁶ Customs officers were to transmit back to London detailed accounts of imports and exports, revenues collected, and incidences of illicit trade occurring at their posts.⁷⁷ To combat what they felt was a predominant lack of knowledge about Customs laws on the part of North American Customs officers, the Lords of the Treasury directed that all officers in North America be given written instructions outlining their duties and the laws they were to enforce.⁷⁸ Instructions to Boston Customs Collector Roger Hale in 1764—the same instructions that went to all North American Customs Collectors—outlined not only the specific duties due on certain goods, but how Hale was to execute his authority.⁷⁹

For the Salem merchants, as for many merchants throughout New England, these duties on trade ran counter to the way they had customarily organized their Atlantic commerce. Molasses was the main return from the fish trade to the West Indies, and Salem merchants worried immediately that by increasing the price of molasses, the Act would make the fish trade

⁷⁶ John Tyler refers to these new regulatory measures as a return to “orthodox mercantilism.” John W. Tyler, *Smugglers and Patriots: Boston Merchants and the Advent of the American Revolution* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1986). See especially articles XX, XXI, XXII, XXIV, XXIX, XXXVI. For the oath requirement see article XXXIX. The Avalon Project: Documents in Law, History and Diplomacy <http://avalon.law.yale.edu/18th_century/sugar_act_1764.asp> These stipulations emerged from recommendations made by the Commissioners of the Customs in London to the Lords of the Treasury, September 16, 1763, Treasury Papers, T1/430, PRO. The Act required merchants to give heavy bonds to Customs collectors for both enumerated and non-enumerated goods on the promise that they would only land the goods in Great Britain or in British colonies. Before leaving port, ship captains now had to obtain affidavits sworn before justices of the peace and Customs certificates outlining the type, quantity and origin of their cargoes. They also had to obtain cockets that outlined the quantity and type of all goods on board, down to the marks on the packages and the names of the merchants by whom they had been shipped and to whom they were consigned. All documentation was to be delivered to Customs officers upon arrival in port, and the information would be checked by Customs officers who would be put on board returning vessels to search their cargo holds. Any discrepancies in documentation or any failure to produce documents upon being stopped at sea would result in forfeitures of cargo or other financial penalties

⁷⁷ Lords of the Treasury to King George III, 1763, Treasury Papers, T1/430, PRO.

⁷⁸ Lords of the Treasury to King George III, 1763, Treasury Papers, T1/430, PRO.

⁷⁹ Hale was to visit and search vessels entering his port to watch for goods on which duties were due. He was to take notice of the people who owned or worked on the wharfs and boats in his post to make sure they were not assisting in landing goods without paying duties. All goods owing duties were to be weighed in his presence or in the presence of the Comptroller, and together these two officers were to keep detailed accounts of the entry of ships and goods at their port “Instructions by the Commissioners of His Majesty’s Customs, to Roger Hale Esq. who is established Collector of His Majesty’s Customs at Boston in New England in America,” July 13, 1764, Revolutionary History Collection, AAS.

less profitable and potentially unsustainable. Moreover, Salem merchants argued that the British West Indies constituted too small a market to consume the produce of the British American fishery. In a petition to the Massachusetts General Court, Salem merchants, along with merchants from Boston, Plymouth, and Marblehead, sought relief from the “fatal consequences” they faced in the fish trade and the other branches of their commerce if the Sugar Act was renewed and enforced.⁸⁰ To aid Boston’s Society for Encouraging Trade and Commerce in drafting a protest against the Sugar Act, Salem merchants submitted tables of the amount of fish shipped to both foreign and British islands, along with the amount of rum imported from both of these sources. They attested that only a quarter of the fish exported from Salem to the West Indies was consumed by the British islands.⁸¹ Drawing on Salem customs records, Salem merchants claimed that from January 1762 to January 1763, Salem had purchased goods valued at £31,408 from conquered French islands in the Caribbean, while in that same period they had purchased only £8,516 worth of goods from English islands. In their letter to Boston enclosing these statistics, Salem merchants assured the Society for Encouraging Trade and Commerce that “we think the inclosed List will at once convince any Person what part of the Fish is used by the English, and how insufficient our own Islands are to supply us.”⁸²

⁸⁰ Salem merchants wrote to Boston in December 1763 that they had “agreed on a Memorial to be presented to the General Court, relating to the Fish Trade and the fatal consequences that must attend to it if the Sugar Act is renewed & put in Execution, with remarks on some other Branches of our Trade.” Benjamin Pickman and Samuel Gardner to John Rowe, December 24, 1763, Ezekial Price Papers, MHS; *Journals of the House of Representatives of Massachusetts 1763-1764* (Boston: Massachusetts Historical Society, 1970), 132. The original petition was destroyed in a fire in 1764. See Charles McLean Andrews, *The Boston Merchants and the Non-Importation Movement* (Cambridge: John Wilson and Son, 1917), 166, fn 2. Summaries of the Salem petition and the petitions from Boston, Plymouth, and Marblehead appear in the records of the Massachusetts Governor’s Council, Volume 25, Massachusetts State Archives, Boston, Massachusetts.

⁸¹ Benjamin Pickman & Samuel Gardner to Messrs. Edward Payne and Thomas Gray, January 10, 1764, Ezekial Price Papers, MHS.

⁸² The conquered islands included Guadeloupe, Martinico, and Grenada. The English islands included Barbadoes, Jamaica, St. Christopher, Nevis, and the Virgin Islands. The goods tabulated included molasses, sugar, and rum. Benjamin Pickman and Samuel Gardner to John Rowe, December 24, 1763 (enclosure), Ezekial Price Papers, MHS. Boston’s Society for Encouraging Trade and Commerce incorporated these statistics into a pamphlet known at the “State of Trade” that argued against the Sugar Act on the grounds that it would harm Massachusetts trade and the

Salem merchants also turned to their transatlantic trading partners to voice their concerns over the Sugar Act and to make adaptations in their trade in the wake of the new legislation. After sending his schooner *Patty* to Madeira, Salem merchant Richard Derby wrote to his contacts there at the British house of Charles, Chambers, Hiccox & Denyer that due to the increased duties on Madeira wine imported into North America under the Sugar Act, he now wanted all proceeds from the sale of the *Patty*'s cargo in bills of exchange on London or Lisbon. If the Madeira house could not give bills to cover the full cargo, and if as a result they had to send the remaining credit back to Salem in wine, Derby pleaded with them to keep the quantity and price of the wine low. The new Sugar Act duty would make selling the wine for a profit difficult in North America if it was priced too high in Madeira. Worse, Derby claimed that the Act weakened the purchasing power of North American consumers. Derby wrote to Charles, Chambers, Hiccox & Denyer that "the Late Acts of Parliament have wrought a Great Reformation on all degrees of People Here....hath put it out of their Power to pay Money for the necessarys of life, because the dutys arising by the Late Act hath almost deprived us of our silver & gold currency already, for the Money that ariseth therefore is sent Home."⁸³

For Salem and other Massachusetts traders, the renewed Sugar Act with its new duties and new methods of enforcement violated their overarching conception of the political economy of the British Atlantic and the strategies of commercial regulation that they believed had made

economy of the British Atlantic. For a published version of the pamphlet see *Reasons Against the Renewal of the Sugar Act* (Boston: Thomas Leverett, 1764).

⁸³ Richard Derby to Charles, Chambers, Hiccox & Denyer (Madeira), Dec 10, 1764, Merchant House Correspondence, Derby Family Papers, PEM. The merchant house of Charles, Chambers, Hiccox & Denyer was also the British East India Company's official agency for supplying British forts in India with wine. The firm and its predecessors had held this contract since 1718. David Hancock, "'An Undiscovered Ocean of Commerce Laid Open': India, Wine and the Emerging Atlantic Economy, 1703-1813," in H.V. Bowen, Margarete Lincoln, and Nigel Rigby, eds., *The Worlds of the East India Company* (Rochester, NY: Boydell & Brewer Inc., 2002), 155-156.

their particular commerce successful within that political economy.⁸⁴ “It is a fundamental maxim of trade,” one writer wrote in the *Boston Evening-Post*, “that the staple articles should be kept free from all incumbrances[sic] whatever, and be cherished with every encouragement government can afford them.”⁸⁵ In Massachusetts, these staple items were fish, oil, and lumber. These were the goods that Massachusetts settlers had found in abundance on their shores and in their woods, and these were the articles that earned them returns in specie, wine, rum, molasses, or sugar when exported to Atlantic markets. Encouragements to these staple trades under the Massachusetts model of political economy meant removing duties that would lower the value of returning cargoes or close Massachusetts ships out of the foreign markets that sustained the demand for and the price of fish.⁸⁶ Protecting the profit margin of the fish trade was important, not only because the Massachusetts fishery competed with the French, but also due to the expensive labor and supplies required to operate fishing ventures. The same writer in the *Boston Evening-Post* argued that the profits of the fishery were so small that minor encumbrances put it in danger: “[The fishery] is known to be one of the most laborious employments, that those who carry it on get to themselves but a bare subsistence...that the merchant who exports, and who is the support of the fishery by his supplies, can scarcely maintain his ships, with every indulgence which may, and ought to be granted them.”⁸⁷

⁸⁴ Historian Oliver Dickinson argued that the experiences of trade and war in the 18th-century British Atlantic under the Navigation Acts had “produced a population that was as militantly loyal as that of England, and possibly more so. This situation is the more impressive because New England, the group of colonies that has been assumed to have been most adversely affected by the Navigation Acts, as the section that was most ardent in fighting the battles of the Empire that imposed the regulations.” Dickinson, *Navigation Acts and the American Revolution*, 157.

⁸⁵ *Boston Evening-Post*, November 21, 1763.

⁸⁶ *The Boston Evening-Post*, November 21, 1763.

⁸⁷ *The Boston Evening-Post*, November 28, 1763. Salem merchants read this piece in the Boston paper with approval, and the call for action in protest of the Sugar Act was the impetus behind the meeting of Salem merchants in December 1763 and their petition to the Massachusetts General Court. Benjamin Pickman wrote to the *Boston Evening-Post*, “It was with great please I saw in your last papers some ingenious remarks on the trade of the continent in general, this province in particular, and peculiarly that greatest support of it, the fishery.” *Boston Evening-Post*, December 5, 1763. The remarks about the fishery and the indulgences due to Massachusetts commerce published in *Boston Evening-Post* were echoed in other letters and tracts at the time. See the letters of Thomas Cushing to Jasper

Through their long engagement in the fishery and its related trades, Massachusetts inhabitants in the province's mercantile communities identified themselves as a commercial people. In the political economy that they envisioned for the British Atlantic, commercial people made very particular and very critical contributions to the imperial interest. The "wild wastes" of North America had been turned into trading towns in Massachusetts, and the mutual advantages that Great Britain and her commercial colonies enjoyed were "intirely derived from the spirit of Trade and Commerce, the planting of Colonies," and the Constitution.⁸⁸ The expansive commerce of Massachusetts had created a nursery for British seamen, by which Great Britain had become "aggrandized, and rendered the arbitress of the world."⁸⁹ The British interest benefitted from access to the resources of British North America, and Massachusetts identified itself not only as the oldest province, but the "most useful" to the mother country.⁹⁰

One of the greatest contributions that Massachusetts as a commercial province made to the imperial interest, its inhabitants believed, was through the consumption of British manufactured goods. Massachusetts consumers believed that the size of the colonial market gave the inhabitants of British North America prominence in this role within the British Atlantic. By the 1760s, the population in the American colonies grew at rapid rates, and trade to the colonies was the fastest growing sector of British overseas trade in the eighteenth century. The quantity of exports to the American colonies rose from ten percent of all English exports in 1700-1701 to thirty seven percent of all English exports by 1772-1773. The value of exports

Maudit, the Massachusetts agent in London regarding the dangers to the province's commerce that the Sugar Act posed. "Jasper Maudit: Agent in London for the Province of the Massachusetts-Bay, 1762-1765," *Collections of the Massachusetts Historical Society* 74 (1918). See also *Reasons Against the Renewal of the Sugar Act* (1764).

⁸⁸ Massachusetts House of Representatives Instructions to Jasper Maudit, June 15, 1762, in *Collections* Vol. 74, 44.

⁸⁹ *The Boston Evening-Post*, November 21, 1763.

⁹⁰ *The Boston Evening-Post*, November 28, 1763.

from England to the American colonies rose 400% from 1701 -1710 to 1761-1770.⁹¹ As the consumption of British goods tied North American colonists into the British Atlantic, it did so by making consumption one of their most productive and prominent roles within the extended British polity due to the size and demand for goods within the colonial market, and the profits from this trade that returned to Great Britain.⁹² With news of the impending Sugar Act, Thomas Cushing of the Massachusetts House of Representatives wrote to the Province's agent in London, Jasper Maudit, that the new duties were certain to weaken the purchasing power of Massachusetts consumers and cause "a severe check on [British] manufacturers." This consequence, he wrote, was "evident to every one that considers that the Inhabitants of this Province by their trade and Fishery are some of the greatest Consumers of the Natural produce of Great Britain."⁹³ Opposition to the Sugar Act in North America stemmed not only from concerns over how it would damage colonial trade, but how it would injure the British interest.⁹⁴

In maritime Massachusetts in particular, inhabitants believed that their consumption and dependence on British manufactured goods distinguished them additionally from the farming plantations of the British Atlantic. "A farmer does not consume any of the manufactures of the

⁹¹ Statistics from Phyllis Deane and W.A. Cole, *British Economic Growth 1688-1959* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1962). Jack Greene discusses these statistics in Jack P. Greene, "An Uneasy Connection: An Analysis of the Preconditions of the American Revolution," in James Hutson and Stephen Kurtz, eds., *Essays on the American Revolution* (New York: W. W. Norton and Company, 1973), 44. Marc Egnal and Joseph Ernst point to the growth of the British export trade to North America as one of the significant commercial changes in the Atlantic economy by the mid-eighteenth century. Egnal and Ernst, "An Economic Interpretation of the American Revolution," 11.

⁹² Existing scholarship on consumerism in the British North American colonies has focused on how consumption of British goods tied colonists into the British Atlantic and gave them a sense of their own Britishness, rather than the role consumption played in distinguishing colonists within the British Atlantic. Timothy Breen, *Marketplace of Revolution*; Phyllis Hunter, *Purchasing Identity in the Atlantic World*. British laws by the start of the eighteenth century had placed consumers in British North America and consumers in Great Britain in two distinct categories. Jonathan Eacott, "Making an Imperial Compromise: The Calico Acts, the American Colonies, and the Structure of the British Empire," in *The William and Mary Quarterly* Vol. 69, No. 4 (Oct., 2012), 731-762.

⁹³ In addition, Cushing wrote that colonial commerce was a nursery for British seamen. Thomas Cushing to Jasper Maudit, October 28, 1763, printed in "Jasper Maudit: Agent in London for the Province of Massachusetts-Bay 1762-1765, *Collections of the Massachusetts Historical Society* Vol. 74 (1918), 134.

⁹⁴ For a greater examination of this argument see John Crowley, *The Privileges of Independence: Neomercantilism and the American Revolution* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993), especially Chapter 1.

mother country,” wrote an author in the *Boston Evening-Post*. “Why? Because the simplicity of a country life and manners has but small demands for luxury, and for what it does require, it will not afford the means for payment.”⁹⁵ It was the commercial people in their purchases for business and daily life who invested their money in a “flow of wealth” back to Great Britain. The distinction that writers in Massachusetts commercial centers drew was not only between commerce and agriculture, but between coastal and inland settlements. The needs and the customary practices of maritime commerce were distinct, in their estimations, even from other types of trade. In coastal Massachusetts, colonists imported not only luxury goods and common items for everyday life, but goods for the fishery.⁹⁶ In 1764 this consumer role was a source of pride in coastal Massachusetts’s conception of its place in the British Atlantic. One writer argued:

It is calculated that a fisherman and his family consume ten times the value of British manufacturers that a yeoman does; that the building and equipping of one ship annually in the plantations is of more value to Great Britain than the consumption of any one inland town; and that a single merchant in an opulent trading town, in the apparel of himself, his family and dependents, his equipage, furniture and utensils of his house (most of which he exports from home) occasions a greater consumption of the manufacturers of Britain than a whole inland county.”⁹⁷

Under these circumstances, it had only been natural, Massachusetts traders believed, for the Province to be granted certain indulgences that freed Massachusetts commerce from restrictive duties and increased the purchasing power of Massachusetts consumers, especially when “no injury arises to [Great Britain] by such indulgences.”⁹⁸

⁹⁵ *The Boston Evening-Post*, November 21, 1763.

⁹⁶ See the records of Salem dry goods importer Samuel Flagg for importations of cloth but also cargoes of nails and bunting and other items for ship chandlery. Samuel Flagg Papers, AAS.

⁹⁷ *The Boston Evening-Post*, November 21, 1763.

⁹⁸ *The Boston Evening-Post*, November 21, 1763.

The indulgences that Massachusetts expected in accordance with their ideas of political economy had real manifestations by the 1760s that were not just conceptual or wishful. The customary practices of commerce and the day-to-day trade in Salem and other colonial New England ports relied on such indulgences for their operation, the biggest of which was the non-enforcement of the Molasses Act of 1733. The Act placed duties on sugar, rum, and molasses imported from foreign islands in the West Indies, and these foreign islands, as Salem traders showed in their 1764 petition, supplied most of the molasses and sugar that entered the North American colonies. New England traders obtained molasses at French islands at better prices than at British islands, in large part due to the higher yields on French islands.⁹⁹ In Rhode Island, 14,000 hogsheads of molasses entered the province yearly, 11,500 of which came from foreign islands. In Massachusetts, only 500 of the 15,000 hogsheads that entered the province in 1763 came from British islands. Yet the duties collected under the Molasses Act did not reflect this significant trade with the foreign islands of the West Indies. From 1734 to 1762, duties collected under the Act on all foreign imports totaled only £10,061.¹⁰⁰ One year's worth of duties on molasses into Rhode Island alone during that time would have amounted to £28,750.¹⁰¹

Customs officers in the ports of British North America were complicit in establishing the customary practice of non-enforcement of the Molasses Act. Tasked in May of 1763 with finding out why the duties collected on foreign imports were so small, the Commissioners of the Customs in London reported back to the Treasury Department that in addition to the many

⁹⁹ Molasses was a by-product of turning sugar cane into sugar. Infrastructure on French islands for turning sugar cane into sugar created higher molasses yields than on British islands. Christopher Magra calculates that 100 quintals of refuse-grade fish could purchase 21 cwt of sugar in British islands, and 28 cwt of sugar in French islands. Magra, *The Fisherman's Cause*, 102-105.

¹⁰⁰ Arthur Schlesinger, *Colonial Merchants*, 46. From 1734 to 1755, total duties collected came to £5,686. From 1756 to 1762, amidst the start of British wartime efforts to enforce the Act, total duties came to £4,375.

¹⁰¹ The duty on foreign molasses under the Molasses Act was 6pence per gallon. One hogshead contained 100 gallons of molasses. Klopfer, 88.

challenges of patrolling the North American coastline and the absenteeism among collectors, Customs officers and colonial traders had worked out an accepted system of trade in which merchants paid small fees to officers in lieu of paying duties on foreign imports. The duty on imported foreign molasses required under the 1733 Act was six pence per gallon, but the general practice was for ship captains to pay a one pence per gallon fee to Customs officers upon their return to port in North America. This fee paid was “Common Fame” according to the Commissioners, and in some cases followed the letter of the law, since Customs officials, as administrators of this tax, had the authority to determine how much of the duty to collect on each returning voyage.¹⁰² To counter the problem, the Commissioners recommended that Customs officers be paid a percentage of their duty remittances to dissuade them from taking fees, and the Commissioners stated that it would also “be necessary that the several Plantation Laws whereby the Permission was given to the Officers of the Revenue to take particular fees therein mentioned be repealed.”¹⁰³

When the British Commissioners of Trade and Plantations wrote to Massachusetts Governor Francis Bernard in 1763 to inquire about the amount of foreign molasses that had been imported into the province, Bernard struggled to find an answer. Bernard sent the Board’s query on to the Salem Customs Collector, James Cockle, who replied that it would be a great difficulty for his office to return a detailed answer since Customs officers were accustomed to recording the quantity of incoming cargoes with no distinction between sugar and molasses or between British and foreign goods. Cockle wrote openly about this policy and felt that this lack of interest in the origin of incoming cargoes was sanctioned by the Molasses Act. “His office not being interested in the distinction of the port whence the goods come & the Act not requiring any

¹⁰² Dickerson, *Navigation Acts*, 85.

¹⁰³ Commissioners of the Customs to the Lords of the Treasury, July 21, 1763, Treasury Papers, T1/430, PRO.

such distinction,” Bernard reported to the Commissioners of Trade about Cockle’s response, “he has taken the word of the Master for the entry of the port from which, without any enquiry into the truth of such export.”¹⁰⁴

Parallel indulgences protected New England commerce with southern Europe.¹⁰⁵ “The last act of navigation which forbids the Americans importing from the continent of Europe any article except salt,” a Boston writer argued, “has by experience been found prejudicial to the trade and fishery of this province.”¹⁰⁶ By 1763, British officials had heard from various colonial depositions that for a small fee, customs collectors in the colonies would allow ships returning from southern Europe to claim only their salt as cargo but in fact return with fruit and wine from southern European markets.¹⁰⁷ A dispute over the Salem customs collector just as the Sugar Act was going into effect did indeed reveal that these practices of not reporting full and illegal cargoes from southern Europe were common practice in Salem. Woodward Abraham, a waiter in the Salem customs district, reported in October 1764 that it had been customary for the Salem Customs Collector to direct Abraham to receive gifts of wine, fruit, and oil from ships arriving from Lisbon as a “gratuity for such cargoes being imported contrary to law, & then the vessels have been entered with salt only.”¹⁰⁸ As Massachusetts merchants reacted to news of the new enforcement measures set to take place by 1763, they challenged the soundness of these measures not only by defending the way trade was carried out, but by arguing for the justness of more allowances. “An indulgence for the vessels which carry fish to the various ports in Europe,

¹⁰⁴ Francis Bernard to the Lords Commissioners of Trade and Plantations, April 29, 1763, Colonial Office Records, CO 5/891, PRO.

¹⁰⁵ James Lydon argues the predominant lax oversight of the colonial trade to southern Europe “fostered a paternalistic and permissive economic system down to 1764, one which indulgently encouraged colonial trade with southern Europe.” Lydon, *Fish and Flour for Gold*, 219.

¹⁰⁶ *The Boston Evening-Post*, November 21, 1763.

¹⁰⁷ Schlesinger, *Colonial Merchants*, 42. Spanish and French wines were not allowed to be shipped directly to North America under British Navigation Acts.

¹⁰⁸ Abraham Woodward deposition, October 3, 1764, Treasury Papers, T1/429, PRO.

to bring back wine and fruit, as well as salt, would be a great benefit, and considerable support to the fish trade,” the same newspaper writer argued, “and attended with no inconvenience to our mother country.”¹⁰⁹

IV

Changes to the customary practices of trade that had shaped and protected Salem’s Atlantic commerce produced surprise and alarm in New England with the announcement of the new regulatory and enforcement measures in late 1763.¹¹⁰ Upon learning of the new directives to enforce the Sugar Act, Massachusetts Lieutenant Governor Thomas Hutchinson wrote to Richard Jackson, secretary to Prime Minister George Grenville, of his own surprise at the changes prescribed for the West Indies trade. “Such indulgence has been shown of late to that branch of illicit trade that nobody has considered it as such,” Hutchinson wrote, with “Vessels arriving and making their entries for some small acknowledgments as openly as from our own islands without paying the duties.”¹¹¹ Rhode Island Governor Stephen Hopkins similarly responded with concerns about how the Act was unnatural for the “peculiarly circumstanced” North American trade and against the traditional indulgences.¹¹² When news of the impending Sugar Act arrived in Massachusetts, a Boston newspaper encouraged the creation of a joint protest with governments of other colonies, but merchants in Salem counseled against this

¹⁰⁹ *The Boston Evening-Post*, November 21, 1763.

¹¹⁰ The Massachusetts Governor’s office received notice from both the Secretary of State for the Southern Department and the Board of Trade that Customs officers with the help of the Governor and naval patrols would now enforce trade laws and the collection of duties on foreign goods. Circular from the Earl of Egremont, July 9, 1763, in Colin Nicholson, ed., *The Papers of Governor Bernard, Volume 1* (Boston: The Colonial Society of Massachusetts, 2007), p. 381-382. [cited hereafter as PFB1]; Circular from the Board of Trade, October 11, 1763, *PFB1*, pp. 420-421. This letter was received by Governor Francis Bernard in December 1763.

¹¹¹ Thomas Hutchinson to Richard Jackson, September 17, 1763. Quoted in Josiah Quincy, Jr., *Reports of Cases Argued and Adjudged in the Superior Court of the Judicature of the Province of the Massachusetts Bay, Between 1761 and 1772* (Boston: Little, Brown, & Company, 1865); *PFB1*, 430.

¹¹² Stephen Hopkins, “An Essay on the Trade of the Northern Colonies”, printed in Merrill Jensen, *Tracts of the American Revolution, 1763-1776* (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1967), 4. Hopkins also added that reducing the duties on wines, fruit, and oil shipped direct from southern Europe to North America would promote the fishery and produce a greater revenue.

cooperation. “It is been often urged that a Coalition of the Governments on this affair would be of service,” a group of Salem merchants wrote to the Boston Society for Encouraging Trade and Commerce, “yet we are of opinion that as we are a Fishing Province we may expect some Indulgences that would not be granted to other Governments as indeed we now have, and therefore may really disserve our Interests to join with them.”¹¹³

In his own correspondence with the Board of Trade in London, Massachusetts Governor Bernard added that what London bureaucrats had deemed fraudulent trades were instead customary “indulgences” that he believed had been “well known to your Lordships.” Customs officers had executed the laws of trade in Massachusetts “as far as has been practicable.”¹¹⁴ The practice of allowing fruits and wine to enter from southern Europe as ship stores, he argued, was “well known in England & allowed, as being no object of trade, or, if it was, no ways injurious to that of Great Britain.”¹¹⁵ The “other well known indulgence,” Bernard wrote, was the non-enforcement of the Molasses Act, not due to fraud, but due to common recognition in Massachusetts that enforcing the measure would be unnatural for the particular structure of the province’s commerce and would fail to produce revenue. Parliament had originally designed the Molasses Act of 1733 as a measure of prohibition, aimed at keeping North American traders from engaging in commerce with foreign markets in the West Indies, Bernard acknowledged. But in the 1760s, he believed the 1733 Act had become a measure for revenue, in which case the enforcement of duties would decrease commerce and therefore decrease revenue. If the 1764 Sugar Act was to return to a strategy of prohibition, it would require strict enforcement, but

¹¹³ Benjamin Pickman and Samuel Gardner to John Rowe, December 24, 1763, Ezekial Price Papers, MHS.

¹¹⁴ Francis Bernard to the Board of Trade, December 26, 1763, *PFB1*, 447-448.

¹¹⁵ Francis Bernard to the Earl of Egremont, October 24, 1763, *PFB1*, 426-427.

Bernard believed the interest of British trade warranted its continuance as a revenue measure and, therefore, the continuation of common indulgences for North American trade.¹¹⁶

British North America was growing, Bernard noted, and London could capitalize on this expansion through indulgences for North American trade in British revenue policies. When Parliament had passed the Molasses Act in 1733, Bernard wrote, a sufficient balance of trade between British North American and the British West Indies seemed possible, but in those thirty years “N America had increased to above double; the British West Indies remain as they were. What is to become of half the produce of N America, if it is not suffer’d to be carried to foreign Markets upon practicable terms of trade?” Similarly, Bernard asked, how could Britain expect to maintain its exportations of manufactured goods to North America if, under the Sugar Act, North Americans lost markets for their own goods in the West Indies and could not sustain a robust fishery? “The Trade of N America is really the trade of Great Britain, (prohibited European goods excepted),” Bernard argued. With this British interest in mind, customs officers had not enforced the Act, but traders had not breached it.¹¹⁷

The Lords of the Treasury in London were aware of this culture of commerce in British North America, but the operation of colonial commerce conflicted with their own understandings of the operation of the British Atlantic. Traders in Massachusetts had seen the growth of the colonies as a reason to free their commerce from restraint, but the Lords of the Treasury saw the vast increase in the size and population of British North America as impetus to finally fix the disparities in trade regulation that they believed had allowed colonial commerce to divert from

¹¹⁶ Francis Bernard to the Board of Trade, December 26, 1763, *PFBI*, 447-448. This letter was in reply to Circular Letter from the Board of Trade, October 11, 1763, *PFBI*, 420-421.

¹¹⁷ Francis Bernard to the Board of Trade, December 26, 1763, *PFBI*, 447-448. Bernard did have a stake in the repeal of these new enforcement measures, since under the new law prize revenue from seizures that once went in part to the Governor’s office now went to naval officers involved in seizures. See Francis Bernard to Board of Trade, April 28, 1766, Treasury Papers, T1/452, PRO.

its natural course.¹¹⁸ In 1765, Thomas Whately, George Grenville's trusted Secretary to the Treasury, published *The Regulations Lately Made Concerning the Colonies and the Taxes Imposed upon them Considered*, which outlined the thinking of Grenville's ministry on the new initiatives to tax the British North American colonies and defended it against critiques from North American pamphlets arriving in London, including Boston's *Considerations Upon the Act of Parliament* and Stephen Hopkins's *Essay on the Trade of the Northern Colonies*.¹¹⁹ Whereas colonial arguments had stressed the benefit of using foreign markets to grow North American and, in turn, British commerce, Whately articulated a goal of self-sufficiency within the British empire. He argued that Parliament had the right, as the governing body over a unitary empire, to make laws for the entire body and to override local laws when necessary.¹²⁰

Whately drew on works by British political economists like Malachy Postlethwayt in his arguments that the colonies should serve, and not compete with, the interest of the British metropolis.¹²¹ By trading illegally in foreign markets, colonists were weakening the whole, Whately argued: "No nation would tolerate such colonies upon any other conditions: it would be suffering themselves to be exhausted, impoverished, and weakened, in support of a people, who might divert their commerce to the advantage of another, perhaps and rival, and the Mother Country would be ruined by the prosperity of her colonies."¹²² The new duties under the Sugar Act, Whately claimed, would "reconcile the regulation of commerce with an increase in revenue."¹²³ He calculated that the new molasses tax would not decrease New England trade with foreign islands in the West Indies, but rather generate revenue from the existing

¹¹⁸ Lords of the Treasury to King George III, 1763, Treasury Papers, T1/430, PRO.

¹¹⁹ Ian R. Christie, "A Vision of Empire: Thomas Whately and the Regulations Lately Made Concerning the Colonies," in *The English Historical Review* Vol. 113 No. 451 (April 1998), 301-304.

¹²⁰ Christie, "A Vision of Empire," 304.

¹²¹ Christie, "A Vision of Empire," 305.

¹²² Qtd. in Christie, "A Vision of Empire," 306.

¹²³ Qtd. in Christie, "A Vision of Empire," 308.

commerce.¹²⁴ Additional measures would encourage commercial growth in those areas recently acquired from the French, specifically the beaver skin trade in British Canada and the whale fishery in St. Lawrence River, in the exportation of rice to Central America, and in the exportation of flax from North America to Great Britain, but not in North American trade to either the West Indies or to southern Europe.¹²⁵

Awareness within the Treasury of the customary practices of trade in Massachusetts and elsewhere alerted Treasury officials that the new Sugar Act would produce significant resistance in North American maritime communities. In their Memorial to King George with their recommendations for the Sugar Act, the Lords of the Treasury outlined the need for British ships and troops in North America and the West Indies to participate in the enforcement of the new regulations. The show of force by the British army and navy, they claimed, would suppress the practices of illicit trade and protect the Customs officers from “the violence of any desperate & lawless persons who shall attempt to resist the execution of the Laws.”¹²⁶

V

By 1766, Parliament responded to colonial outcry with new revenue measures that replaced the Sugar Act but did not allow New England’s Atlantic commercial activity to return to its former state. Since the passage of the Sugar Act, imports from Great Britain to North America had declined. Numerous American merchants and their partisans had testified before Parliament in the intervening period that the 1764 revenue acts had made money scarce and business dull. Danish traders could now undersell Americans in the rum trade to Africa, one New York merchant testified.¹²⁷ Benjamin Franklin, as the agent for Pennsylvania, testified to

¹²⁴ Christie, “A Vision of Empire,” 311-312.

¹²⁵ Christie, “A Vision of Empire,” 308-309.

¹²⁶ Lords of the Treasury to King George III, 1763, Treasury Papers, T1/430, PRO.

¹²⁷ Tyler, *Smugglers and Patriots*, 94-95; Schlesinger, *Colonial Merchants*, 58, 82-83.

Parliament in 1766 that the restrictions on British Americans' Atlantic commerce included in the recent revenue measures had decreased the colonists' ability to import British manufactures. He discussed how British North Americans traditionally paid for their imports from Great Britain by selling their own goods in British and non-British markets in the West Indies, in southern Europe, and throughout the North American colonies. "All the profits on the industry of our merchants and mariners, arising from these circuitous voyages, and the freights made by their ships, center finally on Britain," he claimed. Franklin emphasized how trade regulations and the patrols of the British navy had recently obstructed the North American trade to Spain in particular.¹²⁸

In place of the Sugar Act, the new British ministry under Lord Rockingham implemented the Revenue and Free Port Acts of 1766. The new commercial arrangements under the Revenue Act came directly from a compromise worked out between North American and West Indian merchants in London that included Massachusetts agent Dennys DeBerdt. The new Revenue Act reduced the molasses duty to one penny per gallon, but now all molasses, foreign and British, would pay this duty. Meanwhile, the Free Port Act opened the British islands of Dominica and Jamaica as free ports where North Americans could legally purchase foreign molasses and other foreign goods.¹²⁹ These measures attempted to legalize, and thus tax, all avenues of North American trade as they had operated prior to 1764, but they did not resolve all of the "chief demands" that North American maritime communities had articulated in protest to the Sugar

¹²⁸ *The Examination of Doctor Benjamin Franklin Relative to the Repeal of the Stamp Act, In MDCCLXVII* (S.I.: s.n., 1767), 6.

¹²⁹ Tyler, *Smugglers & Patriots*, 94-98. The British opened Dominica as a free port in 1766 in recognition of the significant New England trade to the nearby French island of Martinique and to divert some of this commerce into a British market, particularly by attracting French planters to bring their goods to Dominica. Free port status would turn the island into a trading center for goods from throughout the Windward Islands, thus giving New Englanders a legal and British option for the type of trade in which they already engaged and sought to protect in their protests against the Sugar Act. Dorothy Burne Goebel, "The 'New England Trade' and the French West Indies, 1763-1774," in *The William and Mary Quarterly* Vol. 20 No. 3 (July 1963), 340, 345.

Act.¹³⁰ Boston and New York merchants petitioned Parliament with renewed objections to the stringent enforcement mechanisms, the increased authority granted to customs officers, the new stipulations that all sugars imported to Great Britain through North American ports be classified and then taxed as foreign sugars, and the remaining prohibitions on the importation of fruits and olive oil from southern Europe.¹³¹ For American traders invested primarily in the West Indian trade, the new Acts offered a reasonable though imperfect compromise, one that at least enabled them to remain open for business. But for those who engaged in a variety of trade, particularly commerce in southern Europe, the continued divide between their commercial vision for the British empire and the vision articulated from London proved increasingly distressing and troublesome for their commerce.¹³² In Salem, where trade to southern Europe constituted a larger percentage of the port's trade than in Boston, many merchants and residents remained dissatisfied with these policy revisions that left their livelihoods and their political economy under threat.

The expanse of the Atlantic created great commercial opportunities for traders, while the same expanse made regulating this vast commerce under a unitary and systematic commercial policy nearly impossible in the late eighteenth century. By 1765, clerks in the Plantation Office complained that the paperwork received from customs officers in North America was still so inconsistent that they could not compare information across ports in order to detect illicit trading.¹³³ By 1772, John Sweetland, British customs Collector at Gibraltar, wrote to his

¹³⁰ Arthur Schlesinger, Jr. claimed that with the Revenue Act “the colonial merchants had won their chief demands in their contest with Parliament.” Schlesinger, *Colonial Merchants*, 91. John Tyler argued instead that the Revenue and Free Port acts were not very well received in North America. Tyler, *Smugglers & Patriots*, 100-107.

¹³¹ Tyler, *Smugglers & Patriots*, 103-105.

¹³² John Tyler wrote that traders engaged in commerce to southern Europe and the foreign West Indies considered smuggling, as it came to be known through British trade regulations, an economic necessity, and eventually they were likely to become advocates for independence from Great Britain. Tyler, *Smugglers & Patriots*, 241-251.

¹³³ Memorandum of the Plantation Clerk, May 16, 1765, Treasury Papers, T1/442, PRO.

superiors in London that while he tried to record the cargoes of American ships that touched at Gibraltar in order to better track American shipping, American ships still regularly evaded accurate monitoring. Captains' reports were Sweetland's only source on American trade, and captains could provide false information with little fear of getting caught. At Gibraltar, American ships arrived from the Mediterranean and the Iberian Peninsula. Those returning to North America declared they carried only salt, though Sweetland believed most also carried merchandise. Even if he did have the authority and manpower to search these vessels, Sweetland believed captains would simply clear out for Madeira, the Canary Islands, or "some other part of the world" and evade such inquiries. Sweetland observed that the duties on foreign merchandise like fruit from Spain would not be large if these Americans chose to carry these goods through England on their way back across the Atlantic, and yet most sailed direct for North America. "The cause of the Americans thus pursuing an illicit trade, does not I am told so much proceed from an inclination to deprive the Crown of its just Revenue," Sweetland wrote, "as to avoid that of prolonging their voyage into the English Channel, which especially in the winter months, is tedious and uncertain, insomuch, that their fruit cargoes in particular which thus come to England for a clearance are frequently very little worth."¹³⁴

Even as American shippers could manipulate customs reporting to protect themselves from seizure in some remote ports of the British Atlantic, when they returned home captains confronted customs officials with increasing authority to regulate, inspect, and seize their ships and cargoes. British trade regulations diminished the influence the local mercantile community

¹³⁴ John Sweetland to John Robinson, Esq. [Secretary to the Treasury], February 7, 1772, Treasury Papers, T1/491, PRO. Sweetland continued to report on suspected illicit trade by American ships through the 1770s. In October 1775, he reported to John Robinson that two schooners from Salem had recently arrived at Cadiz with cargoes of rum and North American produce. "The clandestine trade, in violation of the late Acts of Parliament, is already commenced, and as the winter months come on, will it is expected, become general." John Sweetland to John Robinson, October 2, 1775, Treasury Papers, T1/513, PRO.

once held, through cooperation with local customs offices, to control the oversight of commerce. Prior to 1764, local merchants and customs officers had made the enforcement of navigation acts regarding trade to the West Indies and southern Europe the rare exception rather than the rule. In 1759, for example, Boston merchant Gilbert Deblois had written to Samuel Curwen, a Salem merchant and the port's customs Collector, that he intended "publicly to inform" the Boston Collector that Captain Richard Ober was carrying prohibited items from southern Europe in a coasting vessel from Salem to Boston, "in order that they may be seized." Deblois claimed that Ober had cheated him, spurring Deblois to become an informant. Deblois was a "lover of Honest Men," and he asked Curwen to warn other Salem merchants trading fruit, wine, and oil from southern Europe so that they might "regulate themselves accordingly" and make sure that their goods were not on board Ober's coaster.¹³⁵

The new methods to enforce trade regulations in 1764 removed the locally-derived commercial policies that had long shaped trade in North American maritime communities like Salem. In 1768, the Treasury Office established the Commissioners of Customs for North America that sat in Boston to better monitor North American trade.¹³⁶ By February 1769, Boston Collector Roger Hale's nine-page instruction booklet had become a thirty-nine page manual when the Commissioners of the Customs supplied instructions to Salem's new Comptroller, John Mascarene. In addition to the new information Mascarene received on procedural matters, such as paperwork required from captains and duties due on certain goods, Mascarene's booklet included instructions on how to handle and protect informants as a critical

¹³⁵ Gilbert Deblois to Samuel Curwen, August 6, 1759, Curwen Papers, AAS.

¹³⁶ Dora Mae Clark, "The American Board of Customs, 1767-1783," in *The American Historical Review* Vol. 45, No. 4 (Jul., 1940), pp. 777-806.

way to combat smuggling in port.¹³⁷ For traders, captains, and merchants whose trade had long benefitted from lax enforcement of trade regulations, the new regulatory measures seemed stifling to their commerce and unnatural to the customary practices of their day-to-day business.

By the summer of 1768, discontent over British commercial policy that undermined American political economy erupted in riots in Salem and other ports in North America. Protestors attacked efforts by customs officers to monitor commerce and interrupt illicit trading, seeking to protect the customary practices of trade by which they had traditionally organized their commerce.¹³⁸ They sought to intimidate local individuals who collaborated in the new methods of trade regulation, such as Thomas Rowe, a tidesman in the Customs service in Salem, who was targeted by a protest on September 7, 1768. Rowe had been at work one night on board a recently returned ship locking up the hatches of its cargo holds when he heard sound of tackles across the wharves. Upon investigation, Rowe discovered a group of men without the supervision of customs officers hoisting casks of molasses out of a schooner that had arrived earlier that day from Guadeloupe and St. Eustatius. Without making himself known to the men, Rowe informed the port's landwaiter of his discovery, and a group of customs officers descended on the schooner to put an end to the unloading while Rowe returned to his post.¹³⁹

The next morning, as Rowe continued to stand guard aboard his assigned ship, a group of sailors rushed on board and dragged Rowe out to the town common. There, a Salem merchant, Henry Gardner, waxed and cut Rowe's hair and paraded him to the Salem Liberty Tree. After

¹³⁷ "Instructions by the Commissioners of His Majesty's Customs, to John Mascarene Esq., who is appointed Comptroller of His Majesty's Customs at Boston in New England in America," February 28, 1769, Dated Pamphlets, AAS.

¹³⁸ For a June 1768 incident in Boston following the seizure of the ship *Liberty* owned by John Hancock see George G. Wolkins, "The Seizure of John Hancock's Sloop 'Liberty,'" in *Massachusetts Historical Society Proceedings*, 55 (1921–1922):239–284. For mob action against customs collectors in Philadelphia and New London, Connecticut see T1/471, PRO.

¹³⁹ Deposition of Thomas Rowe, September 9, 1768, Treasury Papers, T1/465, PRO.

returning Rowe to the common, a group of local merchants and ship captains, including Captains Richard Derby and George Crowninshield, joined Gardner in covering Rowe with tar and feathers, sticking two balls of yarn on either side of his face, and parading him through town on a cart. On Main Street they stopped at the home of merchant Joseph Cabot, who supplied two signs reading “Informer” that were stuck to the front and back of Rowe’s head. As the parade continued, the crowd stopped at the houses of the Salem customs officers, where each time they let out three cheers and cried that Rowe was an informer. Next they stopped at the home of merchant James Grant, suspected of recently informing the authorities on another vessel that had entered Salem from Madeira. Rowe and the informers were enemies of the town, as they threatened Salem’s engagement with the Atlantic marketplace. The crowd carried Rowe to the edge of town, where Crowninshield released him and pushed him away, warning Rowe that if “I returned to that Town again I should lose my life.”¹⁴⁰

¹⁴⁰ Deposition of Thomas Rowe, September 9, 1768; John Fisher and John Mascarene, Collector and Comptroller of Salem, to the Commissioners of the Customs at Boston, September 7, 1768; Declaration of Mr. Savage to the Collector and Comptroller of Salem, September 7, 1768, Treasury Papers, T1/465, PRO. A Salem tide waiter identified the group of merchants and ship captains who led the Salem protest: Captain Lambert, Captain George Crowninshield, Captain Richard Derby, Hasket Derby, Captain Putingham, and Henry Gardner. Affidavit of Robert Wood, September 9, 1768, Treasury Papers, T1/465, PRO. See also the newspaper account of the protest in *Essex Gazette*, September 13, 1768.

Chapter 2 Nonimportation and Independence

As the widow Mehetabel Higginson prepared to depart Essex County for Halifax, Nova Scotia on a late April morning in 1775, her anxiety for the safety of those would stay behind in Massachusetts compelled her to write to her friend Timothy Pickering. She hoped that he would reconsider his decision to stay in the wake of the fighting at Lexington and Concord and as the people of Massachusetts turned violently on one another. Higginson and Pickering had enjoyed a long friendship, but in recent years the broad conflict of governance in the British Atlantic had wrenched apart their local community and left them with “wildly differing sentiment as to politics.” As Pickering took on a growing leadership role in the Salem militia and in Salem town committees, Higginson remained aligned with the so-called friends of government, many of whom fled North America as Loyalists over the coming years. By April 1775, the events of Lexington and Concord had pushed public anxiety to a new high. “You from the goodness of your heart never tho^t things would be carried the length they are,” Higginson wrote to Pickering. Now she expected the danger to worsen. “I can’t but say I am anxious for all my friends and particularly for you,” she wrote to Pickering. She implored Pickering to retreat to safety in Halifax, as only then “you never can fall in with the cruelty and rage against the friends to government, many of whom you are personally acquainted with and esteem.”¹

Changes in the broader political economy of the British Atlantic by the 1760s created local conflict in Salem that brought on a revolution by 1776.² Trade gave Salem residents a

¹ Mehetabel Higginson to Timothy Pickering, April 1775, Timothy Pickering Papers [cited hereafter as TPP], Massachusetts Historical Society, Boston, Massachusetts [hereafter MHS].

² The movement for resistance to Great Britain and then independence by 1776 was not a spontaneous action driven by “immediate passions,” nor was it the seemingly inevitable result of ideological conflict. Instead, broad structural changes to the British Atlantic created problems on a local level that galvanized political divisions and eventually brought about revolution. In T.H. Breen’s recent call to restore non-elites to the story of the revolutionary

particular understanding of the Atlantic economy and their place within it, and in the 1760s and 1770s, they used town and provincial politics to protect their conceptions of political economy amid disruptions caused by new commercial policies from London and eventually war.

Salemites protested imperial measures like the Sugar Act and the Stamp Act to save their town and province from “ruin,” arguing, as they genuinely believed, that if Massachusetts failed under the new measures, so would the entire imperial project. But the effort to unite Massachusetts in protest, particularly after the Townshend Acts in 1768, created conflict both within and between Massachusetts communities. Working within town government to organize on behalf of the revolutionary cause revealed that individual interests within Salem were diverse, often shaped by the intercolonial and transatlantic networks in which they conducted their lives and livelihoods. Concurrent agitation within provincial government revealed the disparate interests among Massachusetts towns, particularly the competing hinterlands and different commercial specializations between Salem and Boston, which hindered cooperation between towns. London’s attempt to reshape the political economy of the British Atlantic galvanized local political divisions in Massachusetts, as these different interests competed with one another for the majority voice in town and provincial government that held real authority to determine forms of protests against British policies.

The people of Salem had personal stakes in the political and commercial arrangements of the British Atlantic. The political economy of the Atlantic shaped the lives of Salem residents through the business of importing and exporting Atlantic goods; the maritime landscape of the town with its many wharves, counting houses, ships, and other facilities for commercial

movement, he argues that ideas about politics in British North America were driven by “immediate passions” and fears about personal safety and liberty. Breen puts the start of the Revolution in mid-1774 and argues that this moment was one of “spontaneous political rage.” T.H. Breen, *American Insurgents American Patriots: The Revolution of the People* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2010), 11, 16.

business; the community's familiarity with Atlantic markets in North America, the West Indies, and Europe; and the practices of governance through town government, the Customs service, and imperial trade regulations that facilitated and regulated British Atlantic commerce. In their lives at home, in their community town meetings, and in their trade, North Americans experienced the imperial crisis and all of its conflicts daily on a personal and local level.

Understanding the coming of the American Revolution in terms of political economy reveals the interplay between broad imperial dynamics and local circumstances that shaped responses to the imperial conflict throughout the British Atlantic. Like other subjects in British Atlantic communities in the Caribbean, in Canada, and other regions of North America, Salemites considered themselves part of the British empire structured around the Crown, and they responded to the imperial crisis of the 1760s and 1770s according to their particular geographic and commercial position within the political economy of the British empire.³ Specific issues of taxation and representation provoked heated debate and protest because they were symptoms of the salient alterations in the imperial political economy that put their British American interests in danger.

The nonimportation movement in Massachusetts beginning in 1768 intensified disagreements within Salem and among Massachusetts towns over how to adapt the province's commercial and political strategies to respond to the new regulatory policies for Britain's Atlantic colonies. In Salem, many of the townspeople who began protests against imperial measures like the Sugar Act, the Stamp Act, and the Townshend Acts left the nonimportation

³ For other works that use a political economic framework to explain responses to the imperial crisis in other regions of the British empire, see Andrew Jackson O'Shaughnessy, *An Empire Divided: The American Revolution and the British Caribbean* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2000); Edward Papenfuss, *In Pursuit of Profit: The Annapolis Merchants in the Era of the American Revolution* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1975); Sellers, *Charleston Business*. For a political economic work on the pre-revolutionary era, see Cathy Matson, *Merchants & Empire: Trading in Colonial New York* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998).

protest movement by 1768, even though they shared similar political economic sentiments to those who continued and eventually advocated for independence. These opponents of non-importation conducted trade with London, often as importers of manufactured goods, maintained membership in tight-knit and elite kinship networks that spanned the Atlantic, and many held positions within provincial government. These factors increased their interest in maintaining good relations with the British metropolis, while they also limited their political geography relative to other town merchants who traded throughout the Atlantic and could more easily cultivate political alliances with a broader community of merchants and mariners. As town and provincial governments took on more and more authority to construct and enforce nonimportation agreements by 1770, those men and women who opposed the measures felt increasingly marginalized, vulnerable to popular outrage, and restricted in their personal commercial pursuits. Since nonimportation movements relied on widespread compliance for their success, dissenters nonetheless maintained political influence in Salem. To nonimportation proponents, dissenters posed serious obstructions to town and provincial governments and their constituents striving to protect Salem's interest within the British Atlantic.

Local interests that had once been complementary in the operation of Massachusetts commerce and government fell into conflict by the 1770s. While historiography of New England town meetings during the imperial crisis has focused on the ability of these institutions to cultivate "bonds of cooperation" within the province's resistance movement, the divisions and alienation that town governments created in Massachusetts were just as important for shaping and building this movement and the revolution that followed.⁴ During the nonimportation

⁴ Elizabeth Mancke argues that "the New England town meetings were well suited to forging united opposition to British policy" and that the tradition and ability of towns and town committees of correspondence to communicate with one another in particular helped developed their unified resistance to British policies. Mancke, *The Fault Lines of Empire*, especially Chapters 4 and 7; for "bonds of cooperation," p. 139; for "forging united opposition," p. 77.

movements, constructing political protests through the mechanisms of town and provincial government turned different mercantile groups into enemies by forcing Massachusetts to speak with one voice when there were many. Growing distrust and outrage within Massachusetts sparked popular violence. For people like Higginson, safety and survival meant abandoning their homes and sailing for London, Nova Scotia, or islands of refuge in the West Indies. Others like Pickering reluctantly supported a new call for independence as their solution to this crisis. In his reply to Higginson, Pickering repeated his intention to stay in Massachusetts. Whereas Higginson feared for her life if she remained in Massachusetts, Pickering believed that staying was the means to achieve liberty. "I think it my duty not to desert my country, in that cause which I have hitherto espoused," he wrote to Higginson, "a cause which I believe to be founded on justice, altho' in conducting it many irregularities may have been committed; a cause which if given up, or the supporters of it be overcome, liberty itself I fear will expire."⁵ The divisive response to changes in British Atlantic political economy forced Salemites to choose sides by 1775, and set the stage for a separation from Great Britain most in Salem could not have imagined just a few years before.

II

In late 1767 and early 1768, the Salem community was actively engaged in its Atlantic commerce. At the harbor's edge, the town was laying out a new road to connect Salem's numerous wharves and maritime industries along this busy waterfront.⁶ The maritime trade of

See also Richard D. Brown, *Revolutionary Politics in Massachusetts: The Boston Committee of Correspondence and the Towns, 1772-1774* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1970).

⁵ Timothy Pickering to Mehetabel Higginson, May 2, 1775, Pickering Papers, MHS.

⁶ This new street was laid over an ancient way along the water that had been in place since the establishment of Salem. In 1799, the new street was named Derby Street, although town residents referred to the road with that name as early as 1774. Sidney Perley "Salem in 1700," in *The Essex Antiquarian* X (1906), 22, 61, 114.

Salem was still very much focused on markets in southern Europe and the West Indies, with heavy additional shipping traffic to and from the southern colonies of North America (Figure 2.1). As a customs officer for the port of Salem, Samuel Curwen maintained impost books full of accounts of duties received from Salem ships returning from Montserrat, St. Eustatius, Dominica, Barbados, and other ports in the West Indies, as well as accounts of drawbacks paid to Salem merchants for re-exporting their West Indian rum to other Atlantic markets.⁷ Salem merchant Richard Derby, Sr.'s ship *Antelope* had returned to Salem in July of 1767 from Montserrat, and by November of that year Derby was loading this 160-ton ship with fish and lumber and acquiring insurance from London to prepare her for a voyage to Cadiz, Gibraltar, or any beneficial market in that region under the command of Derby's son, Richard Derby, Jr.⁸ In April of 1768, shopkeeper Samuel Flagg was making his way from Boston to Salem, where he intended to open a dry goods store, and he sent his first memorandum requesting goods for his new endeavor to George Hayley in London.⁹ Curwen, meanwhile, was also busy in the import business as a hardware merchant. He wrote to London to purchase goods from the merchant house of De Berdt, Burkitt, & Sayre. Some of the goods he sold in Salem, and others he sent to his associate John Timmons in Philadelphia for sale in that market.¹⁰

⁷ An Account of Impost Rec'd in the Port of Salem &c. for the Province of Massachusetts Bay by Saml. Curwen from March 26, 1767 to 23 March 1768 Inclusive, Curwen Family Papers, Peabody Essex Museum, Salem, Massachusetts [cited hereafter as PEM].

⁸ In anticipation of this voyage, Derby wrote to Lane, Son & Frasier in London to obtain insurance for the vessel and to alert the London merchant house that the *Antelope's* captain may draw on them for funds during his trade in southern Europe, as was typical for Derby captains. Richard Derby Sr. to Lane, Son & Frasier, November 26, 1767, Derby Family Papers, Letterbook Vol. 11, PEM; *Early Coastwise and Foreign Shipping of Salem*, 9; For the *Antelope's* return see Account of Impost Rec'd in Salem, Curwen Family Papers, PEM.

⁹ Flagg expected that his imported goods would come from London by way of Boston. Samuel Flagg to George Hayley, April 19, 1768, Samuel Flagg Papers, PEM.

¹⁰ Samuel Curwen to Messrs. Debendt, Burkitt, & Sayre, November 26, 1767, Samuel Curwen to John Timmons, July 10, 1767, November 20 and 26, 1767, Samuel Curwen Papers, PEM.

Salem's West Indies trade was still anchored in commerce with non-British markets. In 1768, 99% of the imported molasses that Salem merchants and captains reported to customs officials came from non-British markets; in Boston foreign molasses made up only 31% of total reported molasses imports. Boston was renowned as a regional entrepôt market that took in goods from many faraway markets, including even some goods first imported into Salem, and distributed them to surrounding New England communities and other Atlantic markets. But statistics from the coasting trade also reveal Salem's role as an entrepôt. Although Boston outpaced Salem in the quantity of most goods imported through the North American coasting trade, Salem imported 9030 gallons of molasses from North America ports compared to Boston's 4570 gallons. Essex County and Massachusetts traders from smaller ports used Salem as a market and distribution center for their goods. In 1768, Salem also imported approximately three times as many boards and shingles than Boston, suggesting that the lumber-producing communities of New Hampshire and Maine were part of Salem's commercial hinterland.¹¹

Boston, however, remained the New England's chief commercial link to Great Britain, and its merchants and townsmen used this important role to attempt to pressure London to reverse the Townshend Acts in 1767. Although Salem merchants were in regular contact and business with Great Britain, Salem ships were not. Manufactured goods and even correspondence from Great Britain most often came by way of Boston. Ship clearances for the two ports in 1768 reflected the different Atlantic commercial geographies of the two ports.

(Figures 2.1 and 2.2). News of the new Townshend duties arrived in Massachusetts in August

¹¹ "An Account of the imports into the several ports of North America from the British & Foreign West Indies, Southern Parts of Europe & the Wine Islands, from the 5th January 1768 to the 5th January 1769," Cust 16/1, copy at the Library of Congress, Washington, DC. Of the 101,267 [pounds?] of cotton that Salem ships imported into Salem from October 1768 to October 1769, 78% came from foreign islands in the West Indies. Boston, by comparison, imported only 43% of its 84,749 pounds of cotton in that period from foreign islands. "An Account of the Quantity of Cotton imported in the Continent of North America from the British and Foreign West Indies from Oct. 10, 1768 to Oct. 10, 1769," Great Britain Customs Papers, MHS.

1767, and by October Boston town meeting members tried to align the towns of Massachusetts with Boston in a political protest using the strategy of nonconsumption.¹² Citing the financial hardships incurred by the entire province from taxes and from the importation of European commodities, the Boston town meeting adopted a resolution on October 28, 1767 “to promote Industry, Oeconomy, and Manufactures” within British North America. A Committee drew up a subscription whereby signers would agree not to purchase a long list of “foreign superfluities” generally imported from Great Britain and would instead promote manufactures in the British American colonies.¹³ More than 650 people in Boston ultimately signed the town’s subscription list.¹⁴ Thinking this protest measure would be more potent with additional allies, the Boston meeting attendees tasked the Selectmen with distributing a copy of the measure to Selectmen in every town in Massachusetts, as well as to principal towns in other colonies.¹⁵

¹² Robert Middlekauff, *The Glorious Cause: The American Revolution 1763-1789* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982), 154; Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., *The Colonial Merchants and the American Revolution, 1763-1776* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1917), 107, 110-111.

¹³ For meeting minutes and a list of the enumerated items see *A Report of the Record Commissioners of the City of Boston, Containing the Records of the Boston Selectmen, 1764-1768* (Boston: Rockwell & Churchill, 1889), 222-225.

¹⁴ The original subscription list with signatures is in the collections of the Houghton Library and available digitally. *Whereas this province labours under a heavy debt, incurred in the course of the late war : and the inhabitants by this means must be for some time subject to very burthensome taxes ...* (Boston : [s.n.], 1767). Houghton Library, Harvard University, Cambridge, Massachusetts.

¹⁵ *Boston Town Records*, 224. For the form letter that Boston Selectmen sent to the various towns, see *Gentlemen, In compliance with the orders of the town it is our honour to serve, we inclose you their votes past [sic] the 28th instant; and doubt not ... you will promote similar measures ...* (Boston: s.n., 1767).

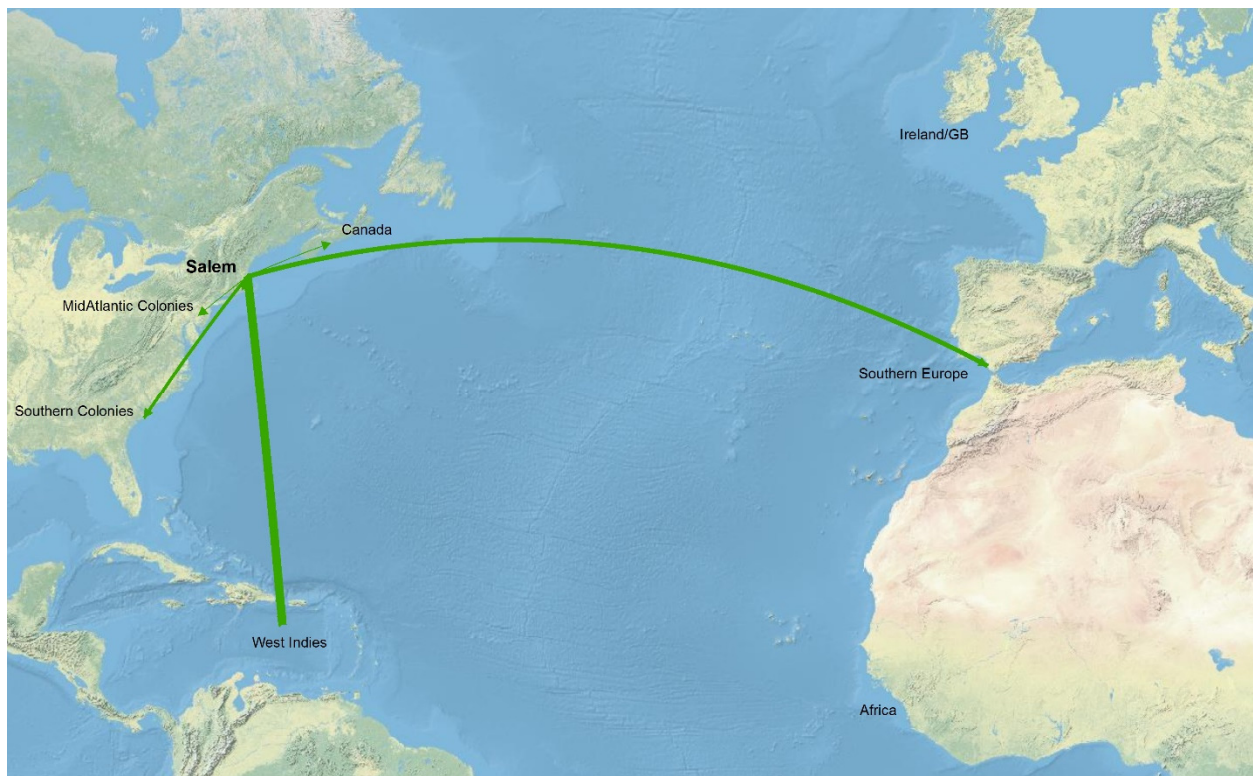


Figure 2.1: Ship Clearances from Salem by Region, 1768. Scaled by tonnage volume.

Source: CO 5/850, Massachusetts Shipping Lists, British National Archives [cited hereafter as PRO].

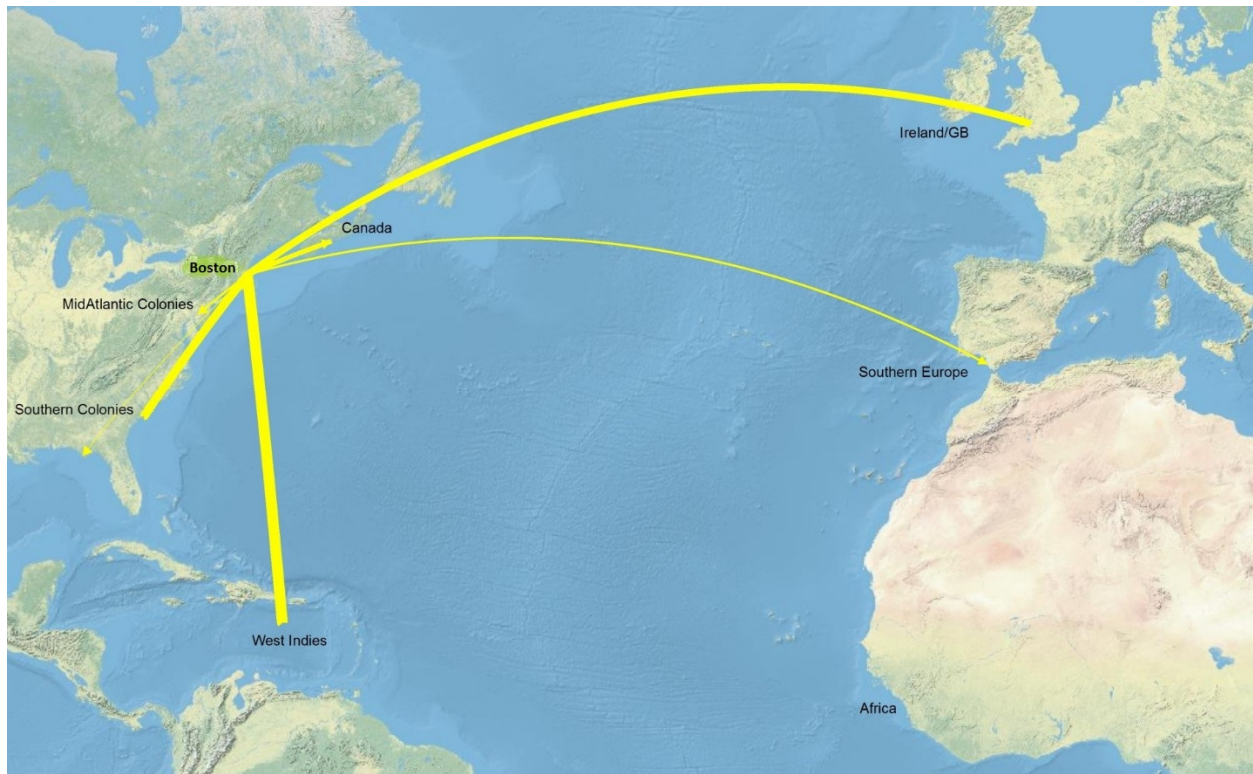


Figure 2.2: Ship Clearances from Boston by Region, 1768. Scaled by tonnage volume.
Source: CO 5/850, Massachusetts Shipping Lists, PRO.

Towns throughout Massachusetts did not automatically consume and repeat the politics of Boston as they received their letters from the Boston Selectmen. Boston's political efforts faced stiff resistance or deliberate disregard from many towns in the province that were not subsumed within Boston's commercial and political geography.¹⁶ Only twenty-four towns adopted the Boston nonconsumption measure out of a possible 196.¹⁷ Most were located near to

¹⁶ Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., *The Colonial Merchants and the American Revolution, 1763-1776* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1917), 110; Charles Mclean Andrews, *The Boston Merchants and the Non-Importation Movement* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1917)192. Alternatively, John Tyler points out the lack of appeal among many in Boston and among Massachusetts towns that the 1767 nonconsumption agreement garnered. John W. Tyler, *Smugglers and Patriots: Boston Merchants and the Advent of the American Revolution* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1986), 111-112.

¹⁷ Schlesinger tallied up the towns that adopted the Boston measure using newspaper reports. Schlesinger, *Colonial Merchants*, 110. The total of 196 Massachusetts towns includes twenty-three in the district of Maine. "Massachusetts City and Town Incorporation and Settlement Dates," Secretary of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, <<http://www.sec.state.ma.us/cis/cisctlist/ctlistalph.htm>>, visited July 1, 2014; "Maine Town Guide," New England Historic Genealogical Society, <http://www.americanancestors.org/maine-town-guide/>, visited July 14, 2014.

Boston in Suffolk or Middlesex County or south of Boston in Plymouth County (Figure 2.3).

Absent from the list of towns in support of the measure were any communities of Essex County.

Similarly, in western Massachusetts, Pittsfield was the only town to even discuss the letter from the Boston Selectmen before dismissing the matter without action.¹⁸

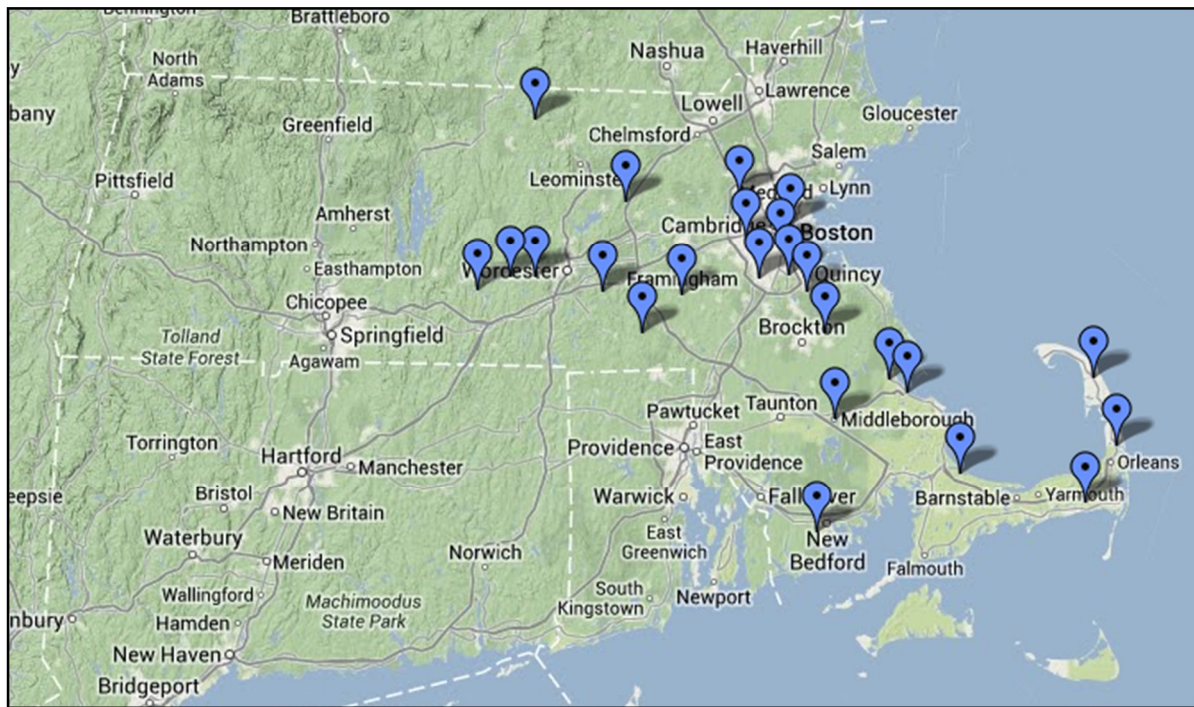


Figure 2.3: Massachusetts towns that adopted the Boston October 1767 measure of nonconsumption.

Source: Schlesinger, *The Colonial Merchants*, 110.

Boston did not speak for the rest of the province. Salem received the Boston Selectmen's letter of October 28 regarding the new nonconsumption initiative and called a town meeting on the matter in mid-November. A Salem Committee composed mainly of merchants and importers had drafted a subscription similar to Boston's to promote North American industry and manufactures, but enthusiasm in town was low, and the town meeting voted not to proceed with

¹⁸ Robert Taylor, *Western Massachusetts in the American Revolution* (Providence: Brown University Press, 1954), 57.

the subscription.¹⁹ Other Massachusetts towns similarly rejected part or all of Boston's resolution. Concord, Massachusetts residents voted their general approval for Boston's actions but passed no measure restricting consumption in their own town.²⁰ In Newburyport, the town meeting voted against joining Boston due to the town's reliance on British imports for its economic livelihood. Newburyport supported itself largely through shipbuilding, the Committee's report read, and the town often received payment for their ships in British manufactured goods, "so that the Importation and Purchase of these and our Staple Business (if we may so express it) have been almost inseparably linked."²¹

As Boston newspapers announced the towns that had followed suit on nonconsumption, they singled out Salem for its decision to disregard the Boston measure.²² Salem was an important population center and regional hub, one that Boston needed for its own protests to succeed. A writer in the *Boston Evening Post* who signed his letter "S----- C-----r" voiced his alarm that Boston's nonconsumption protest had become a thing of ridicule in some Massachusetts communities. He regretted that Salem and Marblehead in particular had chosen not to join with Boston due to their commercial interests. "As the inhabitants of both these towns are, the greatest part merchants, seafaring men, and fishermen, and their business and interest being chiefly *by way of the Sea*," the author wrote, "it is no wonder they should espouse the *same political principles by common consent*."²³

¹⁹ Committee members were Peter Frye, Benjamin Pickman, George Williams, Samuel Barton, Jr., and Joseph Blaney. Salem Town Meeting Minutes, November 23 and December 7, 1767, Salem City Clerk, Salem, Massachusetts.

²⁰ At the time Concord residents were engaged in rigorous efforts within Middlesex County to relocate some of their county's court facilities further west from Charlestown and Cambridge to a more convenient location Robert Gross, *The Minutemen and Their World* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1976), 39.

²¹ Quoted in Labaree, *Patriots and Partisans*, 21.

²² For an announcement of towns that aligned with Boston on nonconsumption, see *Boston Gazette*, January 11, 1768.

²³ Italics from original. *Boston Evening Post*, December 28, 1767. See also *Boston Evening Post*, December 21, 1767.

Salem was not the entrepot of European commodities that Boston was. Claiming that the Boston author had misrepresented Salem's motives in the town's recent rejection of Boston's nonconsumption measure, Salem resident Peter Frye responded in defense of his town meeting.²⁴ Frye emphasized that Salem "always has, and by all lawful methods intend to maintain their freedom, avoid excess and licentiousness in every form." Salem residents, Frye claimed, hoped to sustain a "good understanding and unity" among Massachusetts communities as the best way to "resist the scheme of those who may endeavor to enslave us." Nevertheless, he wrote that the form of the Boston nonconsumption measure would be detrimental to the Salem community because it would hurt certain traders in the interest of political protest. Salem could instead limit the consumption of luxuries in their private lives without resorting to a formal subscription. "The people of [Salem] have for time out of mind been esteemed extremely prudent," Frye argued, and "they therefore thought they might reject those articles (many of which they did not import or make use of) without giving offense to any."²⁵

III

As a commercial trader and a town officer, Peter Frye straddled the multiple perspectives on political economy that existed within Salem's diverse maritime community. From Frye's multiple roles in Salem, he saw both the benefits of Britishness and the very real colonial conflicts with new British regulations. In 1767, Frye served as one of Salem's two representatives to the Massachusetts General Court. In Salem town government, Frye held offices that ranged from tending the town passages for alewives in 1764 to Overseer of the Poor starting in 1766.²⁶ He was also a Justice of the Peace in 1767 under an appointment from the Governor

²⁴ Frye had been a member of the Salem Committee tasked with drafting the town's potential nonconsumption subscription.

²⁵ *Boston Evening Post*, January 11, 1768.

²⁶ Salem Town Meeting Minutes, March 19, 1764, March 10, 1766, March 9, 1767, Salem City Clerk's Office.

and would eventually serve as a judge in the Massachusetts Court of Common Pleas and as an officer in the Salem militia.²⁷ In the 1760s, Frye's service in town and provincial government forced him to make difficult and public decisions about the political strategies he supported to protect his home province.

In his business life, Frye invested himself in different forms of Atlantic commerce. Frye owned a shop in Salem for which he imported goods from England, including those goods targeted by British authorities for increased duties under the 1767 Townshend Acts.²⁸ In 1765 Frye owned shares in six Salem ships. This fleet consisted of four fishing vessels and two vessels engaged in foreign trade. In 1751, Frye had married Love Pickman, daughter of Salem merchant Benjamin Pickman, and Frye owned two of his vessels in partnership with his Pickman father-in-law.²⁹ As a merchant and participant in the fishery, Frye was concerned in both the movement of traditional New England fish cargoes around the Atlantic and access for New England fishing vessels to the fishing grounds off of Newfoundland. In July 1766, one of Frye's fishing vessels, the *Anna*, had its access to the Newfoundland fishery denied. A captain of the British Navy seized the *Anna* and her cargo of fish near the Straights of Bell Isle and impressed one member of its crew as part of Commodore Hugh Palliser's efforts to patrol the Newfoundland fishery and cut down on the illegal fish trade between New England and French ships. The British captain warned the *Anna*'s crew that "if he ever catch'd any New England Men a fishing there again that he would keep & Condemn their vesells & fish, and keep the men

²⁷ Lorenzo Sabine, *Biographical Sketches of Loyalists of the American Revolution, Volume 1* (Boston: Little, Brown, and Company, 1864), 449.

²⁸ Bettye Hobbs Pruitt, *The Massachusetts Tax Valuation List of 1771* (Boston: G.K. Hall & Co., 1978). From August 1768 to March 1770, John Mein's *Boston Chronicle* had named Frye as an importer of linens, nails, lead, and glass from London into Boston. *Boston Chronicle*, August 17 and 31, 1769, March 1, 1770.

²⁹ "A List of Salem Vessels in 1765," in *EIHC* LXII (Jan., 1926), 8-11; Sarah Saunders Smith, *The Founders of the Massachusetts Bay Colony* (Pittsfield, MA: Press of the Sun Printing Company, 1897), 162. In the newspapers at this time, Frye referred to himself as a merchant. *The Boston-Gazette*, February 4, 1765.

and inflict severe corporal punishment.” Vessels fishing in the area from England subsequently claimed an exclusive right to these fishing grounds, and they forced the *Anna* away. “I was oblig’d to quit the fishing Ground there although Fish was Plenty,” the *Anna*’s captain later testified, “and stood to the Westward....to the great loss of my voyage.”³⁰

As a Justice of the Peace, Peter Frye heard and signed statements by Salem merchants who found their commerce thwarted by the new Board of Customs Commissioners recently installed at Boston in early 1768 to oversee the implementation of the Townshend Acts in British North America, particularly in Massachusetts.³¹ By March 1768, the Boston customs Inspector alerted the Commissioners that several Boston merchants had applied to him the “for the usual indulgences,” and that he had told them that the “the full duties would be required.”³² As the Commissioners in Boston began to examine and compare customs records across the many North American ports now under their management, this broad perspective allowed them to better track the movement of colonial ships and their cargoes.³³

³⁰ Deposition of Samuel Masury, September 13, 1766, Miscellaneous Bound Manuscripts, MHS. Magra, *Fisherman’s Cause*, 174-175; William H. Whiteley, “Governor Hugh Palliser and the Newfoundland and Labrador Fishery, 1764-1768,” in *The Canadian Historical Review* I (1969): 141-163.

³¹ In their earliest correspondence back to London, the American Commissioners attributed the civil unrest and the resistance to Customs officers to the spread of democratic ideals promoted to the popular and suggestible masses. With the “minds of the people...susceptible of every impression,” the Commissioners wrote to London, public claims that Parliament had no right to lay external taxes on the colonies “[agreed] with their democratic principles” and raised Boston to a frenzy. Only through the “interposition of the sensible and moderate part” did the town find calm again. The Commissioners also blamed the press for spreading Boston’s frenzy: “Newspapers disseminated these ideas, and thus, the spirit which first showed itself in this town was diffused thro the neighboring provinces, where the people seem to be as ripe for riot, and mischief as they are here.” Commissioners of the Customs for American [cited hereafter as Commissioners] to the Lords of the Treasury, February 12, 1768, Treasury Papers, T1/465/21-24, PRO.

³² The Commissioners reported that one vessel denied such indulgences sailed off only to arrive near the harbor the next day where “a great number of people” unloaded her cargo of wine and shuttled it into town by night so that the vessel could enter in ballast in Boston the following morning. Attempts to prosecute this event through the use of an informer proved fruitless, since “no one dare to appear.” Commissioners to Lords of the Treasury, March 26, 1768, Transcript, Great Britain Commissioners of the Customs Collection, N1511, MHS.

³³ The Commissioners in Boston also worked to obtain customs records from Atlantic ports where colonial American ships often traded. They wrote to the Lords of the Treasury requesting that British officials in Southern Europe and the wine islands send the commissioners notice of any British ship that arrived in that region from North America in an effort to cut down on the goods that were entering undetected, and therefore untaxed, back into North

Salem's role as a transshipment center drew their particular attention, especially after a recent survey by a customs official in Boston had reported to the Commissioners that in Salem "all the owners & masters of every vessel coming with dutiable goods within the limits of that port, are concerned in smuggling."³⁴ In April 1768, a British naval vessel in Boston seized a coasting vessel from Salem loaded with molasses, lemons, and brandy belonging to Salem merchant Richard Manning. Manning had imported the molasses in his vessel *General Wolfe* that had arrived the previous November from Monte Christi, but as the Commissioners reviewed the case they noticed that Manning had listed more casks of molasses for re-export than he had listed on the vessel's inbound cargo.³⁵ In his deposition sworn before Peter Frye, Manning claimed that he had paid all duties on this molasses when it first arrived in Salem, before transporting some of it in batches to Boston for sale, selling some in Salem, and finally selling the molasses in question to Benjamin Hall, a rum distiller in Medfield, and sending it a coaster to the Mystic River.³⁶ Salem's customs collector, John Fisher, reported to the Commissioners that despite their efforts to track shipments of Atlantic goods, trade through transshipment centers like Salem remained elusive to strict oversight. A merchant, he wrote, "hath undoubtedly full

America. Commissioners of the Customs for America to the Lords of the Treasury, September 15, 1768, Treasury Papers, T1/465/206, PRO.

³⁴ Minutes of the Board of Commissioners, September, 27, 1768, Treasury Papers, T1/465/239-242, PRO. The Commissioners referenced the survey of Salem in these minutes. Copy of the Report of Jonathan Williams, Inspector General on the Port of Salem & Marblehead, Treasury Papers, T1/465/244-245, PRO.

³⁵ Commissioners to the Lords of the Treasury, July 15, 1768, Treasury Papers, T1/465/210-211, PRO.

³⁶ Deposition of Richard Manning, April 20, 1768, Treasury Papers, T1/465/212, PRO. Commissioners to the Lords of the Treasury, July 15, 1768, Treasury Papers, T1/465/210-211, PRO; Statement of Benjamin Hall to the Province of Massachusetts Bay Vice Admiralty Court, May 2, 1768, Treasury Papers, T1/465/213, PRO. The British naval schooner *Hope* had seized the coaster and its cargo on the grounds that the cargo lacked the proper paperwork to prove it had been legally imported into Massachusetts with full duties paid. The case went to the Admiralty Court in Boston, where the decision hinged on whether or not Hall's cargo had the proper cockets, rather than certificates, to prove that the duties on the molasses had been paid pursuant to Acts 4 Geo. III and 5 Geo. III. The court found that the relevant laws about cockets did not pertain to intracolony trade. During the trial, John Fisher produced an extract of a customs certificate as proof that Manning had paid all duties on the molasses in support of Hall's claim that the molasses was not liable to seizure. See the Decree of the Court of Vice Admiralty in the Case of George Dawson Esq. v. Ligher & Molasses, May 9, 1768, Treasury Papers, T1/465/235-238, PRO.

power to change, alter, diminish and increase the package thereof according to his own interest, humour or caprice, without any Custom house communication.”³⁷ The Commissioners, however, suspected continued collusion between the Salem customs officers and Salem merchants, and they dismissed Fisher under accusations that he had permitted smuggling in his district.³⁸

What the Commissioners found in Salem was a commercial economy designed to move goods in from North American and Atlantic markets and then out again to customers in Salem’s Atlantic world. The scope of Salem’s maritime commerce was pan-Atlantic. When Hall’s coaster was seized in Boston, its cargo of molasses, lemons, and brandy had likely originated in the West Indies and in southern Europe. Salem merchants like Manning and the seamen who had managed the acquisition of these goods were pan-Atlantic traders. New England fish, wood, rum, and other products met significant demand in the markets of southern Europe and the West Indies, while products like Madeira wine and West India molasses served demand in North America and beyond. Salem’s pan-Atlantic merchants capitalized on these complementary trading relationships as they moved goods throughout the Atlantic. Since voyages to the West Indies were shorter and required smaller vessels than voyages to Europe, commerce to the Caribbean and the coastal trade with other North American ports served as a common entry point for middling merchants into Atlantic commerce. After gaining more capital and expertise, many

³⁷ In an effort to explain why the quantity of molasses imported and exported by Manning did not match up, Fisher added that “it being the merchant’s interest to shift either molasses or sugars into the largest casks they can procure for transportation from hence to Boston, a hogshead of 150 gallons paying no more than one of 100, it is the common and constant practice.” John Fisher’s answers to the Commissioners, Treasury Papers, August 31, 1768, T1/465/228-9, PRO.

³⁸ The Commissioners charged Fisher with not having collected the full duties on Manning’s imports and with later providing the court with a certificate that covered Manning’s “clandestine proceedings.” Minutes of the Board of Commissioners of the Customs for America, September, 27, 1768, Treasury Papers, T1/465/239-242, PRO. The Lords of the Treasury found that the Commissioners’ charges against Fisher had not been proven, and they reinstated him in Salem. Lords of the Treasury to the Commissioners of the Customs for America, December 26, 1768, Treasury Papers, T1/465/ 247-248, PRO.

of these entrepreneurs expanded their business to include trade with southern Europe. Regular market fluctuations imbued the culture of this commerce with a focus on managing risk.³⁹ As they built and outfitted ships and loaded and traded cargoes, these enterprising merchants did regular and direct business with the broader maritime community of sailors, artisans, retailers, and other merchants.⁴⁰

Pan-Atlantic merchants organized their commerce to respond to opportunity and to risk and consequently to avoid dependency on any single market. This strategy encouraged them to intermix their trade in British places like Barbados and Gibraltar with trade in non-British markets in southern Europe or in the foreign islands of the West Indies. Historiographical treatment of these pan-Atlantic merchants has cast their trade as smuggling or as commerce “outside the empire,” but to merchants like Manning, these non-British markets were integral and commonplace to the structure of British Atlantic commerce, even if they were outside the territorial boundaries of British Atlantic governance and settlement.⁴¹ Manning thought of himself as an Atlantic Briton, making profit off of ports all around the ocean. These merchants did not want their commerce to be restrained by regulations and officials operating out of ignorance, as they believed, to the detriment of wider commercial activity in the British Atlantic, so they sought and expected British officials’ indulgences such as low duties on foreign imports. But these Salem merchants nonetheless recognized and embraced the idea that their broad Atlantic commerce, moving goods from one market to another, depended on membership in the British Atlantic, with the liberties of Englishmen and the protections of the British navy.

³⁹ See Matson, *Merchants & Empire*; Doerflinger, *A Vigorous Spirit of Enterprise*.

⁴⁰ Matson, *Merchants & Empire*, 4.

⁴¹ Tyler, *Smugglers & Patriots*, 246-247.

The implementation of the Townshend Acts and the operations of the Board of Customs Commissioners spurred Massachusetts residents to consider new non-importation protests early in 1768. The Townshend Acts applied new duties on imports like glass, papers, and tea and installed extensive new customs policies for submitting bonds, acquiring cockets and certificates for commercial cargoes, and searching vessels. In March, Boston merchants gathered to discuss and draft a new nonimportation strategy that they hoped would operate on a continental scale. The agreement that emerged called on all subscribers to stop the importation of European goods, with an exception for items used for the fishery, beginning on June 1, 1768. Signers agreed to inform their correspondents that they were halting orders for new manufactured goods so that “the said Impediment may be removed & Trade and Commerce may again flourish.”⁴²

The stipulation that nonimportation would not go into effect unless trading towns both in Massachusetts and in neighboring colonies adopted similar resolutions made the agreement appealing to potential signers worried about losing business to competitors who might otherwise not participate in the protest.⁴³ Signers agreed to this protest measure with awareness through their own commercial experiences and inter-colony connections that effectively stopping trade in the short term meant stopping it among a critical mass of North American ports. As the Boston merchants forwarded their nonimportation agreement to other Massachusetts towns and other provinces, individual communities responded and made alterations to the measure based on their own perspectives on the British Atlantic. Newburyport in Essex County agreed to the

⁴² *Diary of John Rowe*, p. 154-155.

⁴³ See text of agreement in *Diary of John Rowe*, 155. For the original Boston agreement with signatures see the Samuel P. Savage Papers I, MHS. Boston merchants were worried about their competition with one another. Following the March 4th Boston meeting, subscription lists were passed among the port’s importers of British goods for signatures and then put on display so that “each gentleman will conclude whether the subscription is so general as to determine him to conform his subscription.” Despite references to these merchants as “gentlemen” at least two women—Elizabeth Craigie and Jane Eustis—signed the Boston agreement. Boston notice, March 4, 1768, Samuel P. Savage Papers I, MHS.

nonimportation measure, but only as “local circumstances will admit.” Aware of their competitors, the Newburyport merchants and traders wrote to Boston that in addition to the fishery items already exempt from the nonimportation measure, Newburyport signers had made their compliance dependent on the exemption of “all that either Boston, Salem, or Marblehead have or shall except.”⁴⁴

In Salem, Peter Frye led a local nonimportation movement that was similarly concerned with constructing a continental protest. Salem merchants and traders gathered on March 29, 1768 and adopted Boston’s nonimportation measure with few alterations.⁴⁵ Joining Frye on the Salem committee to correspond with other towns over nonimportation and call meetings among the signers of Salem’s nonimportation agreement were Samuel Curwen and Joseph Blaney. All three were Harvard graduates, justices of the peace, and office holders in the Salem town meeting.⁴⁶ Both Curwen and Blaney had served as Salem Selectmen, and Blaney still held this office in 1768.⁴⁷ Both men were related to prominent Salem landowner, judge, and General Court Representative William Browne.⁴⁸ Although Blaney owned less than 200 tons of shipping in Salem, he owned a wharf, and by 1771 there were only five other Salem men who owned as

⁴⁴ Newburyport Committee to Boston Committee, April 16, 1768, Samuel P. Savage Papers I, MHS.

⁴⁵ While Boston merchants, for example, had referred to imports from Great Britain as “excessive” in their justification for stopping trade, the Salem group claimed that the protested duties increased the prices on the “goods as are absolutely necessary for our use & trade.” The change made sense for Salem because the port was not an entrepôt of European goods like Boston, and also because Frye and his fellow Salem nonimportation leaders were invested in the dry goods trade and interested in [stabilizing] connections with Great Britain. Text of the Boston agreement available online. Massachusetts Historical Society, “John Rowe Diaries.” Accessed November 29, 2014. <http://www.masshist.org/revolution/image-viewer.php?item_id=432&mode=transcript&img_step=2&tpc=#page2>; Salem nonimportation agreement, March 29, 1768, Samuel P. Savage Papers I, MHS.

⁴⁶ Blaney would have been thirty-eight years old in 1768. Diary of William Pynchon, 21; George Atkinson Ward, *Diary and Letters of the Late Samuel Curwen* (Boston: J.H. Francis, 1842), 10.

⁴⁷ Salem Town Meeting Minutes, May 16, 1763, March 19, 1764, March 9, 1767, March 14, 1768.

⁴⁸ Blaney was Browne’s brother-in-law. Curwen a second cousin of Browne’s father. Richard Morris, “Social Change, Republican Rhetoric, and the American Revolution: The Case of Salem, Massachusetts,” in *Journal of Social History*, Vol. 31, No. 2 (Winter 1997), 423.

much or more feet of wharf space in town as Blaney.⁴⁹ By 1768, Curwen was fifty-three. In 1745, he had participated in the expedition to conquer Louisburg, and since 1759 he had served as an Impost Officer for Essex County, Massachusetts.⁵⁰ Curwen was a dry goods importer with a specialization in selling hardware.

In contrast to merchants like Richard Manning, Curwen and Blaney lived within a predominantly Anglo-American Atlantic. Their political appointments and kinship connections tied them into provincial and even imperial governance. They were commercial people, but they were more invested in real estate than in shipping.⁵¹ As an importer, Curwen looked to his Atlantic contacts to promote and protect his business interests, but these contacts were primarily traders in other North American ports or in England. As currency grew scarce in North America by November 1767, for example, Curwen turned to his associate John Timmons in Philadelphia and suggested that the two men purchase goods from London jointly so that they could double or triple their stock and safeguard themselves against the new abundance of traders working on credit and selling dry goods at rock bottom prices.⁵² He kept in regular correspondence about trade with his London merchant suppliers, De Berdt, Burkitt & Sayre. Curwen envisioned a political economy of the British Atlantic that was very similar to the one envisioned by merchants like Richard Manning, but Curwen and Manning played different roles in this shared system. Pan-Atlantic and Anglo-Atlantic merchants could complement each others' economic roles; indeed pan-Atlantic merchants relied on dry goods importers to supply goods for their

⁴⁹ Pruitt, *The Massachusetts Tax Valuation List of 1771*. For notice of ship leaving for South Carolina from Blaney's wharf in 1772, see *Essex Gazette*, December 12, 1772.

⁵⁰ Ward, *Diary and Letters of the Late Samuel Curwen*, 11-14, 18.

⁵¹ Morris, "Social Change, Republican Rhetoric, and the American Revolution."

⁵² Samuel Curwen to Messrs. Deberdt, Burkitt, & Sayre, November 26, 1767, Samuel Curwen to John Timmons, July 10, 1767, November 20 and 26, 1767, Samuel Curwen Papers, PEM.

Salem homes and their ships. Nevertheless, the trades themselves operated with different commercial and regulatory needs.

Whereas pan-Atlantic merchants thought foremost about promoting shipping trades as the commercial means to finance imports from Great Britain, Curwen considered trade with Great Britain as his primary commercial interest and goal. The Atlantic dry goods trade, after all, was his personal line of business. The benefits of membership in the British Atlantic to men like Curwen were in the commercial stability that came with British credit, currency, and the safety and protections from non-British competition that came with the British Navy and mercantilist policy, not in the expansion of trade, particularly the carrying trade, to distant markets. While pan-Atlantic merchants spoke of the essential benefits of British trade indulgences, dry goods importers praised the Navigation Acts. By 1768, for example, the Boston dry goods importing firm J. & J. Amory, which by 1769 also maintained a store in Salem, regularly made the point in their letters to London that the firm had no problem with Parliamentary actions that regulated colonial trade in foreign commodities, since the British Navigation Acts created a political economy in which their importing business could best succeed by restricting competition from traders in foreign markets.⁵³ They were “sensible that there is no power on earth with whom we could so well be connected as with Great Britain, as almost all our interests coincide.” They wrote to London that they were grateful for the British fleets and armies that protected their security, and also for the British system of trade that put restrictions on imports from foreign markets: “We are contented with a restriction upon our trade, especially that part which it is the

⁵³ The Amory brothers did protest Parliamentary laws that sought to raise a revenue off of trade. J. & J. Amory to Messrs. Nat. & Robt. Denison, Oct. 29, 1768; J. & J. Amory to Messrs. Harrison and Ausley, July 26, 1769, Amory Family Papers, MHS.

most for the interest of Great Britain, to exclude us from, we mean the Dutch & Northern Trade.”⁵⁴

Salem’s commercial community included traders with Anglo-American perspectives and pan-Atlantic perspectives. The categories were general, and on the ground in Salem, daily life often thwarted such tidy and rigid classifications. Some traders, like the importer Samuel Flagg, engaged in Anglo-American trade through the dry goods business but still sided politically with pan-Atlantic merchants. Nonetheless, this basic and overarching distinction in commercial practice did lead to different understandings of the political economy of the British Atlantic and different reactions to the new British commercial regulations by 1767. For Manning, serving the interest of the British Atlantic was a pan-Atlantic process that involved provisioning British Atlantic settlements, strengthening the presence and skill of British maritime commerce, and remitting proceeds back to Great Britain. For Curwen, the Amorys, and other importers, serving the interest of the British Atlantic was a process they carried out in the more narrow context of Anglo-American trade and government.

As Massachusetts communities considered new nonimportation protests in 1768, potential participants considered their competitors on an Atlantic scale as they debated the new political strategy to combat the Townshend Acts. While Thomas Cushing, speaker of the Massachusetts Assembly wrote to Dennys De Berdt, Agent for Massachusetts in London, extolling the cooperation of Salem and other communities in Massachusetts, New York, and likely Philadelphia in forming a joint nonimportation agreement, Curwen also wrote to De Berdt to voice his concern and unease over the fractures within the same movement.⁵⁵ Salem

⁵⁴ J. & J. Amory to Messrs, Devonshire & Reeve, June 16, 1766, Amory Family Papers, MHS.

⁵⁵ Thomas Cushing to Dennys De Berdt, April 18, 1768, printed in “Letters of Thomas Cushing, from 1767 to 1775,” in *Collections of the Massachusetts Historical Society*, Fourth Series, Vol. IV (Boston: Little, Brown, and Company, 1858), 350-351.

merchants and traders had approved the nonimportation measure with the clause that it would only be binding if New York, Philadelphia, and Salem's Essex County neighbors followed suit. When New York merchants agreed to stop importation after October 1, 1768 but Philadelphia merchants chose not to participate, Boston merchants moved to proceed with the protest anyway, and they adopted October 1, 1768 as the new date to stop their own importation from Great Britain. With Philadelphia traders still importing, Curwen's London suppliers would still have channels through which to get their goods to the North American market. Curwen would lose business to these competitors, while the small nonimportation protest would weaken the measure's influence in London and lessen the chances of winning regulatory change. "You will doubtless by this opportunity hear of a Combin. not to import from GB after Oct. till the Act for laying an Impost duty on glass &c. be repealed," he wrote to his supplier of manufactured goods in London, Messrs. De Berdt, Burkitt & Sayre. "What effect (should such a plan really be perfected here) have here or with you time only can develop," Curwen continued, "but this we may all be assured of, it give the merchts. great uneasiness & the enemys of America great indignation & I apprehend advantage."⁵⁶

IV

Massachusetts communities divided against one another as inhabitants with different Atlantic perspectives used the town meeting to protect the social and commercial organization in which they lived. The majority in town meeting held the authority not only to allocate critical local resources, but also to articulate the town interest to provincial and Atlantic audiences through petitions and through the selection of representatives to the Massachusetts General Court. During the imperial crisis, town governments took on the authority to craft and enforce

⁵⁶ Samuel Curwen to Messrs. Deberdt, Burkitt & Sayre, May 5, 1768, Curwen Family Papers, PEM.

nonimportation protests. Membership in the town meeting majority or service as a town officer were, therefore, not positions that Salem residents gave up eagerly or easily. Town debates over political action were vigorously and often viciously contested. The stakes for the winners and losers were high for personal property, safety, and standing within the town. Consequently, the political controversies of the imperial crisis in the British Atlantic often played out most tangibly and most alarmingly for Salem residents on a local level, organized around town meeting.

By July of 1768, Salem's response to the Circular Letter controversy in the Massachusetts House of Representatives revealed this intense and divisive competition over town authority. By February, the Townshend Acts had sparked an angered Massachusetts House of Representatives to approve and distribute a Circular Letter to the legislatures of the other British North American colonies calling on them to "harmonize with one another" in common protest that these Acts "are infringements of their natural and constitutional rights; because....they are not represented in the British Parliament."⁵⁷ Citing the Letter's challenges to Parliament's authority, Lord Hillsborough, Secretary of State for the colonies, ordered Massachusetts Governor Francis Bernard to dissolve the Massachusetts assembly unless the members of the House voted to rescind the Circular Letter. At this insistence, both of Salem's Representatives, Peter Frye and William Browne, joined a group of seventeen in a July vote to rescind. This group, however, fell in the minority by a large margin. Ninety-two House members voted not to rescind the Letter, and Boston newspapers worked quickly to publish the names of the seventeen rescinders along with the towns these represented. Frye and Browne from Salem appeared prominently at the top of the list.⁵⁸

⁵⁷ Avalon Project, "Massachusetts Circular Letter to the Colonial Legislatures, February 11, 1768." Accessed, July 2014. http://avalon.law.yale.edu/18th_century/mass_circ_let_1768.asp.

⁵⁸ *Boston Weekly News Letter*, July 7, 1768.

The actions of the Salem Representatives and the Boston newspapers had put Salem's reputation as a town and the political views of its residents on public trial. The *Boston Gazette* called the seventeen rescinders "parricides" and labeled Peter Frye a hypocrite due to his former support of nonimportation measures.⁵⁹ These public dispersions caused "unease" among many of the Salem inhabitants who felt "abhorrence" at the actions of Frye and Browne.⁶⁰ On July 16th, Samuel Barton, Richard Derby, and fifty-six other Salem inhabitants petitioned the town Selectmen to call a town meeting to discuss the Circular Letter and to vote on whether the town approved of House's vote not to rescind.⁶¹ Barton, Derby, and the other Petitioners were confident that the majority of the town freeholders felt that there was nothing in the Circular Letter that opposed the constitutional authority of Parliament, and they expected that the forthcoming town meeting would "let the public know that the minds of the people of [Salem] were not familiar with those of its Representatives."⁶²

The town meeting on July 18th was the "fullest meeting perhaps ever known" in Salem at the time, and it was marked by "temper and heat" as Salem voters competed over authority in town government. Benjamin Pickman called the meeting to order as Moderator. Richard Derby and his cadre of pan-Atlantic merchants had the majority, and they voted first that the town had the legal right to call such a meeting, and second that the town approved of the Massachusetts

⁵⁹ Salem did not have its own newspaper until August 1768. *Boston Gazette*, July 11, 1768. The Peter Frye criticisms appeared in a letter addressed M.M. The references to Salem's forefathers and the call for a Salem town meeting appeared in a letter addressed Cincinnatus. The post script of that letter read: "The above, with little variation, may be considered as an Address to every Town in the Province which had the Misfortune to be scandalized by their Representatives in the last General Assembly."

⁶⁰ Letter from "A Native of Salem," *Boston Evening Post*, August 15, 1768.

⁶¹ Salem Town Meeting Minutes, July 16, 1768, Salem City Clerk; *Supplement to the Boston Gazette*, August 1, 1768.

⁶² *The Boston Evening-Post*, August 17, 1768; Samuel Barton submitted the original petition to call a town meeting to address the Circular Letter. Minutes of Salem Town Meeting, July 16, 1768, Salem Town Records, Salem City Clerk.

House of Representatives in their vote not to rescind the Circular Letter.⁶³ At the conclusion of the voting, thirty participants then rose to submit a protest against the legitimacy of the town meeting, led by the Moderator, Benjamin Pickman. The meeting devolved into character attacks between Derby's Petitioners and Pickman's Protestors aimed at weakening the legitimacy and confidence of each side's claim to authority. Both sides looked to protect their understanding of the town's interest from undue influences. Pickman denounced Boston "with the most scurrilous language," as Barton, Derby, and the other Petitioners used the meeting to clarify publically that the interest of town meeting members was not the same as the interest of the town's representatives. The language from both sides was fierce, and the duration of the meeting grew long. Both sides saw high stakes in winning or losing the debate, as each wanted a role in managing town government. For the Derby faction, their victory in winning majority approval for their petition meant that they would not have to be "slaves" to their Representatives.⁶⁴ For the Pickman faction, defeat of their protest after such a contentious meeting would mean that they had lost influence in town meeting and with it an authoritative voice over town affairs due to the decreased likelihood of reelection to town office.

The debate that ensued reflected the local clash of commercial and political interests now demonstrably at odds with one another, even though both strongly centered on membership in the British Atlantic. Curwen, Blaney, and Frye had all signed the Pickman protest, along with twenty-seven other men who served in appointed offices in the Massachusetts judiciary, as officers in the Salem militia, or in commercial trades like importing that did not involve

⁶³ Minutes of Salem Town Meeting, July 18, 1768, Salem City Clerk.

⁶⁴ Letter from "A Native of Salem," *Boston Evening Post*, August 15, 1768.

significant investment in shipping.⁶⁵ Many of the men were related. With the exception of Pickman who did significant trade to markets around the Atlantic, the Protestor group consisted of men who existed largely in an Anglo-American Atlantic world.⁶⁶ In contrast, Barton and Derby were maritime shippers like Richard Manning who owned vessels and traded goods throughout the Atlantic. In 1771, twenty-nine-year-old Barton owned seventy-seven tons of shipping, £630 worth of merchandise, and a warehouse.⁶⁷ Derby was Salem's wealthiest merchant. His fleet of ships in 1765 was engaged in both the fishery and in maritime trade, but in this period Derby shifted his investment increasingly into pan-Atlantic shipping. His sons Richard Jr., Elias, and John, along with his son-in-law George Crowninshield served as captains aboard Derby vessels as they traded in the West Indies, southern Europe, and North America.⁶⁸ Traditionally, town government had created a space from which the Pickman group could tie themselves into the hierarchy of provincial and imperial governance, but when the Derby faction took initiatives to use town meeting to protest against that system of governance, Pickman and the protestors turned to new arguments that this 1768 town meeting was illegitimate.⁶⁹

⁶⁵ For a list of the protestors and their positions within provincial government, as well as their family relations to each other, see *Boston Gazette*, July 25, 1768. For a discussion of how many of these men and old Salem families had abandoned maritime commerce by this time, see Morris, "Social Change, Republican Rhetoric," 422, 424.

⁶⁶ In his study of New York, Daniel Hulsebosch wrote about the political competition between New York ruling elite and cosmopolitan New Yorkers who thought in terms of an "imperial interest." Daniel Hulsebosch, *Constituting Empire: New York and the Transformation of Constitutionalism in the Atlantic World, 1664-1830* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2005).

⁶⁷ *Vital Records of Salem Massachusetts to the end of the Year 1849, Volume 1 Births* (Salem, MA: The Essex Institute, 1916), 73.

⁶⁸ Morris, "Social Change, Republican Rhetoric," 422, 424.

⁶⁹ At a time when the relationship between provincial and imperial governing bodies formed a core debate in the imperial crisis, town meeting rules grew contested since they were structured more on customary practice than on explicit language in legal text. The protest of the Pickman group, for example, rejected the idea that the petitioners "had any Right by Law, to order or require a Meeting of the said Town for any Cause like that mentioned in the Warrant." Minutes of Salem Town Meeting, July 18, 1768, Salem Town Records, Salem City Clerk. Under Massachusetts provincial law, town meetings could be called for the annual election of officers and "when and so often as there shall be occasion of a town meeting for any business of publick concernment to the town." Only ten freeholders were needed to request a legal town meeting. *The Charters and General Laws of the Colony and Province of Massachusetts Bay* (Boston: T.B. Wait and Company, 1814), 252, 411.

This was a battle between competing webs of interdependency and commercial interest, not between classes. An attendee at the town meeting compared the tax payments of the Protestors and the Petitioners to investigate a charge that “the petitioners for the said meeting were only of the lower sort of people.” While Pickman and fellow Protestor Francis Cabot did pay some of the highest taxes in Salem, one Petitioner, left unnamed, paid the highest taxes among both groups. The attendee noted that Richard Derby, who had played a prominent role in the meeting, paid more taxes than half of the Protestors, and that ten of Derby’s co-Petitioners paid more taxes than any the Protestors, Pickman and Cabot excepted.⁷⁰ Salem was only 2 ½ miles long, and it was a town of elite merchants, of officeholders, of ship officers, of maritime laborers, and of sailors. Historian Daniel Vickers described economic differentiation in colonial Salem as scattered throughout the town, not concentrated in particular wards. While many of the town’s wealthiest residents lived on the main corridor of Essex Street, this was also the bustling town business center surrounded in close proximity by the homes of Salem’s less affluent inhabitants. Instead of living in elite seclusion, Vickers wrote, Salem’s richest residents “exercised much of their influence through social connections to those who lived nearby.”⁷¹ Social and commercial relationships bound groups together in webs with social gradations, not sharp class divisions.⁷²

In this maritime community, credit lines bound people together across economic status through links of interdependency. Unsurprisingly, then, this political contest in town meeting over the Circular Letter eventually turned to credit as a way to encourage or force political

⁷⁰ *Boston Evening Post*, August 15, 1768.

⁷¹ Vickers, *Young Men and the Sea*, 135.

⁷² For the argument that Salem’s community was characterized by “chains of personal dependency far more than sharp distinctions of class” see Daniel Vickers, *Young Men and the Sea*, 86, 132-136. For a discussion of the many people and trades that constituted the colonial maritime community in Philadelphia, see Sherryllynne Haggerty, *The British-Atlantic Trading Community, 1760-1810: Men, Women, and the Distribution of Goods* (Boston: Brill, 2006).

allegiance in order to gain the all-important town meeting majority. As tempers grew fierce, one Protestor threatened that he would “not chuse to credit any of the petitioners with any part of his interest.” But this threat lacked sway at the meeting because the Protestors were not the exclusive providers of credit in Salem. There were other credit networks that attendees could and likely did rely on for their trades or household economies. Consequently, the Derby group of Petitioners doubted that the Protestors’ credit was very large, or at least larger than their own. The Petitioners suspected that “were [the protestors’] debts paid, little would remain with them.”⁷³

The July meeting over the Circular Letter sparked significant and enduring discord within the Salem community. Many townspeople took Salem’s celebration of the anniversary of Stamp Act protests on August 16, 1768 as an opportunity to highlight the political divisions in the town. Among singing, cannon fire, and parading through the streets, the celebration included a number of toasts to a constitutional empire, the rights of British colonies, and those that supported these principles, including “the *Constituents* [of Salem, Ipswich and Marblehead], who have publicly approved of the Vote against *Rescinding*.”⁷⁴ Salem residents began sending letters to the new *Essex Gazette*, which began publication on August 2, 1768, and the editor grew uneasy over printing these opinion pieces for fear that “any disputes, especially at this Time, must be attended with Consequences prejudicial to the Community,” though he did agree to print pieces from both sides of the debate. In these published letters, the community was at the heart of the dispute. Although Salem residents shared a general consensus about the town’s shared contribution to the common good and political economy of the British Atlantic, there was no such agreement about

⁷³ *The Boston Evening-Post*, August 15, 1768.

⁷⁴ *Essex Gazette*, August 16, 1768. Italics from original.

how to align these different interests through town meeting as individuals with varying commercial roles in the British Atlantic had different stakes in political protests.⁷⁵

V

Some of the most dangerous and real enemies to liberty, both sides agreed, were local. By August 1768, a new nonimportation movement intensified already hostile divisions within Salem. Meeting at the King's Arms Tavern, Salem merchants and traders deliberated on how best to regulate their trade as it suffered under the difficulties and disturbances of the new revenue acts.⁷⁶ On August 7, 1768, these merchants and traders adopted a new nonimportation agreement in-line with Boston's efforts to protest the arrival of the American Board of Customs Commissioners and the Townshend Acts. Unlike the March agreement, this one was not conditional on the adoption of similar nonimportation agreements in ports like Philadelphia and New York. The August agreement was unilateral, and it bound signers to halt their orders and importations of British goods and merchandise, except articles for the fishery, from January 1, 1769 to January 1, 1770. Additionally, signers agreed that the nonimportation of tea, glass, paper, and painters colors—those items taxed under the Townshend Acts—would not be bound to a specific timeline, but would remain in effect “until the Act imposing Duties on those articles shall be repealed.” Eighty three members of Salem's commercial community—seventy-nine men and four women—signed the agreement.⁷⁷ Included in this list were Richard Derby, Richard Derby, Jr., Richard Manning, Benjamin Pickman, and Peter Frye.

⁷⁵ Supporters of the Petitioners claimed that Salem's commission-hungry placemen put the common good at risk, while those in support of the Protestors argued that an empowered majority unconcerned for the views and property of the minority were the true enemies to liberty for the Salem community. See letter of Phil. Paci in *Essex Gazette*, August 9, 1768; See letter of Anti-Rescinder in *Essex Gazette*, August 16, 1768.

⁷⁶ *Essex Gazette*, September 6, 1768.

⁷⁷ Nonimportation Agreement of the Merchants and Traders of the Town of Salem, August 4, 1768, Curwen Family Papers, American Antiquarian Society. This agreement includes original signatures. Notice of meeting and of nonimportation agreement also appeared in the *Essex Gazette*, September 6, 1768. With two minor exceptions, the Salem agreement was a word-for-word copy of the Boston agreement signed by Boston merchants and traders that

The Salem merchants and traders tasked themselves with overseeing the nonimportation protest in Salem, and they met regularly throughout 1768 and 1769.⁷⁸ They dealt with potential violations among Salem traders and with prohibited goods entering Salem from other ports, especially Boston.⁷⁹ When they discovered prohibited goods for sale at a Salem shop, this extralegal group accused the offending merchants of “expecting to make their Fortunes, while others were sinking theirs for the Benefit of their Country,” and they warned the town that they would make public the names of all who purchased prohibited items from those who had broken the nonimportation agreement.⁸⁰ Amid these local tensions, Samuel Curwen wrote to his London associates De Berdt, Burkitt & Sayre that he had felt forced to sign the agreement not to import until 1770, and he stated his regret and alarm that “we are all seized with a frenzy & under the greatest infatuation a people destined to destruction ever was seized with.” Curwen resented the political pressure from Boston: “The country is unhappily under the influence of Boston & Boston of ruined men of desperate fortunes.”⁸¹ Curwen requested that this London merchant house keep him informed of orders for goods that might come from merchants throughout Massachusetts, because he did not trust his Massachusetts competitors to abide by nonimportation.⁸²

same week. Tyler, *Smugglers and Patriots*, p. 114; *Boston Post Boy*, August 15, 1768; full Boston agreement printed in *Boston Chronicle*, August 21, 1768. The Salem agreement added nails to the goods excepted from nonimportation and removed of any mention of the whale fishery in the reasoning behind the necessity of nonimportation.

⁷⁸ Notice of meetings appeared in the *Essex Gazette*, October 11, 1768; June 27, 1769; October 10, 1769; August 22, 1769; November 21, 1769; December 19, 1769.

⁷⁹ *Essex Gazette*, June 27, 1769.

⁸⁰ *Essex Gazette*, July 4, 1769. In May of 1769, Salem shopkeeper James Gool, a signer of Salem’s nonimportation agreement, had sailed for London, and he had left his Salem shop in the hands of Boston merchants James and Robert Selkrig who had already been charged in Boston with violating that port’s nonimportation agreement. The June meeting of the Salem merchants and traders accused the Selkrigs in the *Essex Gazette* of supplying Gool’s shop with imported goods prohibited in both Salem and the Boston. See notice posted by James & Robert Selkrig, *Essex Gazette*, May 30, 1769; Description of meeting of Boston Merchants on June 26, 1769, printed in *Essex Gazette*, August 15, 1769.

⁸¹ Samuel Curwen to De Berdt, Burkitt & Sayre, September 20, 1768, Curwen Family Papers, PEM.

⁸² Samuel Curwen to De Berdt, Burkitt & Sayre, January 20, 1769, Curwen Family Papers, PEM.

In 1770 Salem's town meeting took over the enforcement of these once extralegal nonimportation protests. Despite communication from Boston merchants in the late winter of 1769 urging the Salem merchants to continue nonimportation under the terms of the August 1768 agreement, the resulting Salem merchant meetings were sparsely attended, and no renewal emerged.⁸³ A new group of men involved in Atlantic commerce and aligned with the Derby family had gained election to town offices in the wake of the town meeting over the Circular Letter, and these men began to promote the town meeting as the overseer of continued nonimportation protests.⁸⁴ In May of 1769, the town meeting elected Richard Derby, Jr. and John Pickering, Jr. to serve as Salem's new representatives to the Massachusetts General Court and provided them with instructions for their time in office. In casting their votes, the town asserted goals of confining the admiralty courts to their previous limits, watching over the rights and privileges of Salem constituents while working to restore harmony with Great Britain, and promoting the fishery. But the town meeting stated that "the most weighty charge lying upon you" for Derby and Pickering was the effort to secure a repeal of the recent Revenue Acts, which town meeting attendees believed to be the town's "greatest grievance."⁸⁵ In Salem and throughout Massachusetts, the March 1770 Boston Massacre sparked new initiatives to use nonimportation to press for the revenue acts' repeal.⁸⁶ At a March 1770 meeting, Salem attendees voted that "the inhabitants of this town will use their endeavors that none they are

⁸³ The Boston merchant committee sent a letter to the Salem merchants on November 10, 1769 calling on the Salem merchants to extend nonimportation until the Revenue Acts of 1764 and 1766, in addition to the Townshend Acts, were fully repealed. Tyler, *Smugglers & Patriots*, p. 136. The Salem merchants met the following week with no new agreement. *Essex Gazette*, November 21, 1769, December 19, 1769. Mention of low attendance from *Essex Gazette*, October 2, 1770.

⁸⁴ The new Selectmen were George Williams, Jacob Ashton, Samuel Barton, Jr., Elias Hasket Derby, and Captain George Dodge. Salem Town Meeting Minutes, March 13, 1769, Salem City Clerk.

⁸⁵ Instructions to Representatives, Salem Town Meeting Minutes, May 27, 1769, Salem City Clerk.

⁸⁶ Instructions to Representatives, Salem Town Meeting Minutes, May 27, 1769, Salem City Clerk. For the alarm occasioned in Salem over the Boston Massacre see "Letter by A Whig," *Essex Gazette*, March 13, 1770. This agreement was also printed in the Salem newspaper. *Essex Gazette*, March 20, 1770.

concerned with shall purchase goods of any importer of goods contrary to the agreement of Merchants in this and other towns” and that they would “use their endeavors likewise respecting purchasing goods of such purchasers.”⁸⁷

Salem town meeting members in favor of using town government to extend the nonimportation protest drew confidence in this plan from news that other towns were taking similar steps.⁸⁸ On March 13, 1770, Boston’s town meeting had approved an agreement for town shopkeepers that they would not sell tea until the repeal of the Revenue Acts.⁸⁹ Smaller towns were also active in turning their governments into managers of the nonimportation movement.⁹⁰ On April 26, the Salem town meeting received a letter from a committee of the nearby town of Newbury informing Salem that “by order of the town” Newbury had voted to offer subscriptions to residents whereby they would agree not to purchase, trade, or consume foreign tea, not to do business with tea importers, and not to comply with any person employed in transporting tea against the “true intent” of the agreement of the United Body of Merchants.⁹¹ The town of Beverly, Salem’s neighbor to the north, citing the “great grievance and infringement on our charter rights and privileges” imposed by the remaining Parliamentary duty on tea, voted in July of 1770 that Beverly inhabitants would “do all in their power to discourage the use of tea in their

⁸⁷ Salem Town Meeting Minutes, March 12, 1770, Salem City Clerk.

⁸⁸ For an overview of this movement see Brown, *Revolutionary Politics*, p. 28-29.

⁸⁹ Boston Town Meeting Minutes, March 13, 1770, printed in *A report of the Record Commissioners of the City of Boston containing the Boston town records, 1770 through 1777* (Boston: Rockwell and Churchill, 1887), p. 12-13. [cited hereafter as *Boston Town Records 1770 through 1777*]

⁹⁰ On March 19th, the Boston town meeting voted thanks “to al the Towns through the Province that have in their late Meetings with a generous & truly publick Spirit, passed such Resolutions and Votes, as must greatly strengthen and confirm the salutary and necessary Measure of Non Importation entered into by the Merchants and Traders of this and other Maritime Places.” Boston Town Meeting Minutes, March 19, 1770, *Boston Town Records 1770 through 1777*, p. 16.

⁹¹ Salem Town Meeting Minutes, April 26, 1770.

families” and that the Beverly town meeting would create a committee of inspection to oversee this measure.⁹²

In Salem, calls for action intensified as London goods ordered in anticipation of the expiration of nonimportation began to enter the port with more frequency by the spring of 1770. In April 1770, Nathaniel Archer and others submitted a petition to the town Selectmen that a meeting be called to “prevent the goods last imported from London being exposed to sale” and, to this end, to pass such resolves in writing “as the town when assembled shall think best.”⁹³ By May of 1770, the Salem Selectmen called a meeting to address the increase of British imports appearing in town. “Agreeable to a Petition of a great Number of Inhabitants,” the Selectmen announced that Salem would gather in town meeting on May 1st “to determine upon proper Measures to be pursued in the *common cause*, by preventing British Goods being imported into this Town till the detested Revenue Acts are *totally* repealed.”⁹⁴ At issue was both community and private property. In words that would have resonated with all parties concerned, the Selectmen announced that they expected “every Freeholder, &c. who regards the Right of disposing of his own Property as a Blessing worth contending for, will give his Attendance at this Meeting.”⁹⁵

Revelations that four Salem traders—John Appleton, Abigail Eppes, Peter Frye, and Elizabeth Higginson—had imported goods from Great Britain against the town’s August 1768 nonimportation agreement motivated the call for a meeting in May 1770. All four had signed the

⁹² Transcription of Beverly Town Meeting Minutes, July 3, 1770, Massachusetts Collection, American Antiquarian Society. This transcription was done by the Beverly town clerk circa 1837 at the request of William Lincoln, who was tasked by Massachusetts Governor Edward Everett with publishing the journals of the provincial congresses of Massachusetts. Lincoln corresponded with city and town clerks of Massachusetts municipalities to get transcriptions of their town records relevant to the American Revolution.

⁹³ Salem Town Meeting Minutes, April 26, 1770.

⁹⁴ Italics from original. *Essex Gazette*, May 1, 1770.

⁹⁵ *Essex Gazette*, May 1, 1770.

August 1768 agreement. Appleton was a dry goods importer who also served at the time as one of the town's three Clerks of the Market.⁹⁶ Abigail Eppes was the widow of William Eppes, the daughter of Benjamin Pickman, and sister-in-law to Peter Frye. She owned a store in Salem, and in 1771 she paid taxes on £1000 of merchandise in her name.⁹⁷ Elizabeth Higginson, originally Elizabeth Cabot, was the widow of Salem merchant Stephen Higginson, who had died in 1761. She kept a store in Salem where she had sold items such as tea throughout the 1760s, and she lent money out at interest.⁹⁸ John Mein's *Boston Chronicle* had named Peter Frye as an importer of linens, nails, lead, and glass from London into Boston during nonimportation.⁹⁹ Frye also found himself at the center of the town's debate over whether nonimportation expired in January 1770 or whether it continued indefinitely until all duties had been repealed. Frye had kept the Salem 1768 agreement in his possession at its signing, but when debate began in town over the expiration or continuation of the agreement by 1770, he claimed that he had handed it over to the officers of town meeting at their request.¹⁰⁰ No one admitted knowledge of the document's whereabouts.¹⁰¹

⁹⁶ *Essex Gazette*, March 21, 1769. Prior to the nonimportation movement, Appleton frequently advertised in the *Essex Gazette* his inventory of English and Scottish silks, furs, and other articles for sale at his Salem store. *Essex Gazette*, December 27, 1768.

⁹⁷ Sarah Saunders Smith, *The Founders of the Massachusetts Bay Colony* (Pittsfield, MA: Press of the Sun Printing Company, 1897), 162. Merchant Richard Derby, Jr., as a point of comparison, owned £1200 worth of taxable merchandise Bettye Hobbs Pruitt, *The Massachusetts Tax Valuation List of 1771* (Boston: G.K. Hall & Co., 1978).

⁹⁸ Vickers, *Young Men and the Sea*, 152; Sidney Perley, *The History of Salem, Massachusetts*, Vol. 1 (Salem: Sidney Perley, 1924-1928), 158; Pruitt, *The Massachusetts Tax Valuation List of 1771*.

⁹⁹ Pruitt, *The Massachusetts Tax Valuation List of 1771*. From August 1768 to March 1770, John Mein's *Boston Chronicle* had named Frye as an importer of linens, nails, lead, and glass from London into Boston. *Boston Chronicle*, August 17 and 31, 1769, March 1, 1770.

¹⁰⁰ *Essex Gazette*, October 16, 1770.

¹⁰¹ The original Agreement did survive and exists today in the Curwen Family Papers at the American Antiquarian Society. Samuel Curwen was a Salem importer who left his active role in town government after the 1768 meeting and eventually fled Salem for Great Britain in 1774. In the *Essex Gazette*, the Committee charged Peter Frye with protecting his own interest by concealing or destroying the 1768 Agreement, and in the next issue Frye responded with his own claims that the Committee was defrauding the public by withholding facts about the search for the Agreement. *Essex Gazette*, October 9, 16, and 23, 1770.

At the town meeting on May 1, 1770 Salem residents placed town government at the center of nonimportation enforcement. The meeting voted to create a Salem Committee of Inspection and Correspondence and elected nine members to serve in its ranks, including Richard Derby, Jr., Richard Manning, and Samuel Flagg.¹⁰² Next, the meeting voted that the Committee would draft and distribute a Subscription to town inhabitants upholding nonimportation. Richard Derby, Jr., elected to the Committee only moments before, rose and read a prepared draft of the full Subscription. The duties under the Townshend Acts were admittedly small, Derby wrote, but they nonetheless threatened to multiply “hungry placemen & pensioners among us” and make “dependents” out of the colonists. The new duty remaining on tea necessitated the continued adherence to full nonimportation under the August 1768 measure. Merchants had created the nonimportation agreement, but the town now recognized nonimportation as the “most likely means” to obtain a repeal of all the Townshend Act duties. Consequently, Derby wrote, the town would take action to assist the “Body of Merchants and Dealers in English Goods” and take all proper measures to “render effectual their Agreement of Nonimportation and prevent any from making an unreasonable Advantage of such a generous sacrifice.” By signing the Subscription, Salem inhabitants agreed not to purchase goods from those traders who had imported in violation of the full 1768 agreement, not to do business with men engaged in transporting prohibited imported goods, and not use tea in their families or trade with dealers of prohibited tea. Meeting attendees approved. In a final vote, the meeting instructed the new Committee of Inspection to publish the names of all local importers who

¹⁰² The members were Samuel Flagg, Richard Derby, Jr., Warwick Palfrey, Jonathan Ropes, Jr., John Gardner, Richard Manning, Thomas Mason, James King, and David Northey. Salem Town Meeting Minutes, May 1, 1770.

violated the nonimportation agreement, along with the names of all those who chose to purchase prohibited goods.¹⁰³

The town meeting's enforcement of nonimportation through the Committee of Inspection had severe implications for the personal and property of those found in violation of the nonimportation agreement.¹⁰⁴ Within a week of the May 1 meeting, 360 people had signed the Subscription not to trade or drink tea.¹⁰⁵ Eppes, Higginson, Appleton, and Frye now agreed to submit their imported goods for storage under the "care and inspection" of the town Committee until importation began again in Boston and, subsequently, until the merchants of Salem had their first orders arrive in port.¹⁰⁶ The Committee reported its business in the local *Essex Gazette*, and as the self-proclaimed watchdog for the public or town good, the Committee could accordingly work to mold public opinion about local traders, for good or for bad. By May 15, 1770, for example, the Committee offered a public pronouncement of its restored faith in John Appleton due to his compliance with the new Committee rules. "We therefore desire the Publick would not consider him in a disagreeable Light," the Committee reported, "but that he may stand as fair as if no such Transaction had been, assuring the Publick that we are fully satisfied with his Conduct."¹⁰⁷ Others fared less well. In August 1770, the Committee advertised in the *Essex Gazette* that John Hendy, a Sailor, had demonstrated "Opposition to the general Sense of the Town" through his refusal to sign Salem's tea agreement and through his continued trade in tea.

¹⁰³ Salem Town Meeting Minutes, May 1, 1770.

¹⁰⁴ *Essex Gazette*, May 8, 1770.

¹⁰⁵ There was local pushback against this subscription. Complaints by town residents that the requirement not to employ people who suffered tea to be consumed in their homes was "too severe" necessitated another town meeting and an explanation by the Committee that the Subscription merely required signers to use their influence to encourage their employees to refrain from tea consumption. Salem Town Meeting Minutes, May 16, 1770, Salem City Clerk; *Essex Gazette*, May 22, 1770.

¹⁰⁶ Copy of the original agreement May 2, 1770 between the Committee and Appleton, Eppes, Higginson, and Frye printed in *Essex Gazette*, October 2, 1770.

¹⁰⁷ *Essex Gazette*, May 15, 1770.

As a result, the Committee warned, Hendy was in alliance with “the Enemies to American Liberty.” He was unworthy of any business from the Salem public, the Committee argued, because he preferred his private interest over “the Public good.”¹⁰⁸

Local tensions increased as Salem traders who were subject to their town government’s nonimportation policy saw their competitors in other towns engaging once again in the Atlantic trade for manufactured goods in 1769 and 1770. In addition to claims by Salem traders that their town had been well supplied with prohibited goods throughout 1769, many began to argue by the summer and fall of 1770 that the relaxation of nonimportation in practice, if not in official sanction, that had been allowed in other towns should be granted to the Salem trading community as well. In January 1770, two leading merchant houses in Boston had either refused to store their new imports or removed their goods from the public warehouse and opened them for sale.¹⁰⁹ In July 1770, imports from Great Britain into the town of Marblehead and their alleged distribution for sale throughout Essex County sparked concern in Boston, and a committee from Boston travelled to Salem, Marblehead, and Newbury to confirm the commitment of those towns to the nonimportation effort. Despite the assurances of the Salem Committee during this visit that Salemites had strictly adhered to nonimportation, one angry Salem resident burst into the hotel room where the Boston Committee members were staying and threatened them with tar and feathering for interrupting the peace if they did not leave the town immediately.¹¹⁰ As Peter Frye observed that the Marblehead Committee was allowing the sale of glass and that, as a result, glass from that town was entering the Salem market, he applied to the

¹⁰⁸ *Essex Gazette*, August 28, 1770.

¹⁰⁹ The two firms were Thomas & Elisha Hutchinson and Benjamin Greene & Son. Tyler, *Smugglers & Patriots*, p. 142. As more Boston merchants joined in protest against continuing nonimportation, Boston’s Body of Trade, the merchant committee charged with overseeing the town’s nonimportation policy, elected to expand the list of permitted imports. For the Body of Trade see Tyler, p. 144. The newly permitted imports included linen, baize, oznabrigs, and duck. Tyler, *Smugglers & Patriots*, p. 156.

¹¹⁰ *Essex Gazette*, August 14, 1770.

Salem Committee to remove his own inventory of glass from storage and open it for sale, arguing that “I ought to fare as my Neighbors did.” He petitioned the Salem Committee again when he found glass entering the Salem market from both Boston and Portsmouth, New Hampshire, but each time the Committee denied him access to his stored goods.¹¹¹

In September 1770, Frye and his three fellow importers finally rejected the authority of town government to regulate their business, and they broke their goods out of the town Committee’s storehouse.¹¹² Appleton came on his own to remove his goods, while Eppes, Higginson, and Frye came accompanied by an Under-Sherriff and armed with a process of law. The four importers and their representatives broke open the storage house, removed their goods, and carted them off to be offered for sale at their Salem shops.¹¹³

Salem’s town meeting was quick to censure the four violators. At the request of the Committee of Inspection, the town convened a meeting to address the “infamous Conduct” of Frye, Eppes, Higginson, and Appleton. With Timothy Pickering as Moderator, the meeting attendees denounced the actions of the four importers as violations of their “solemn agreement” of May 1770. A narrative of events drawn up by the Salem Committee of Inspection painted the four importers as enemies of both America and the Salem community. They had violated “the only peaceable Measure by which Americans could hope to obtain redress of their Grievances,” and they had “taken an ungenerous advantage of their Neighbors trading to Great Britain.”¹¹⁴

¹¹¹ *Essex Gazette*, October 2, 1770. An account by the Salem Committee of Inspection confirmed that Salem importers had made requests in the fall of 1770 to remove their goods from storage and that the Committee denied these requests. *Essex Gazette*, October 9, 1770.

¹¹² Appleton, for one, had made an effort in 1769 to alert the public through newspaper advertisements that he was abiding by the nonimportation agreement. During nonimportation, he used advertisements in the *Essex Gazette* to reassure the community that he was abiding by his word. In May 1769, Appleton announced that his dwindling stock of goods, including English piece goods, was due not to his own neglect, but to his “strictly adhering to the Agreement not to import superfluities.” *Essex Gazette*, May 16, 1769.

¹¹³ *Essex Gazette*, September 28, 1770.

¹¹⁴ The narrative appeared in the *Essex Gazette* October 9, 1770.

The meeting wielded real authority to punish the four importers in their social and political standing in town. Attendees resolved that a memorandum naming the four importers and narrating their infamous actions be read at every annual town meeting for the next seven years directly before the selection of town officers. In addition, the meeting voted that notice be published in the *Essex Gazette* for the next eight weeks reminding the public of that these four individuals had sold prohibited goods to the unfair detriment of their fellow traders.¹¹⁵ To punish the importers in their trade, signers of a town subscription agreed not to purchase goods from the four importers or their customers and not to employ Benjamin Daland, a local trucker who had assisted the four importers in moving their goods. The subscription agreement would remain in place through the rest of nonimportation and for an additional twelve months after trade had reopened. Further, signers agreed to “withhold all Marks of Respect” to the five violators for the same period.¹¹⁶ The punishments were harsh, but the Committee argued that all four importers, including the two women, were “Offenders to whom no such Indulgence is due.” “When the Question is concerning Liberty or Slavery of America,” the Committee stated, “the Matter is of too much Importance to regard the little Distinctions of Rank, Sex, and Condition.”¹¹⁷

A number of traders, however, felt that the Committee had made unfair distinctions in the people it chose to accuse of violating nonimportation. Two weeks after the forced removal of the goods from the Committee storehouse, the Committee announced in a public notice that Matthew Mansfield, Francis Grant, and John Hendy had all purchased goods from the four

¹¹⁵ Salem Town Meeting Minutes, September 25, 1770, Salem City Clerk; minutes printed in *Essex Gazette*, October 2, 1770. The requisite public notice about Frye, Eppes, Higginson, and Appleton appeared in the *Essex Gazette* for the first time on October 23, 1770.

¹¹⁶ Salem Town Meeting Minutes, September 25, 1770, Salem City Clerk; minutes printed in *Essex Gazette*, October 2, 1770.

¹¹⁷ *Essex Gazette*, October 9, 1770. The Committee stated that Mrs. Eppes had been acting under the influence of her father, Benjamin Pickman.

violators.¹¹⁸ Mansfield, a shopkeeper, replied in the newspaper that he had purchased goods from Appleton with no remorse that he was breaking the August 1768 nonimportation agreement since he believed that by the time of his purchases nonimportation in Salem had effectively been abandoned. Mansfield had thought it unwise to continue his own embargo on trade while so many of his neighbors had reopened theirs, “that it would be in vain to stand out any longer, unless I would stand alone.”¹¹⁹ He asked why others who had imported prohibited goods or purchased items from Appleton just like Mansfield has gone unpunished by the Committee.¹²⁰ Peter Frye held similar sentiments to Mansfield about his own case before the Committee, especially since he had broken his goods out of storage only after observing these items for sale in other markets in Massachusetts and New Hampshire. In the *Essex Gazette*, Frye accused the Committee of bias, said his conscience was clear, and devoted himself to the cause of liberty: “however maliciously I may be represented to the Publick, I shall continue to enjoy that Quiet of Mind which Men nor *Devils* can take from me; being conscious (in this matter) that I have not offended against the Laws of God, or my Country; neither have I injured my Neighbor.”¹²¹

As these struggles of using town government to protest imperial policies and protect Atlantic commerce heightened political tensions in Salem, the editor of the *Essex Gazette* found it increasingly difficult to convince his politically-charged readership that he remained committed to “publish the Sentiments of *all Parties*.”¹²² The local paper had become a key forum for political debate in Salem since its establishment in 1768. An October 1770 letter to

¹¹⁸ *Essex Gazette*, October 9, 1770.

¹¹⁹ *Essex Gazette*, October 16, 1770.

¹²⁰ *Essex Gazette*, October 16, 1770. In response, the Committee argued that Appleton had broken his goods out of the Committee storehouse prematurely, whereas other traders, in keeping with recent actions in Boston and Philadelphia, had waited to remove their goods until the town merchants had given approval to end the storage policy that October. *Essex Gazette*, October 23, 1770.

¹²¹ *Essex Gazette*, October 2, 1770.

¹²² *Essex Gazette*, October 16, 1770.

the *Essex Gazette* revealed how imperial and local politics had informed one another as the town recovered from the nonimportation conflicts and while Salemites continued to express concerns over taxation and representation within the British Atlantic. The letter's subject was a fictionalized conversation between a town Tory and a Whig that referenced the recent Frye affair and the ongoing debate over the town meeting's authority to manage private property on behalf of its residents. This dialogue addressed fictional disturbances in town occasioned by the firing of large guns at the town fort. The Tory had a solution to this problem that he offered in a mocking tone: "by calling a Town Meeting, we might order [the guns] back again, or that they should be *stored*." When the Whig expressed his doubt that town meeting could carry out such a task, the Tory disagreed. "The Town and their Committee," he assured the Whig, "had as much Power to do this, as to do what they did with the Goods."

The resolution to this dispute, the two men agreed, would be proven through the town Treasury: "Whether if the Selectmen order the Charges of the Committee to be paid out of the Town Treasury, and the Inhabitants be taxed for them, their Tax will be good?" The Salem Whig, believing that town meeting spoke justly for its inhabitants, believed Salem residents would pay the tax and thereby make it good. The Salem Tory, alternatively, believed that town government had grown arbitrary in its governance and thus no longer served as a representative body and was confident that Salem residents would refuse the new tax.¹²³ Just as Salem and the North American colonies debated issues of taxation and representation in the broader British Atlantic, the issue took on a local meaning within the town community. There had been a real debate in Salem over the town's reimbursement of all expenses incurred by the Committee of Inspection in the prosecution of Eppes, Appleton, Higginson, and Frye. The voters supported the

¹²³ Italics from original. *Essex Gazette*, October 9, 1770.

expense, and this tax eventually passed. After town members reconsidered the annual tax assessment at a number of town meetings, Salem voters agreed to assess £1200 on the public polls to be paid into the town Treasury.¹²⁴

VI

Salem residents made sense of the shifting imperial political climate of the 1760s and 1770s using their Atlantic perspective on political economy, but the organization of Massachusetts governance ensured that residents with different stakes in Atlantic commerce would have to work through town government to build their political strategies. In late 1770 and 1771, as Richard Derby wrote to his merchant contacts in London, Gibraltar, and Cadiz asking them to assist his ship *Antelope* that would depart shortly for southern Europe and then the Caribbean in the search of the best markets for this pan-Atlantic trade, Samuel Curwen wrote to his own merchant contact in London about supplies of new British goods that would help him compete in the dry goods trade as Boston pushed for continued nonimportation: “from the embargo poor Boston is now & is to be under we presume ourselves great commercial adversaries.”¹²⁵ While they communicated with Atlantic associates and operated within different

¹²⁴ The issue of assessing local taxes had been contested in May 1770, just two weeks after town meeting had created the Committee of Inspection, when some meeting attendees presented resistance to a £1250 annual tax assessment that included funding for “other usual and necessary charges accruing within said town.” Salem Town Meeting Minutes, May 16, 1770. That July, Committee chairman Samuel Flagg had submitted a bill to the town to pay for legal expenses the Committee had incurred in the case against Appleton, Eppes, Higginson, and Peter Frye. Reference to this bill in James Duncan Phillips, *Salem in the Eighteenth Century* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1937). At the September 1770 town meeting, attendees had voted that the town would indemnify and reimburse the committee of inspection for their work prosecuting this incident. Salem Town Meeting Minutes, September 28, 1770. The tax issue remained by January 4, 1771 when a town meeting voted to “reconsider” the May 1770 assessment. After discussion and the final vote, however, the tax passed, and Salem voters agreed to assess £1200 on the public polls to be paid into the town Treasury. Salem Town Meeting Minutes, January 4, 1771, Salem City Clerk.

¹²⁵ Samuel Curwen to Hayley & Hopkins, October 25, 1770, Samuel Curwen Papers, PEM. Richard Derby to Lane, Son, and Frasier, October 11, 1771, to Robert Anderson & Company, October 14, 1771, to Henry Pickern, October 14, 1771, Derby Family Papers, PEM.

geographies of Atlantic trade, both men were active in town affairs as a critical part of their political response to the imperial crisis.

The militarization of the imperial conflict and the new restrictions on provincial government by 1774 struck directly at the two anchors of Salem's maritime community, town and trade. New threats left little room for people like Peter Frye to exist in the middle ground in an increasingly polarized town. In the wake of the Tea Act of 1773 and the subsequent Boston Tea Party that December, Parliament responded with punitive legislation. The Boston Port Act closed Boston to all trade until payment was made on the tea dumped into Boston Harbor. The Massachusetts Government Act made all colonial offices royal appointments and restricted town meetings beyond the annual gathering to those allowed at the Governor's discretion. With Boston closed under the Port Act, newly-appointed Governor Thomas Gage, the Massachusetts provincial government, and the Commissioners of the Customs moved to Salem.¹²⁶ From London, Dennis De Berdt wrote to Curwen that Boston's loss would be Salem's gain: "I shd. suppose your Town will be much benefitted by the Port of Boston being shut up should you see it prudent to order Goods I shall be happy to receive your Commands."¹²⁷

Gage's arrival in Salem forced residents to more publicly and formally declare their political allegiances and, thereby, their political divisions from one another. Some treated Gage as their welcome protector and formed a grand procession to usher Gage into Salem.¹²⁸ Many of the same residents, including Samuel Curwen, Benjamin Pickman, Peter Frye, and William

¹²⁶ On June 14, the Massachusetts General Court opened its session at the Salem court house, the usual gathering place for Salem town meetings, where General Court members voted their approval for a congress of the colonies, elected Massachusetts delegates to this congress, and decided on nonimportation and nonconsumption recommendations against Great Britain and her territories. The newly appointed Governor, Thomas Gage, sent his secretary to the court house to disband the meeting. When the secretary found the chamber door barred, many Salem residents likely watched as he stood on the stairs of this public building and read aloud Gage's proclamation dissolving the General Court. Felt, *Annals of Salem*, 489.

¹²⁷ Dennis DeBerdt to Samuel Curwen, April 1, 1774, Samuel Curwen Papers, AAS.

¹²⁸ *Essex Gazette*, June 7, 1774.

Browne signed a congratulatory address granting Gage patronage over Salem's trade and commerce, which they believed would flourish under Gage's "full protection of the Liberties, Persons and Properties of Individuals."¹²⁹ An alternative address, drafted by Timothy Pickering and signed by 125 residents, including Richard Manning, Richard Derby and his sons, and George Crowninshield, greeted Gage as an appointed official culpable for the province's current distress and capable of carrying out more harm to Salem's Atlantic trade. The closing of Boston alarmed them, particularly because it deprived these Salem traders of one of the biggest markets for their West India goods. To heal the breach with Great Britain, they claimed, they would only accept measures "compatible with the dignity and safety of British subjects."¹³⁰ The Salem town meeting bolstered the political claims of these protestors in May of 1774 when meeting attendees voted to implement nonimportation and nonexportation with Great Britain and the British West Indies until Boston was reopened, if other colonies agreed to do the same, as the best means to secure "the Salvation of N. America and her liberties."¹³¹

When Gage challenged the right of Salem residents to gather in town meeting that summer, residents responded with great alarm to these severe restrictions on their local governing institution that had become a central arena for protecting and managing Salem's Atlantic interests. On August 20, 1774, notices appeared from the Salem Committee of Correspondence calling residents to a meeting that day to elect representatives for an Essex County Convention to in nearby Ipswich to address the recent Parliamentary Acts.¹³² After

¹²⁹ Forty-eight Salem residents signed this address. Address to Thomas Gage, June 1774, original in Gage Papers, American Series, Clements Library, University of Michigan. Printed in *Essex Gazette*, June 14, 1774.

¹³⁰ Address to Thomas Gage from Merchants and Freeholders of Salem, June 1774, original in Gage Papers, American Series, Letters, Volume 120, Clements Library, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, Michigan. Printed in *Essex Gazette*, June 21, 1774. Octavius Pickering claims Timothy Pickering drafted the address to Gage. Octavius Pickering, *The Life of Timothy Pickering, Volume 1* (Boston: Little, Brown, and Company, 1867), 49.

¹³¹ Salem Town Meeting Minutes, May 17, 1774, Salem City Clerk.

¹³² Notice printed in Pickering, *The Life of Timothy Pickering*, 53-54. Committee members included George Williams, Stephen Higginson, Richard Manning, Jonathan Ropes, Timothy Pickering, Jonathan Gardner, Joseph

noticing these postings around Salem, Gage summoned the Committee members to meet him at the home of William Browne, who had recently been appointed a Mandamus Councilor, and he ordered the Committee to stop the town meeting due its seditious purposes. As the exchange grew heated, the Committee member Richard Derby, Jr. argued that the town meeting broke no laws of either Parliament or the Province. Gage threatened to send the sheriff and British soldiers to disperse while the “people must abide the consequences,” but as the conference with Gage ended and as two companies of armed British troops marched to the Salem court house, the town meeting had already concluded with all delegates elected. Gage quickly gave orders to Peter Frye, as a Justice of the Peace, to issue warrants for the arrest of the Committee.¹³³

On these orders, Frye did arrest two members of the Committee—Timothy Pickering and Joseph Sprague—and he faced harsh consequences from the public. Pickering was unconcerned for his own safety and freedom, since he was sure a jury would acquit him if the case went to court. He worried instead for Frye’s safety, and Frye felt the alarm as well.¹³⁴ Two weeks after the disputed town meeting, Frye signed a declaration, drafted by Pickering, announcing that he had, under his own accord, recalled the warrants for the remaining Committee members and returned the bonds for Pickering and Sprague to appear in court. Further, he announced that he would not accept any future commission under the act of Parliament that subjected Massachusetts town meetings to the Governor’s approval. He hoped these actions would restore him to “that friendship and regard with my fellow citizens & countrymen which I heretofore

Sprague, Richard Derby, Jr., and Warwick Palfray. Joseph Felt, *The Annals of Salem: From its First Settlement* (Salem: W. & S. B. Ives, 1827), 564.

¹³³ Account of the Committee’s meeting with Gage from Timothy Pickering to Paine Wingate, August 25, 1774, printed in Pickering, *The Life of Timothy Pickering*, Vol. 1, p. 54-57; Timothy Pickering to Boston Committee of Correspondence, August 25, 1774, TPP, MHS; *Boston Evening Post*, August 29, 1774.

¹³⁴ Timothy Pickering to Paine Wingate, August 25, 1774, printed in Pickering, *The Life of Timothy Pickering*, Vol. 1, p. 56.

enjoyed.”¹³⁵ Pickering and the Salem public had impressed upon Frye the danger of aligning with Parliament and crossing interests with those who supported the town meeting. Frye wrote on an accompanying scrap of paper: “T. Pickering said if the acts were put in force, we would wade in blood first.”¹³⁶

In February 1775 as Gage strategized over seizing provincial ammunition stores and as towns across Massachusetts began to mobilize their militias, Salem town meeting led the effort to fortify the town against a potential British attack.¹³⁷ The town acquired seventeen cannons from Richard Derby, and the Committee of Safety began collecting ammunition and gun carriages.¹³⁸ But in Boston word leaked to Gage, who responded by dispatching Colonel Alexander Leslie with a regiment of 300 men to Salem to confiscate the cannons. On February 26, 1775 British soldiers landed at Marblehead and began their march for Salem. As word spread of Leslie’s impending arrival, Salem residents hurried to hide the cannons in neighboring towns and bury them in gravel pits.¹³⁹ As the troops marched through Salem town center, John Sargent, half-brother of William Browne, waved a white handkerchief at Leslie, and when the Colonel approached, Sargent provided him with information about the location of the hidden cannons in nearby Danvers. Crowds began to gather in the streets and stride along the column of soldiers. Onlookers included Salem ship captain and minuteman John Felt, reverend Thomas Barnard of North Parish, Richard Derby, Jr., and the Salem Selectmen.

Following Sargent’s lead, Leslie marched to North Bridge, the only bridge into Danvers. A crowd had gathered there too: fishermen had scuttled many of the boats lying in the river

¹³⁵ Peter Frye’s Declaration, September 8, 1774, TPP, MHS. Printed in *Essex Gazette*, September 13, 1774.

¹³⁶ Printed in Pickering, *The Life of Timothy Pickering*, Vol. 1, 58.

¹³⁷ Middlekauff, *The Glorious Cause*, 264-266.

¹³⁸ Charles Endicott, *Account of Leslie’s Retreat at North Bridge, in Salem, on Sunday, Feb’y 26, 1775* (Salem: Wm. Ives and Geo. W. Pease Printers, 1856), 44

¹³⁹ Endicott, *Account of Leslie’s Retreat*, 20.

below, sailors and laborers heckled the troops who shivered in the cold February afternoon, and a group of townspeople raised the drawbridge, barring the British crossing. A standoff ensued. Leslie's calls to lower the drawbridge went unheeded. As tempers grew heated, Richard Derby, Jr. yelled to Leslie that his search for the cannons was futile: "Find them if you can! Take them if you can, they will never be surrendered."¹⁴⁰ As Leslie consulted with his officers and debated threatening the crowd with gunfire, John Felt overheard and warned Leslie that firing on the Salem townspeople would cause a violent backlash against the British soldiers. Soon Timothy Pickering arrived at the bridge with a contingent of the Salem militia, and Pickering, Derby, Barnard, and Felt consulted over a plan as the evening set in. They informed Leslie that if he consented to march only ten rods towards Danvers and then retreat, Salem residents would lower the bridge. Leslie agreed. When Felt directed the lowering of the drawbridge, Leslie complied with the agreement. He returned to Boston with no cannons.¹⁴¹

When these British soldiers arrived to formally and physically challenge the work of town residents and town meeting, they appeared saviors to some and invaders to others. The militarization of the imperial conflict within the town's borders put personal safety and property under increased risk, and competing Salem interests struggled more than ever to peaceably coexist. Sargent had welcomed Leslie as a form of protection against his townspeople, but with Leslie's departure Sargent felt more vulnerable than ever, and he quickly disappeared.¹⁴² To residents like Derby, Pickering, and Felt, Sargent's collusion had brought the British troops within a short march of disarming the town, which would have had alarming consequences for

¹⁴⁰ Peter Charles Hoffer, *Prelude to Revolution: The Salem Gunpowder Raid of 1775* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2013).

¹⁴¹ Endicott, *Account of Leslie's Retreat*, 25-29.

¹⁴² A local ballad described the apprehension among those, like Sargent, who had helped the British troops: "The tories in the town were all put to fright;/ Some left their houses and others watched all night./ Prince, he kept close, John Sargent he fled,/ and Grant was afraid for to sleep in his bed." Printed in Endicott, *Account of Leslie's Retreat*, 32.

their town meeting and their personal safety. As the British stalled at the south side of North Bridge, onlooker James Barr had shouted, “Soldiers, red jackets, lobster coats, cowards, d—na—a to your government.”¹⁴³ When Leslie demanded to know why the “King’s highway” was obstructed, he was informed by those on the opposite side of the bridge that “it was not the King’s road, but the property of the inhabitants, who had a right to do what they pleased with it.”¹⁴⁴

VII

Robert Honyman, a Scottish-born doctor living in Virginia, found Salem a bustling but nervous Atlantic port during his trip through town in March of 1775. The Salem harbor and the adjoining passage out to the Atlantic were filled with sloops and schooners, Honyman noted, while stages for drying fish snaked along the shoreline. The town’s ropewalks were the “longest and finest” he had ever seen, and they were all busy making rope and cable. But unease about defense was also visible. Stopping at a local meeting house, Honyman observed a town meeting where Salem inhabitants were discussing how to train troops for the local militia. Pursuant to recommendations from the Massachusetts Provincial Congress and in the wake of Leslie’s march on Salem, the town had just voted to acquire artillery pieces and raise two companies of minute men.¹⁴⁵

The political bonds formed by shared residency in the town, which had long been strengthened by the overarching bonds of shared membership in the British Atlantic, had become strained to the point of hostile conflict. Residents’ differing roles and interests within the British

¹⁴³ William Gavett’s account, printed in Endicott, *Account of Leslie’s Retreat*, 38-40.

¹⁴⁴ Timothy Pickering account, *Essex Gazette*, February 1775.

¹⁴⁵ Journal of Robert Honyman, Huntington Library, 63; Salem Town Meeting Minutes, March 23, 1775. On the town considering the recommendation of the Massachusetts Provincial Congress to raise minute men, Salem Town Meeting Minutes, March 6, 1775, Salem City Clerk. For biographical information on Honyman see Richard K. McMaster, “News of the Yorktown Campaign: The Journal of Dr. Robert Honyman, April 17-November 25, 1781,” in *The Virginia Magazine of History and Biography* Vol. 79, No. 4 (Oct., 1971): 387-426.

Atlantic that had once coexisted as different means to the same political economic end, now came in to opposition to one another. In 1763, for example, Salem residents had petitioned the Massachusetts House of Representatives for repeal of the Sugar Act, claiming that the new duties would be prejudicial to the trade of the province and bring “pernicious consequences to Great Britain.”¹⁴⁶ There were competing Atlantic interests at work in pressure to pass the Sugar Act, as the petitioners acknowledged with their accusations against the West India planters. There were also different merchant interests in Salem that cooperated to petition together for redress, since various commercial practices—the commercial fishery, trade to the West Indies and southern Europe, and the dry goods trade—complemented one another to create a united political economy of the British Atlantic that they all envisioned in 1763. By the late 1760s and early 1770s, new imperial commercial policies and the colonial protests against these measures put these variant interests and commercial practices at odds with one another. The increase in customs oversight and regulation put new limitations on the pan-Atlantic trading practices of merchants like Derby and Manning and the mariners who worked on Salem ships and on Salem wharves. While the new duties on imported goods taxed consumers across the Salem community and threatened to decrease the availability of specie in North America, the political protests against these measures singled out and threatened the business of dry goods traders who imported from Great Britain. Not only did nonimportation restrict their ability to trade goods, but the uncertainty and volatility these protests introduced into colonial communities put these merchants at risk of not obtaining the credit they relied on from Great Britain for their trade.

The militarization of the imperial crisis in 1775 after the battle of Lexington and Concord infused Salem life and commerce with new fear and new risks. For merchants like Derby, pan-

¹⁴⁶ Records of the Governor’s Council, December 28, 1763, Massachusetts State Archives, Boston, Massachusetts.

Atlantic trade now increased risks, but the trade, which had always depended on strategies to mitigate risks as merchants and captains kept flexible options and sought the safest trading strategy under any circumstance, could still operate. Risks came from British warships that threatened to seize North American vessels or bombard North American ports, but Derby had the backing of town institutions to mitigate this danger, even if only to a small degree. When a British naval ship appeared off Salem harbor in May of 1775, for example, and residents “apprehended the Kings troops intended to make an attack some where,” the Salem militia under Timothy Pickering mustered and manned the sentries at the Salem fort in defense of the harbor.¹⁴⁷ After the violence of April 19, Richard Derby, Sr. found Massachusetts “in such a confused state” that he knew not what to write to Captain Daniel Hathorn in command of Derby’s vessel *Patty* in the West Indies, but Derby did know that even under these circumstances he intended to continue in his pan-Atlantic trade. He advised Hathorn to load the ship with molasses and head for home, and the traditional strategies of minimizing risk by trading circuitously still applied: “If you have not sold and ye markets are bad where you are, you have liberty to proceed any other ways, either to ye Mole, Jamaica, or to make a fresh bottom, or anything else that you may think likely to help ye voyage.”¹⁴⁸

Other residents and traders had less latitude than Derby to protect themselves from commercial failure and even personal harm. Samuel Curwen, for example, shared neither this possibility to continue trade in Salem nor the same source of risk as Derby. As residents feared attack from British warships, others like Curwen also feared attack from fellow citizens and

¹⁴⁷ Timothy Pickering to Officers of the Militia on their march to Salem, May 30, 1775, TPP, MHS.

¹⁴⁸ Richard Derby, Sr. to Captain Daniel Hathorn, quoted in *Merchant Ventures of Old Salem*, 37-38.

worried about their personal property and safety.¹⁴⁹ The sense of impending violence caused merchant Nathaniel Appleton to seek out safe storage for his movable goods, preferring to make fast sales or divide them up among friends' houses and safe basements. But he found that very few people in town were willing to take on this risk.¹⁵⁰ In April 1775, after Benjamin Pickman, Jr. had sailed for London, a letter from his mother, Love Pickman, in Salem told of the fear and confusion felt throughout the town. "This unhappy Battle opens to us the horrors of a Civil War at which will not end here," she wrote, and we "know not wither to make our escape from Sword or fire every moment expecting the Kings Ships to destroy the Sea ports." "The minds of this people are so enraged against the King and ministry," she continued," that it is as much as any ones life is worth to speak one word against their proceedings."¹⁵¹ A few months prior, in October, a terrible fire had broken out in Salem that destroyed an entire street of shops and houses. The suspected cause was arson, set at the home of Peter Frye in retaliation for his recent acquiescence to General Gage. In March, the town meeting voted to expand the nightly watch and the town Committee of Safety to crack down on the recent rash of damages to private homes.¹⁵² But town actions did not protect everyone, and the sense of unease heightened in those who had fallen out of the majority of town meeting since the late 1760s.

¹⁴⁹ In contrast to Breen who says revolutionary movement was for the most part nonviolent and who downplays impact of social shunning and the restriction of loyalist rights by revolutionary committees. Breen, *American Insurgents*, esp. chapter 8.

¹⁵⁰ Nathaniel Appleton to Oliver Wendell, May 1, 1775, printed in William P. Upham, "Extracts from Letters Written at the time of the Occupation of Boston by the British, 1775-1776," in *EIHC* Vol. XIII No. 3 (July, 1876), 170-1.

¹⁵¹ Love Pickman to Benjamin Pickman, April 1775, printed in George Francis Dow, *Diary and Letters of Benjamin Pickman (1740-1819) of Salem with a Biographical Sketch and Genealogy of the Pickman Family* (Newport, RI, 1928), 58.

¹⁵² Salem Town Meeting Minutes, March 13, 1775, Salem City Clerk.

Many began to leave Salem for the perceived safety of inland towns, for distant havens like Nantucket, Halifax, or London.¹⁵³ Salem resident William Wetmore departed for Nantucket to avoid both the threat from the King's ships and the "ignorance" of the people.¹⁵⁴ By May 1775, Samuel Curwen departed Salem for the relative safety of Philadelphia. As tempers in Salem had grown more and more "malevolent" against tories, "among whom I am unhappily (although unjustly) ranked," he was "unable longer to bear their undeserved reproaches and menaces hourly denounced against myself and others."¹⁵⁵ On his voyage south he wrote home with anxiety and doubt that he would ever see his personal property again: "my future destination I can't yet divine, my future destiny god only knows."¹⁵⁶ Philadelphia, however, became his "asylum" where he could reacquaint himself with "neighbors suffering in the same cause as myself."¹⁵⁷ Soon after, Curwen sailed for London, where he visited the New England coffee house, rejoiced to see his townsman Benjamin Pickman, and could recreate the Salem community he had lost.¹⁵⁸

Meanwhile, as the new Continental Congress passed Articles of Association in October 1774 outlining a plan for nonimportation and nonconsumption to protest the Boston Port Bill and the Quebec Act, the tensions of aligning the disparate commercial interests of Association members in unified protest continued on this new continental scale. When the Association extended its nonimportation and nonexportation to the British markets the West Indies, Canada,

¹⁵³ For reports of masses of people leaving Salem for safer locations see Nathaniel Appleton to Oliver Wendell, May 8, 1775, in Upham, "Extracts from Letters," p. 176; James Jeffry journal entry for April 27, 1775, printed in William Smith, ed., "Journal Kept in Quebec in 1775 by James Jeffry," in *EIHC* Vol. L, No. 2 (April, 1914), p. 111.

¹⁵⁴ Journal entry of William Wetmore for April 28, 1775, William Wetmore, "Extracts from the Interleaved Almanacs of William Wetmore of Salem,," in *Essex Institute Historical Collections* 43 (1907), 116-7.

¹⁵⁵ George Atkinson Ward, *Journal and Letters of the Late Samuel Curwen* (Boston: J.H. Francis, 1842), 25.

¹⁵⁶ Samuel Curwen to John Timmons, May 7, 1775, Curwen Family Papers, PEM.

¹⁵⁷ Samuel Curwen to Nathan Goodale, May 16, 1775, Ward, *Journal and Letters*, 29.

¹⁵⁸ Ward, *Journal and Letters*, 30. For the migration of loyalists from British North America, see Maya Jasanoff, *Liberty's Exiles: American Loyalists in the Revolutionary World* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2011).

and North America that comprise Salem's traditional trading grounds, Salem's Committee of Correspondence pushed back against these restrictions.¹⁵⁹ In February 1775, the Newport, Rhode Island Committee of Correspondence accused Salem traders of breaking the Association's rules by sending sheep to South Carolina, which had not yet joined the Association. The Newport Committee called on Salem to halt this trade in order to prevent "uneasiness and dissatisfaction" and to build a "Union of Measures."¹⁶⁰ Salem merchants, however, had done significant colonial commerce with South Carolina and incorporated this southern marketplace into Salem's traditional commercial geography. They resisted political interference into these trading practices. In a return letter to Newport drafted by Committee member Timothy Pickering, the Salem Committee wrote: "We do not see why the salt water which intervenes between some of the associated colonies should cut off or lessen their important trade & dealings any more than the small rivers or other boundaries between the New-England colonies, among whom the usual commerce particularly in sheep is continued."¹⁶¹ South Carolina may not have signed the Association agreement as of yet, the Salem Committee responded, but since they had "shown themselves amongst the most firm & zealous supporters of the rights of the colonies... We think them deserving of the most friendly intercourse."¹⁶²

When the Salem militia under the command of Timothy Pickering arrived too late after a long march on April 19, 1775 to assist in colonial efforts against the British regulars during their retreat from Lexington and Concord, Salem faced harsh accusations that it had abandoned its

¹⁵⁹ For the Association nonimportation, nonconsumption, and nonexportation agreement passed in October 1774, see *Journals of the Continental Congress, Volume I*, 75-80. Middlekauff, *The Glorious Cause*, 244-248. While the Continental Association did restrain violence, it did not necessarily engender political unity and often created political tensions across and within North American communities. For an alternative argument that the Continental Association and the local oversight committees it created were "laboratories of republican rule" that operated as an early "provisional constitution" for the North American colonies, see Breen, *American Insurgents*, 18, 170.

¹⁶⁰ Newport Committee of Correspondence to Salem Committee of Correspondence, February 9, 1775, TPP, MHS.

¹⁶¹ SCC to Newport Committee of Correspondence, February 22, 1775, TPP, MHS.

¹⁶² to Newport Committee of Correspondence, February 22, 1775, TPP, MHS.

fellow Massachusetts towns. In a petition to the Massachusetts General Court in August 1775, the Salem town meeting argued that the Salem militia had made a genuine effort to “procure a redress” from the “barbarous deeds of the King’s Troops,” but the distance from Essex County had been too far. The insults and abuse the town had suffered as a result puzzled Salem residents, the petition continued, since so many other towns had also failed to contribute. “By a strange and unaccountable partiality, the inhabitants of Salem only are reproached, and the multitudes near at hand, who never stirred an inch, or, though they Lived but at half the distance, arrived as late as the Salem Militia.”¹⁶³ Like other residents throughout Massachusetts, Salemites worried about protecting their own safety, and the town’s reputation within the province mattered for securing support from other communities. The “insult, reproach, and malediction” that the town had experienced as a result of the events of April 19 threatened this inter-town aid from local militias. The Salem Committee reported to the General Court that the town had been told by other communities “that should the enemy attack us they could not come from the country to our relief.”¹⁶⁴

¹⁶³ Salem Town Meeting Minutes, August 10, 1775; Petition of the Salem Town Meeting, August 17, 1775, TPP, MHS.

¹⁶⁴ Petition of the Salem Committee of Correspondence to the Massachusetts General Court, August 2, 1775, TPP, MHS.

Chapter 3

Armed Commerce and Adaptations of Trade during the American Revolution

The upheaval and uncertainty of wartime offered Salem the chance to become the mart for Atlantic commerce that the port had long sought in the colonial period. The imperial crisis and the risks of war restricted Salem's traditional routes of commerce and required adaptations in Salem's trade for the port's self-preservation. In early 1775, the New England Restraining Act required New England ships to trade exclusively with Great Britain and with British markets in the West Indies and barred New England vessels from the Newfoundland fishery.¹ By October 1775, Salem town meeting was already organizing the sinking of ship hulks in the harbor to protect the port from British warships after learning of British orders to "lay waste burn and destroy" Massachusetts seaports, including Salem.² In December 1775, Great Britain passed the Prohibitory Act, which prohibited all trade by the British North American colonies, not including those in British Canada. These restrictions applied to the coasting trade as well as Atlantic trade, and any American ship found in violation of the Act could be seized by British vessels "as if the same were ships and effects of open enemies." From his post in the Continental Congress, John Adams read the Prohibitory Act in March 1776 and considered it "a compleat dismemberment of the British Empire" that "throws thirteen Colonies out of the Royal Protection."³ When Salem

¹ For the effect of the fishery restrictions on the New England revolutionary movement, see Magra, *Fisherman's Cause*, esp. Chapter 7.

² These orders came as a response to news that residents in these ports had fortified their seacoasts, had fired on British ships and troops, and were in "open and avowed Rebellion against his Majesty." On October 6, 1775, Admiral Samuel Graves directed the British vessel *Canceaux* to burn Salem, Marblehead, Newburyport, Cape Anne Harbor, Portsmouth, Ipswich, Saco, Falmouth, and Mechias." Vice Admiral Samuel Graves to Lieutenant Henry Mowat, October 6, 1775, printed in *Naval Documents of the American Revolution Volume II* [cited hereafter as NDAR], p. 324-326. At a Salem town meeting in October 1775, a resident of Falmouth, Massachusetts—modern-day Portland, Maine—brought news the British attack on that seaport as part of this naval initiative in which hundreds of Falmouth buildings and a number of Falmouth ships had been burned or destroyed. Salem Town Meeting Minutes, October 23, 1775. Salem Town Meeting Minutes, October 23, 1775; *Journals of the House of Representatives of Massachusetts 1775* (Boston: Massachusetts Historical Society, 1982), p. 201.

³ "From John Adams to Horatio Gates, 23 March 1776," Founders Online, National Archives (<http://founders.archives.gov/documents/Adams/06-04-02-0023>, ver. 2014-05-09). Source: *The Adams Papers*,

lawyer William Pynchon received a copy of the Declaration of Independence in July of 1776, he read it with deep concern, wondering how North Americans would access specie now that they fell outside the bounds of the British Atlantic and faced a long and uncertain process of establishing the United States.⁴

The dislocations of wartime also opened up new commercial opportunities in Salem. Despite his own reservations about independence, Pynchon observed the celebration in Salem shortly after the arrival of the Declaration and the great expectations for the future. A townsman read the document from the balcony of the Salem Town Meeting building on King Street as cheers and bells rang out in celebration. That afternoon, a crowd removed the king's arms from the building and broke them apart on the street.⁵ The loss of traditional markets like Halifax in Nova Scotia and Jamaica in the West Indies was a shock to the Salem mercantile community, but independence from Great Britain also offered them the chance to engage more openly and broadly in Salem's commerce with the non-British markets that had garnered increasing restrictions from London in recent years. Salem privateers and letters of marque began seizing the manufactured goods they had previously imported by way of Boston, and they cultivated new trade with French markets.

The Salem mercantile community turned to privateering as both a strategy of self-preservation against British seizures and as an opportunity to use the disruptions of war to expand Salem as an Atlantic port. The Salem mercantile community had the means and the motivation to invest its resources and manpower in privateering. Salem had the skilled mariners,

Papers of John Adams, vol. 4, *February–August 1776*, ed. Robert J. Taylor. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1979, 58–60.

⁴ Fitch Edward Oliver, *The Diary of William Pynchon of Salem* (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin, and Company, 1890), 10.

⁵ Oliver, *Diary of William Pynchon*, 12. At a June 1776 town meeting, Salem residents had voted their support for independence in their instructions to their representatives in the Massachusetts General Court. Salem Town Meeting Minutes, June 12, 1776, Salem City Clerk.

the capital and ships, the harbor facilities, and the merchant community to initiate privateering endeavors and to process the sales and handling of prizes back in port. Ports in British North America that competed with larger regional entrepot markets, as Salem competed with Boston, had historically been some of the most active in privateering during the previous wars of the eighteenth century.⁶ The Salem mercantile community's familiarity with speculative and new commerce in order to compete with Boston eased the port's turn to privateering as a wartime strategy. Salem became a leading New England center for privateering, and prizes flowed through the Massachusetts Maritime Court in Salem and out to Salem auction houses. By the end of the war, Salem's privateering efforts primed the port to expand its trade into the global marketplace with the arrival of the peace through the acquisition of large merchant ships, capital, and commercial knowledge.

Imposition of an American legal regime over privateering spurred debates and divisions over the political economy for the new American union. As prize cases proceeded through the state and then congressional admiralty courts, these courts became a venue for American traders to justify their commerce and its contribution to the greater good of the new Confederation. Admiralty cases publicized the practices of privateers and extended the debate to the broader populace. War gave Salem traders the opportunity to pursue the political economy they desired for the British empire under the new auspices of the American union. Salemites' colonial trade, however, had been opportunistic and expansive, and setting a definition of the commercial interest of the new nation, particularly in wartime, limited the forms of lawful national commerce. Further, privateers competed with the U.S. navy over manpower, they pushed the

⁶ During King George's War, Newport (a subsidiary port of Boston) and New York (a subsidiary port of Philadelphia) were the leading privateering centers in British North America. Carl E. Swanson, "American Privateering and Imperial Warfare, 1739-1748," in *The William and Mary Quarterly* 3rd Series, Vol. 42, No. 3 (July 1985), 363, 366.

bounds of American commerce beyond those allowed by the law of nations, and they even seized American merchant ships plying traditional colonial-era trade routes that had now become illegal. Managing the conflict between these interests as they related to the new exigencies of war and the American union helped Americans identify, if not start to answer, the political questions they would have to address and the interests they would have to reconcile in the ensuing debate over the new American political economy and the construction of a new sovereign nation.⁷

⁷ Recent historiography, particularly by works David Hendrickson and Eliga Gould, have put the influences of the eighteenth-century international state system at the heart of the American founding. In so doing, these works have revealed the inadequacies of Progressive, consensus, and republican paradigms to explain the construction of the American federal system. Hendrickson's "unionist paradigm" characterized the founding of the American union as a peace pact among the "proto-nations" of American colonies and later states. Only by joining in political union, he argued, could American communities overcome the "state loyalties" that would otherwise prove fatal to their long term collective independence and sovereignty in the international arena. Hendrickson's state-centered focus nonetheless leaves open the question of how Americans outside of high-level politics envisioned the union and struggled to cooperate with their fellow Americans in their daily lives and in their own contributions to the construction of this new political alliance. As Salem's merchant experience reveals, the new union had to reconcile American interests that were often pan-Atlantic in scope but also centered on city or town corporate interests, not individual states like Massachusetts. David Hendrickson, *Peace Pact: The Lost World of the American Founding* (Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 2003), for quotations see 29, 110. Further, American experiences in wartime trade reveal how the founding-era American "drive to be accepted as a treaty-worthy nation in Europe," identified by Gould, created conflict for maritime Americans. Merchants and traders who welcomed the protections and privileges that came with establishing a sovereign American under the law of nations sought out these protections as a means to participate in Atlantic commerce. They bristled when the rules of sovereignty placed boundaries on the practice or growth of their commerce in Atlantic markets, a tension that endured at the heart of debates over American political economy throughout the founding era. Eliga Gould, *Among the Powers of the Earth: The American Revolution and the Making of a New World Empire* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2012). Earlier historiographical paradigms of the American founding that focused on the influences of liberal or republican ideology illuminated the expectations that Americans had for their new government in terms of the rights and virtues that they believed it would protect and the interventions they believed government would make in the underlying conflict between aristocracy and democracy, especially within states. But constructing a functional and sovereign union required achieving cooperation among the states and their inhabitants, and here Hendrickson pointed out that liberalism or republicanism offered little or no guidance for Americans of the founding era. For early conceptions of the unionist paradigm see Cathy Matson and Peter Onuf, *A Union of Interests: Political and Economic Thought in Revolutionary America* (Lawrence, KS: University of Kansas Press, 1990). On the importance of political thought and ideology see Bernard Bailyn, *The Ideological Origins of the American Revolution* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1967). On republicanism see Gordon Wood, *The Creation of the American Republic 1776-1787* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1969); Stanley Elkins and Eric McKittrick, *The Age of Federalism: The Early American Republic 1788-1800* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993). On liberalism see Joyce Appleby, *Capitalism and the New Social Order: The Republican Vision of the 1790s* (New York: New York University Press, 1984). An alternative paradigm of the founding presented by Progressive historians instead focused on the domestic, class-based struggle for power between the moneyed or landed elite and the popular, democratic interests. But the unionist paradigm revealed that by ignoring or downplaying the state or sectional conflicts in the founding era, these Progressive historians missed the context of inter-state conflicts that had real ability to destroy the union at the time of its founding. For Progressive-era

II

In the months before and after independence, the Derby merchant house in Salem considered how to adapt their Atlantic commerce to wartime conditions in order to protect their property from seizure and, if possible, capitalize on new wartime opportunities. In February of 1776, Elias Hasket Derby, son of Richard Derby, Sr. who had taken over active management of his father's merchant house, wrote to Captain Nathaniel Silsbee in command of a Derby ship in the West Indies that Derby had no idea what the ever-changing state of political and commercial affairs would look like in the spring. Consequently, he left the conduct of the family's West Indies business to Silsbee's care. If Silsbee could get the ships back to port, Elias recognized that the unsettled conditions had created an opportunity for great profit. He expected cotton, cocoa, sugar, cordage, and gunpowder from the West Indies to make at least a 100 percent profit and goods imported from Europe via the West Indies, including linens, silks, and stocking, even more.⁸ Under the new rules of the Continental Associations, whose committees were "very watchful in all affairs," Silsbee could bring French or "foreign" goods back to Massachusetts, and Derby counseled him to make sure to bring manufactured items like linens back from the French port of Mole St. Nicholas on Saint-Dominique rather than a British market.

Derby faced risks for trading at both British and non-British markets. He had sent Captain Allen Hallet to Mole St. Nicholas, a free port on the French island of Saint-Dominique,

treatments of the founding era see Charles Beard, *An Economic Interpretation of the Constitution of the United States* (New York: Free Press, 1935); Arthur Schlesinger Jr., *The Colonial Merchants and the American Revolution, 1763-1776* (New York: F. Ungar Publishing Co., 1957). For neo-Progressive interpretations that also focused on socioeconomic conflict at the founding see Gary Nash, *The Unknown American Revolution: The Unruly Birth of Democracy and the Struggle to Create America* (New York: Viking, 2005); Woody Holton, *Forced Founders: Indians, Debtors, Slaves & The Making of the American Revolution in Virginia* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1999).

⁸ Elias Hasket Derby [cited hereafter as EHD] noted that Goods imported into the West Indies from Europe, including linens, silks, and stocking, were worth even more. EHD to Nathaniel Silsbee, February 13, 1776, printed in *NDAR*, 3:1247.

where he met Silsbee. He recognized that the Continental Association allowed the importation of French goods and that trading at Saint-Dominique offered a way to purchase French goods or cover British goods as French goods, but this trade put his ships at risk of seizure from the British navy, and he had already lost one vessel to a British cruiser that year.⁹ Derby instructed Silsbee that Hallet carried two registers which would ease his trade in either French or British markets as Silsbee thought best. With his British register, Hallet could sail from Saint-Dominique to Jamaica, a British market that had anchored much of Derby's traditional commerce to the West Indies, and trade there as a British ship from Dominica. He could also sail from Mole St. Nicholas to Nova Scotia with papers claiming the cargo was consigned to a merchant there. Nonetheless, trading in British markets risked seizure by American privateers, and Derby expected hundreds of these privateers would head to sea by the summer. "I suppose the Interest of mine as Jamaica or Halifax Property, must share the fate of others if taken," he wrote to Silsbee, and he counseled his captain to make sure his goods did not come to ports in Essex County with British papers.¹⁰ News in Salem was that Great Britain was tiring of the "war" and was sending commissioners to North America to reach a settlement. Derby doubted this effort would have much success, but he had no doubt that eventually "we shall once more carry on business at Salem in peace and safety."¹¹ He had great expectations for the future of Salem in peacetime, and in the meantime he managed his trade with the flexibility to take advantage of opportunities or protect his interest from risks however they might arise.

⁹ For quote see EHD to Nathaniel Silsbee, February 13, 1776, printed in *NDAR*, 3:1245; for directions about not breaking Association rules see EHD to Nathaniel Silsbee, February 1776, quoted in Robert Peabody, *The Derbys of Salem, Massachusetts: A study of eighteenth century commerce carried on by a family of typical New England merchants* (Salem: Essex Institute, 1908), 212.

¹⁰ EHD to Nathaniel Silsbee, February 13, 1776, printed in *NDAR*, 3:1245. For the capture of the Derby ship *Patty* by a British vessel see Peabody, "The Derbys of Salem," p. 211.

¹¹ EHD to Nathaniel Silsbee, February 1776, quoted in Peabody, "The Derbys of Salem," 24.

The fate of the four Derby vessels under Silsbee's care reflected the risks and rewards of the time. Silsbee sent Hallet back to North America from Mole St. Nicholas, and the vessel made a safe passage to Massachusetts, where its cargo sold to advantage.¹² Silsbee kept the remaining three vessels with him in the West Indies. He wrote to Derby that he would visit Jamaica to gather the latest news and that he would not send the ships back to North America until their safety seemed secure. But even the moments of perceived safety were filled with significant trade risks. When the three vessels finally departed for Massachusetts in the spring of 1776, only one made it home. British cruisers captured the other two.¹³

After this loss, Derby made a calculated decision to manage the risks of business and continue his trade by entering into privateering. In June 1776, Derby outfitted the ninety-ton ship *Sturdy Beggar* and obtained a commission from the Massachusetts Council to arm her as a privateer. In August, Derby installed Hallet as the *Sturdy Beggar's* captain. With her six carriage guns, the *Sturdy Beggar* plied the same Caribbean waters that had formerly comprised Derby's trading grounds. For captures, the *Sturdy Beggar* sought British vessels loaded with sugar, rum, and other West Indian goods that Derby once traded for on his own account as a private merchant. If he could not acquire the goods he was accustomed to trading for through his traditional channels, he could acquire them through armed commerce.¹⁴

The turn to privateering and letters of marque was a longstanding and routine strategy in Massachusetts and throughout the Atlantic to protect maritime commerce against armed threats,

¹² The ship arrived in Falmouth (Portland, Maine). Peabody, "The Derbys of Salem," 24.

¹³ Peabody, "The Derbys of Salem," 24.

¹⁴ Peabody, "The Derbys of Salem," 24. Commission for *Sturdy Beggar* is in Massachusetts Archives Collection, Volume 164, Massachusetts State Archives, Boston, Massachusetts (according to Peabody). For Allen Hallet as commander of the *Sturdy Beggar* in August 1776 see *The Massachusetts Magazine*, Volume 2 (Salem, MA: Salem Press Company, 1909), 170.

particularly during times of war.¹⁵ There were other business strategies for merchants to pursue during war that allowed them to adjust their commerce to heightened wartime risks or prohibitions, but arming their vessels offered the chance of continuing and even expanding commerce at the lowest risk.¹⁶ As armed commerce exposed the competing Atlantic interests within American society—particularly between the interests of trade and establishing sovereign government— it earned labels of piracy, a claim that historiographical treatments have continued.¹⁷ Nevertheless, privateering was an established, legitimate form of wartime

¹⁵ In the eighteenth century, the Lords of Admiralty in London granted authority to colonial governors to issue wartime privateering commissions and letters of marque that authorized colonial ships to arm themselves and seize enemy ships. As recent as the French and Indian War, buying and selling prize goods, or at least entering cargoes as prize goods, had been a regular way for Massachusetts merchants to obtain trade items like wine and the products of foreign markets. In that war, Massachusetts merchants, sailors, and ships had been active in privateering, in armed commerce under letters of marque, or in service aboard armed provincial vessels built and commissioned to protect the Massachusetts coast and Massachusetts shipping. Philip Chadwick Foster Smith, “*King George*, The Massachusetts Province Ship, 1757-1763: A Survey,” in *Seafaring in Colonial Massachusetts* (Boston: The Colonial Society of Massachusetts, 1980), 175-198. The *King George* was one Massachusetts ship commissioned by the provincial government during the French and Indian War to protect Massachusetts shipping, and muster lists for that vessel reveal that Salem men comprised 16% of the ship’s crew during its service from 1758-1763 [need numbers!]. Smith, “*King George*”, 184-185. Richard Derby to Captain Edward Allen, December 31, 1762, Derby Family Papers, Peabody Essex Museum, Salem, Massachusetts [cited hereafter as PEM]. John Franklin Jameson, ed., *Privateering and Piracy in the Colonial Period: Illustrative Documents* (New York: The MacMillan Company, 1923), x.

¹⁶ Richard Buel discussed merchant entry into maritime insurance and sharing vessels or cargoes in syndicate with other traders as two strategies merchants pursued in lieu of traditional trade during periods of armed conflict. Buel wrote that arming vessels was “the most obvious strategy for minimizing the risk of capture during wartime.” Richard Buel, *In Irons: Britain’s Naval Supremacy and the American Revolutionary Economy* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998), 96-102. See also Doerflinger, *A Vigorous Spirit of Enterprise* for merchant adjustments to their business strategies during war and periods of heightened risk. Gardner Weld Allen, *Massachusetts Privateers of the Revolution* (Boston: The Massachusetts Historical Society, 1927), 9.

¹⁷ Privateering has become so regularly linked with piracy in part because the practice could be easily abused by participants who seized unlawful prizes in the Atlantic where distance and geography challenged oversight and regulation. But the ease of abuse is also a reason why privateering became such a critical project of governance for the new American union. Eliga Gould demonstrated the distinction between lawful privateering and lawless piracy, and he described fears of eighteenth-century Americans that privateers would turn into pirates, thereby weakening the legitimacy of American claims to just sovereignty in the eyes of other nations. Gould, *Among the Powers of the Earth*, 34-37. For a discussion of privateering as a regulated and lawful wartime endeavor that offered alternative commercial strategies to merchants during war and was distinct from piracy, see David Starkey, *British Privateering Enterprise in the Eighteenth Century* (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 1990). For a discussion of privateering that emphasized its commercial aspects, especially as means to engage in trade for relatively small city-states, but demonstrated the problem of historians slipping without explanation between the terms piracy and privateering, see Fernand Braudel, *The Mediterranean and the Mediterranean World in the Age of Phillip II, Volume II* (New York: Harper & Row, 1949), 865-891. For further discussion of privateering see Carl Swanson, *Predators and Prizes: American Privateering and Imperial Warfare, 1739-1748* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1991). For a treatment of both privateering and piracy see David Starkey et al, eds., *Pirates and Privateers: New*

commerce that occupied American maritime communities and required a legal framework from the new American union. As merchants, mariners, and their commercial associates participated in this armed commerce, therefore, they also participated in the contested and gradual process of building a new sovereign nation with an Atlantic political economy.

As the British navy threatened the centers of trade and routes of commerce in Massachusetts by November 1775, Massachusetts was the first province in British North America to issue privateering commissions to its vessels.¹⁸ The preamble to the privateering legislation identified Massachusetts's royal charter as the fundamental justification for these new privateering commissions, since the charter authorized Massachusetts to make provisions "for the special defence of their said Province or Territory" and to protect against any and all persons engaged in the invasion, destruction, or annoyance of the province. With these commissions, armed Massachusetts vessels could seize all ships found attacking any part of America, supplying the British military, "or employed by the said enemy in any respect whatsoever," and they were to libel their prizes in Massachusetts admiralty courts.¹⁹

Shortly after the Massachusetts Act, the Continental Congress began issuing commissioners for armed commerce, particularly in response to Prohibitory Act in December 1775, followed by commissions for privateers by March 1776. The King had rejected the

Perspectives on the War on Trade in the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 1997).

¹⁸ New England experienced restrictions on its commerce earlier than the rest of British North America, and thus transitioned into wartime strategies with a head start on other regions. Buel, *In Irons*, 101. The enemy, as named in the Act, was not Great Britain writ large, but its present Administration which the Act claimed had gained a corrupting influence over the British Parliament and now wielded destructive "military tools" which were "infesting the sea-coasts with armed vessels, and daily endeavouring to distress the inhabitants [of Massachusetts], by burning Towns, and destroying their dwellings with their substance, plundering livestock, and making captures of provision and other vessels." *Act of Massachusetts for Encouraging the Fixing out of Armed Vessels*, November 11, 1775, American Archives: Documents of the American Revolution, Accessed August 3, 2014, <http://lincoln.lib.niu.edu/cgi-bin/amarch/getdoc.pl?var/lib/philologic/databases/amarch/.8724>.

¹⁹ *Act of Massachusetts for Encouraging the Fixing out of Armed Vessels*, November 11, 1775.

colonies' petitions for redress, the Congressional privateering resolution claimed, the British military had commenced an "unjust war" against British North America, and now Parliament had declared the colonies to be in rebellion, all of which revealed to the Congress the current British scheme to "deprive [the colonies] of the liberty they have a right to by the laws of nature and the English constitution."²⁰ To provide for the security and defense of the United Colonies, the Congressional resolution authorized the arming of vessels to cruise against and seize all ships owned by inhabitants of Great Britain. The congressional resolves called on the states to establish their own admiralty courts for the trial of prizes. Americans could bring their prizes to any state court, but the resolution offered no guidelines for the rules by which these state courts would operate, so courts differed in their practices from state to state.²¹ Commissioning privateers was an act reserved for legitimate governments according to international legal traditions, but many saw supporting trade rather than supporting a new independent government as the Act's ultimate goal.²² Marblehead's Elbridge Gerry wrote home to Joseph Warren that he hoped with the new privateering resolution in Congress that "all your ports will be open, and a free trade allowed with all nations."²³

Commercial centers were filled with optimism that privateering would salvage their economies by protecting the American shoreline and American shipping from British warships

²⁰ *Journal of the Continental Congress, Volume IV* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1906), 229-230.

²¹ Henry Bourguignon, *The First Federal Court: The Federal Appellate Prize Court of the American Revolution, 1775-1787* (Philadelphia: The American Philosophical Society, 1977), 52-58.

²² Promoting the new congressional privateering act, John Hancock wrote to the Assembly of Rhode Island: "The trade of America is an object of so much consequence, and the protection of it so necessary, that I make no doubt of your giving all the encouragement in your power, to any measures that may be deemed expedient, for its security and existence." John Hancock to Assembly of Rhode Island, April 12, 1776, printed in *Journal of the Continental Congress*, 4: 255n 1. Mimicking New England ideas of political economy articulated in the months and years after the 1764 Sugar Act, Marblehead's Elbridge Gerry wrote home to Joseph Warren that he hoped with the new privateering resolution in Congress that "all your ports will be open, and a free trade allowed with all nations." Elbridge Gerry to Joseph Warren, March 26, 1776, printed in *Journal of the Continental Congress*, 4: 232n2.

²³ Elbridge Gerry to Joseph Warren, March 26, 1776, printed in *Journal of the Continental Congress*, 4: 232n2.

and by seizing the trade goods off of British vessels that Americans had been so long denied. After living through so many years of commercial restrictions from either imperial regulations or colonial protests, Americans seaport communities were eager to return to the traditional, but also robust Atlantic commerce they had once enjoyed. From his post at the Continental Congress in Philadelphia, John Adams wrote home to Abigail Adams that “Thousands of schemes for Privateering are afloat in American Imaginations” as the people in that port strategized over how best to acquire goods for the American market through seizures. “Some are for taking the Hull ships, with Woolens for Amsterdam and Rotterdam -- some are for the Tin ships -- some for the Irish Linnen ships -- some for outward Bound and others for Inward Bound India Men -- some for the Hudsons Bay ships -- and many for West India sugar ships,” Adams wrote to his wife. “Out of these Speculations many fruitless and some profitable Projects will grow.”²⁴

In her replies from Massachusetts, Abigail Adams informed her husband that “the Rage for privateering” was great there, too.²⁵ Privateers had kept the local market well-stocked with sugar, she wrote, and they had driven down sugar prices from their previous high levels.²⁶ Similarly, James Warren wrote from Boston in August of 1776 that privateering had consumed the port’s commerce. “We have nothing going forward here but fixing out privateers, and condemnation and sale of prizes sent in by them, so many that I am quite lost in my estimate of them.” Like Abigail Adams, Warren noticed the price of West India goods dropping with the influx of prize cargoes.²⁷ To Samuel Adams, Warren wrote that same week that Boston was

²⁴ John Adams to Abigail Adams, August 12, 1776 [electronic edition]. *Adams Family Papers: An Electronic Archive*. Massachusetts Historical Society. <http://www.masshist.org/digitaladams/>

²⁵ Abigail Adams to John Adams, September 7, 1776 [electronic edition]. *Adams Family Papers: An Electronic Archive*. Massachusetts Historical Society. <http://www.masshist.org/digitaladams/>

²⁶ Abigail Adams to John Adams, August 17 and 25, 1776 [electronic edition]. *Adams Family Papers: An Electronic Archive*. Massachusetts Historical Society. <http://www.masshist.org/digitaladams/>

²⁷ James Warren to John Adams, August 11, 1776, printed in *Warren-Adams Letters: Being Chiefly a Correspondence Among John Adams, Samuel Adams, and James Warren*, Vol. I (Boston: The Massachusetts Historical Society, 1917), 267.

“privateering mad” and that “Many kinds of West India Goods, that we used to be told we should suffer for want of, are now plentier and cheaper than I have known them for many Years.”²⁸

In Salem, privateering offered the town’s mercantile community the chance to sustain if not expand their Atlantic trade and capitalize on wartime conditions to build up Salem as a regional hub for maritime commerce. Four of the town’s merchants shared one of the first Massachusetts privateering commissions under the November 1775 Act. On December 1, 1775, Bartholomew Putnam, Joseph Sprague, Henry Rust, and Joshua Ward, Jr. petitioned the Massachusetts Council for a privateering commission for their vessel the *Dolphin*, a small schooner of about seventeen tons.²⁹ All four men were Salem merchants, and they appointed Richard Masury, a Salem ship captain, as captain of the *Dolphin*. The *Dolphin* set out from Salem, and by February 1776, notices appeared in Massachusetts newspapers of her prizes and their impending trial in the Massachusetts Maritime Court. The *Dolphin* had cruised a traditional trade route between New England the Nova Scotia, and her first two prizes, the fifty-ton *Fisher* and the seventy-ton *Success*, were both British supply vessels sailing along this passage loaded with provisions for the British military.³⁰ Before the end of her first commissioned cruise, the *Dolphin* also took the forty-five-ton vessel *Dispatch* and the sixty-ton *Friendship*. All prizes

²⁸ James Warren to Samuel, August 15, 1776, quoted in Allen, *Massachusetts Privateers*, 17.

²⁹ Although the title of the petition listed the intended commission as a privateer commission, in the text of the petition the four owners requested a commission for letters of marque and reprisal. “Petition for Commission for the Massachusetts Privateer Schooner *Dolphin*,” December 1, 1775, printed in *NDAR* 2:1217. Original from Massachusetts State Archives, Volume 164. Allen, *Massachusetts Privateers*, 116.

³⁰ *The Continental Journal*, September 9, 1776; Both vessels had been captured before the *Dolphin* received her official privateering commission from the Massachusetts Council. Timothy Pickering to the Council of the Colony of Massachusetts Bay, November 30, 1775, Timothy Pickering Papers [cited hereafter as TPP], Massachusetts Historical Society, Boston, Massachusetts [cited hereafter as MHS]; *Boston Gazette*, February 26, 1776. The notice of trial in the *Boston Gazette* listed the *Success*’s tonnage at fifty tons, but the notice of its sale at auction listed the vessel as seventy tons. *New-England Chronicle*, June 13, 1776.

were condemned in the Massachusetts Maritime Court, and all were sold at auction in Salem over the summer of 1776 along with their cargoes and ship supplies.³¹

Salem's privateering fleet grew from then until the end of the war, with an average size of about thirty ships in rotation.³² During the course of the Revolution, Salem and the adjoining harbor of Beverly supplied just over 20% of the entire Massachusetts privateering fleet, and just over 10% of the entire fleet of American privateers commissioned by either the states or the Continental Congress.³³ Over the course of the war, Salem privateers employed nearly 3,000 men in their crews. Advertisements for prize cargoes and prize vessels filled Massachusetts newspapers in 1776 in the place of traditional advertisements for merchant imports.³⁴ While some merchants owned privateers in small groups of two or three people, many others owned privateers in large partnerships through the purchase of shares, just as they had distributed risk and lowered trade costs by purchasing freighting space on multiple trading vessels in earlier periods of open commerce. Massachusetts law dictated the distribution of prize profits among the owners, officers, and crew of the capturing privateer once the prize had been tried and condemned in court. Wages from privateering voyages were well-known to be higher than those available on land or in the Continental military, while the crew's payment in shares of prize goods offered better protection against inflation than normal mercantile wages.³⁵ Further, crew members holding shares in future prizes could sell any portion of their shares for income before

³¹ *New-England Chronicle*, June 13, 1776.

³² Allen, *Massachusetts Privateers*, 40; the bond for the *Dolphin* printed in *ibid.*, 86. Vickers, *Young Men and the Sea*, 164-165.

³³ Phillips, *Salem in the Eighteenth Century*, 396.

³⁴ "Auction Sales in Salem, of Shipping and Merchandise, During the Revolution," in *Essex Institute Historical Collections* Vol. XLIX (April 1913): 97-124.

³⁵ Payment in goods was better protection from deflation because "the value of goods continued to rise against money." Buel, *In Irons*, 103.

departing on a cruise.³⁶ The business arrangement on privateers mirrored and often bettered those offered in private commercial enterprise, with sailors signing on to single, often short, cruises with no further obligation once the vessel returned to port.³⁷

Despite the risks of seizure or prizeless voyages, the draw to privateering as a business venture was strong for merchant, shopkeeper, and sailor. Now that British cruisers had disrupted the fishery and Salem's commercial trade routes, privateering offered a way to return to the normality of maritime commerce in this seaside town.³⁸ Stories of daring battles at sea between American privateers and British vessels circulated through American seaports, but the guns that fired in Salem harbor at the return of privateers and their prizes did not only celebrate incoming riches or grand victories against the oppressive British. Salem also celebrated the return to a traditional commercial lifestyle enabled by privateering, even as the town adapted to the new context of American independence.³⁹

Captain Simon Forrester knew the waters off Portugal well from his days in the merchant service, and after he gained command of the Salem privateer *Rover* in July 1776, Forrester set his course for these familiar sea lanes. Before returning to Salem in 1777, Forrester and his crew had seized seven prize vessels that had been engaged in trade to southern Europe and the broader Mediterranean marketplace. Similarly, when James Barr stepped aboard the Salem privateer *Black-Snake* in 1777, the ship had just returned to Salem from a cruise in the West Indies and

³⁶ Buel, *In Irons*, 92. As one example, in 1777 Stephen Cox of Beverly sold one half of one of his shares in the future prizes of the brig *Lyon* to Stephen Waters of Salem. *Lyon* (Privateer Brig) Agreement, December 20, 1777, Revolutionary War Collection, Series I Ships' Papers, PEM.

³⁷ Paul A. Gilje, *Liberty on the Waterfront: American Maritime Culture in the Age of Revolution* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004), p. 110-114; Buel, *In Irons*, 102-103.

³⁸ For the larger argument about how "waterborne activity was from an early age entirely normal and utterly ubiquitous" in Salem and for maritime communities, see Vickers, *Young Men and the Sea*, especially introduction, 3.

³⁹ For guns firing in celebration at the return of privateers to Salem see John Pickering, Jr. to Timothy Pickering, April 15, 1779, TPP, MHS.

would soon depart for another of New England's traditional trading grounds, the waters off Nova Scotia.⁴⁰ In these three Atlantic regions—the West Indies, the North Atlantic, and the seas off the Iberian Peninsula—the same regions where Salem merchant vessels had plied most of their colonial trade, Salem privateers carried out most of their wartime cruises. By focusing on seizing ships going in and out of these traditional markets, privateer-merchants ensured that most goods they carried to Massachusetts admiralty courts and were sold in Massachusetts auctions were the common trade goods and provisions that had traditionally filled New England marketplaces. In 1776, advertisements for the sale of prize cargoes filled Massachusetts newspapers in place of traditional advertisements for merchant imports or retail shops.

Salem auction houses and wharves became busy sites for the sale of prize cargoes and captured ships during the war. Linens, papers, decanters and glasses, armaments, and ship rigging all went up for sale in Salem prize auctions. Joseph Lambert's auctioneering business handled many of the prize sales. In 1776, among the many auctions that Lambert managed, he sold the provisions that had been seized by Salem's first privateer, the *Dolphin*, off a ship bound for Halifax, and at Ropes Wharf he sold the multiple vessels seized by Captain Forrester in the *Rover*.⁴¹ Many of the items that had been imported into Salem under a claimed indulgence from Great Britain in the colonial period, now came regularly and lawfully as prize goods. Lambert auctioned off Lisbon lemons, Portuguese onions, and red wine from southern Europe.⁴² The store of Salem merchant Joseph Blaney hosted the public sale of the cargo off the *Rover's* prize ship *Mary and James*, which Captain Forrester had taken on route to the Mediterranean. The vessel's bill of lading had valued her cargo at £36,000, and the auction list printed in the

⁴⁰ James Barr Curwen, "Reminiscences of Capt. James Barr of Salem, Mass.," in *Essex Institute Historical Collections*, Vol. XXVII No. 7, 8, 9 (Jul., Aug., Sept., 1891), 127-133.

⁴¹ "Auction Sales in Salem," 100; *Independent Chronicle*, November 14, 1776.

⁴² "Auction Sales in Salem," 99, 102.

newspapers before the sale listed large assortments of cloth goods and clothing, furniture, tableware, paper wall hangings, jewelry, and other fine manufactured goods.⁴³ Captain Samuel Williams of Salem served as agent for a number of the town's privateers, and he oversaw the sale of prizes and the distribution of prize money to the owners and crew. In December of 1777, Williams was taking inquiries from potential buyers for a number of prize vessels, their rigging, and their cargoes recently arrived in Salem, including the schooner *Sally*, prize to James Barr's *Black-Snake*.⁴⁴

As privateering sustained traditional Atlantic trade in Salem, it strengthened Salem's role as an entrepôt market, independent of distribution centers like Boston, and it strengthened the town's commercial connections with ports throughout the Atlantic. Like the *Rover*, many prize vessels brought manufactured items into Salem that had traditionally come from England or Europe, usually by way of Boston. Metal ware, anchors, compasses, chinaware, and a variety of linen goods found direct import and sale in Salem as prize cargoes. In 1779, William Pickman wrote to Pickering from Salem that he hoped the town's privateers would find good fortune at sea in the upcoming season and obtain for Salem a new "crop" of foreign goods.⁴⁵ Newspapers in Massachusetts, particularly those in Boston, advertised upcoming prize auctions in Salem, and Lambert's auctioneering records reveal that Boston merchants were regular buyers of Salem's prize vessels and cargoes.⁴⁶

⁴³ For the value of the *Mary and James's* cargo see *Continental Journal*, October 10, 1776, printed in NDAR, 6:1196; For the advertisement for the auction of the ship's cargo see *Independent Chronicle*, November 14, 1776.

⁴⁴ "Auction Sales in Salem," 99-102; *The Boston Gazette*, December 29, 1777.

⁴⁵ William Pickman to Timothy Pickering, May 17, 1779, TPP, MHS.

⁴⁶ Boston newspaper regularly and by law printed notices of upcoming libel cases to be held at Salem, as well as advertisements for Salem prize auctions. For two examples see *Continental Journal* (Boston, MA) October 10, 1776, and *Independent Chronicle*, November 14, 1776. As one example of Boston merchants purchasing condemned prizes in Salem, see "Auction Sales in Salem," 100 for the sale of the *Rover's* prize vessels that went to Boston merchants.

Privateering enabled Salem's commercial community to solidify and grow its connections with non-British ports and merchants around the Atlantic through the handling of prize trials and prize sales in foreign markets. Many American privateers while on cruises near Europe or in the West Indies chose to send their prizes to more regional markets of neutrals or allies rather than send them back across the Atlantic to the United States for trial. In the Spanish port of Bilbao, the merchant house of Gardoqui & Sons, a regular trading partner with colonial New England merchants in the fish trade, handled the sale of many American prize cargoes. During the Revolution Gardoqui & Sons supplied the U.S. Army with cargoes of armaments through their New England commercial partners.⁴⁷ American privateers also sent prizes into French ports in the West Indies. At French Martinique by 1782, the American firm of Messrs. Brenton, Shattuck, and Jarvis handled the condemnation and prize sales for a number of New England and Salem merchants.⁴⁸

Salem people relied on the basic provisions brought into market by privateers to feed the mercantile community and to fill outward cargoes. On July 21, 1776, guns fired and cheers went up at a Salem wharf as a prize vessel entered the harbor, filled not with European luxury goods, but with butter and beef.⁴⁹ In Salem as in ports throughout the eastern seaboard, the war disrupted and reoriented usual commercial routes to acquire provisions.⁵⁰ Salem struggled to

⁴⁷ See Magra, *Fisherman's Cause*, Chapter 8.

⁴⁸ For the firm's work with Elias Hasket Derby, see Peabody, *Logs of the Grand Turk*, 25; for the firm's announcement of its establishment see Brenton, Shattucks, and Jarvis to Christopher Champlin, July 28, 1782, printed in "Commerce in Rhode Island, 1726-1800," in *Collections of the Massachusetts Historical Society*, Seventh Series, Vol. II (Boston: Massachusetts Historical Society, 1914), 165-166.

⁴⁹ Oliver, *Diary of William Pynchon*, 13.

⁵⁰ In New York City, for example, the British occupation of the southern New York counties cut off the city from these provision suppliers, and traders responded by importing more goods by way of Boston, Philadelphia, or ports in Rhode Island and Connecticut. Historian Bernard Mason writes, "Battered by adversity, a number of merchants forsook the state in order to have direct access to maritime traffic." Bernard Mason, "Entrepreneurial Activity in New York During the American Revolution," in *The Business History Review* Vol. 40 No. 2 (Summer 1966), 190-191.

trade for provisions with the inland towns of Massachusetts during the war, particularly since the port had traditionally relied on its Atlantic hinterland to supply many of its foodstuffs and outward cargoes. Privateering offered a wartime strategy to continue to import provisions from Salem's Atlantic commercial geography, but the irregularity of incoming prizes forced Salemites to rely more than usual on their inland neighbors for food. Salem merchant George Williams, brother-in-law to Pickering, resented Salem's new dependence on Massachusetts farmers. "Our Farmers are as cruel as Death in there Demands on the Inhabitants," he complained to Pickering as the price of firewood, beef, and corn rose higher and higher in Salem.⁵¹ In 1778, the dwindling supply of bread in Massachusetts gave Williams further worry that "on the Sea Coast the Inhabitants will not have any to eat."⁵² The state's supply by sea had dwindled, due in large part to an increase in British patrols of the Massachusetts coastline in 1778, making the seaports even more dependent on "the Farmers extortion." "We were in hopes to have had some by way of Privateering," he wrote Pickering, but "none come as yet."⁵³ He worried that the town would not be able to send out its fleet of privateers in early 1779 due to want of provisions.⁵⁴ Massachusetts farmers were as "cruel as the enemy" he wrote to Pickering in August 1779, and despite the geographic distance, those in other states seemed much more trustworthy as trading partners.⁵⁵ "We long to have a free coast with our Southern States," Williams claimed, "so we may not depend on our Farmers, for they will destroy the sea ports, if it be in there power."⁵⁶

⁵¹ George Williams to Timothy Pickering, March 22, 1778, in George Williams, "Revolutionary Letters Written to Timothy Pickering," in *Essex Institute Historical Collections* XLII (Salem: Essex Institute, 1907), 10.

⁵² George Williams to Timothy Pickering, March 15, 1779, in *Revolutionary Letters*, 208.

⁵³ George Williams to Timothy Pickering, March 15, 1779, in *Revolutionary Letters*, 208.

⁵⁴ George Williams to Timothy Pickering, April 6, 1779, May 17, 1779, in *Revolutionary Letters*, 204, 207.

⁵⁵ George Williams to Timothy Pickering, April 6, 1779, July 3, 1779, in *Revolutionary Letters*, 314.

⁵⁶ George Williams to Timothy Pickering, August 15, 1779, in *Revolutionary Letters*, 316.

Williams believed relief would come with the re-opening of Salem's sea lanes: "I hope a day will come that we Shall have a free course by water, which is the only way to loar the price."⁵⁷

III

As the Salem community turned to privateering as a means to both protect and build the port's interest as an Atlantic commercial hub, condemnations in the Massachusetts Maritime Court kept Salem auctions busy with the sale of prize goods and ships. Massachusetts had established a state admiralty court with its first privateering act in November 1775, but after the Continental Congress passed its own privateering resolves in March 1776 calling on the states to try prizes, Massachusetts reworked its admiralty courts and established a new district in Salem. Unlike admiralty courts in the colonial era that had drawn the ire of British North Americans, juries determined the facts of Revolutionary-era admiralty cases, while a judge then ruled whether or not to condemn a vessel or cargo as a lawful prize.⁵⁸ As the Massachusetts Assembly determined the procedures of Massachusetts Maritime Court, the state legislature restricted the cases authorized for appeal to Congress. In measures matched only by New Hampshire in their restrictions on appeals, Massachusetts law allowed only those cases involving seizure by a continental naval vessels or vessels of a friendly foreign nation to submit an appeal to Congress, while the Massachusetts Superior Court of Judicature maintained the final ruling in all other cases.⁵⁹

⁵⁷ George Williams to Timothy Pickering, December 13, 1777, in *Revolutionary Letters*, 324. Compounding this tension by late 1778 and early 1779 was the refusal of Massachusetts farmers to accept "dead" money. Williams wrote to Pickering that farmers sold provisions for a much higher price if purchased with dead money and that most people in the seaports, merchants and poor included, had most of their money in dead money. See George Williams to Timothy Pickering, February 28, 1779, printed in *Revolutionary Letters*, 201.

⁵⁸ For the colonial admiralty courts see, Carl Ubbelohde, *The Vice-Admiralty Courts and the American Revolution* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1960).

⁵⁹ For an overview of the Massachusetts Maritime Court and its relationship to the Congressional court of appeals, see Bourguigon, *The First Federal Court*, esp. 58-61.

The Middle District of Massachusetts Maritime Court sat in Salem, and Salemites trusted in this court due to its decisions by local juries, its fast work hearing and processing cases, and the appointment of townsman Timothy Pickering as its judge. From 1775 to 1777, Pickering heard all libels against prizes once they arrived back in Essex County.⁶⁰ If condemned, prize vessels and their cargoes went to public auction, with agents to divide the proceeds among the officers and crew.

The Salem maritime community used the mechanisms of privateering law, including Pickering's court, to retain the commercial benefits of this wartime strategy in Salem, even to the detriment of outside interests, including the authority of the Continental Congress. As Salem's wharves and auction houses bustled with the business of privateering, they also revealed the tensions between growing American trade and establishing an American government. John Bradford, the Massachusetts agent for the Continental Congress's Secret Committee of Trade, which acquired arms and ammunition for the American army through Atlantic commerce, often found himself in different Massachusetts ports working to recover Committee ships that had been seized at sea by American privateers. In October 1776, Bradford was in Salem trying to recover the ship *James* and its cargo after Captain Forrester's *Rover* had seized this vessel as its prize. The Edenton, North Carolina merchant house of Hewes & Smith owned the *James* and had sent it out from North Carolina loaded with tobacco and turpentine for Europe under contract with the Congress's Secret Committee. A British naval vessel had captured the *James* on this voyage, but Forrester's *Rover* had retaken the *James* in the Atlantic and sent the ship into Salem. Privateering law made this a lawful prize, and Pickering concurred when he condemned the ship in the Massachusetts Maritime Court. Bradford spoke with the *Rover*'s owners to try to

⁶⁰ Timothy Pickering to the Council of the Colony of Massachusetts Bay, December 12, 1775, TPP, MHS.

negotiate a fixed price by which Bradford could re-purchase the *James*, but the owners and their privateering crews stood to benefit from an open auction, and the law made this the legal means to dispose of prize ships and cargoes. On November 26, Samuel Williams sold the *James* at Ropes's Wharf on the Salem waterfront. The ship had gone for more money than Bradford had been willing to pay, and he and the Committee received only a portion of the ship's value granted to them by the Massachusetts Court.⁶¹

In September 1776, Elias Hasket Derby stood before his fellow townsman Pickering as the representative for the Salem privateer *Revenge* in the case of the prize *Anna Maria*. On August 15, 1776, the *Revenge* had captured the *Anna Maria* on its voyage from Barbados to Nova Scotia carrying rum, sugar, madeira wine, and other goods. Despite claims by Daniel Bucklin, representative for the Rhode Island privateer *Montgomery*, that the two privateers had taken the prize in consort with one another, thereby entitling the *Montgomery* to a share of the prize, the jury declared the *Anna Maria* the lawful and sole prize of the *Revenge*. Pickering condemned the ship and sent it to public auction, all in just over a month since the *Anna Maria*'s capture.

Removing the case from Pickering's court lost the benefits of this local jurisdiction to Salem people, and it subjected the prize distribution to lengthy delay. After an unsuccessful appeal in the Massachusetts Superior Judicature in Cambridge, Massachusetts, Bucklin submitted a petition to the Continental Congress asking for a final appeal. But after a year-long wait until the case finally came before the congressional court, Bucklin failed to appear in court,

⁶¹ John Bradford to the Secret Committee of the Continental Congress, November 26, 1776, printed in *NDAR*, 7: 291; John Bradford to the Secret Committee of the Continental Congress, April 9, 1777, printed in *NDAR*, 8: 303; *Independent Chronicle*, September 26, 1776; *Independent Chronicle*, November 14, 1776; Elizabeth Miles Nuxoll, *Congress and the Munition Merchants: The Secret Committee of Trade During the American Revolution, 1775-1777* (New York: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1985), 197, 215, 218-219; "Auction Sales in Salem," 100.

and the matter was dismissed. Those in Salem involved in the *Revenge* had resisted this appeal to Congress, and they argued against Bucklin's petition not on the merits of the case but on the legality of the congressional appeals process. After being called before the congressional court in 1778 to testify in the appeal as the *Revenge's* captain, Salem's Joseph White submitted a lengthy petition, authored by Salem lawyer William Wetmore, in which he drew on the Massachusetts laws governing admiralty appeals to Congress to argue that final decision in this case rested with the state. "In all the resolves of Congress even respecting maritime matters & the institution of a maritime court," Wetmore wrote, "the supreme legislatures of the several states seem to be presumed as competent for & having authority to regulate these matters." Wetmore claimed that since there was no mandatory language in the congressional resolves regarding what appeals would go to congress, the state had the final rulings. Under the Articles of Confederation, he continued, "it is expressly declared that each state retains its sovereignty, freedom, & independence, and every power, jurisdiction & right which is not by this confederation expressly delegated to the united states in Congress assembled, so that how, even before such confederation agreed on, the laws of this state can be revised and annulled by any proceedings on this petition, he is at a loss to conjecture."⁶²

As he considered the eventual end to war with Great Britain, however, Pickering himself saw benefit for his community and union in applying a national standard for American privateering in line with the law of nations. When Simon Forrester departed from Salem in the *Rover*, for example, the terms of his commission revealed the Continental Congress's interest in

⁶² Petition of Joseph White, *White v. The Ship Anna Maria, Daniel Bucklin*, Records of the Court of Appeals in Cases of Capture, 1776-1787, Microfilm, National Archives and Records Administration. Bourguignon, *The First Federal Court*, 270-271.

aligning American privateering with the traditional laws of nations.⁶³ The commander could seize by force of arms all ships belonging to the inhabitants of Great Britain and all ships engaged in transporting contraband goods to the British military; all prizes would be tried in American admiralty courts; commanders were to ensure that both he and his crew acted according to “the practice of civilized nations in war.”⁶⁴ American merchants and traders, keen on securing broad Atlantic trade for themselves, welcomed the political initiative to secure the treaty-worthiness of the United States in an international context, but they did not always welcome the real-life ramifications that this endeavor imposed on their commercial practices.

As the *Rover* sent prizes back to Massachusetts for trial, Pickering determined whether or not Captain Forrester and his crew had made lawful captures according to the rules of his instructions. At every seizure, Forrester had shown his privateering commission, signed by John Hancock, to the captain of his prize.⁶⁵ He had interpreted this commission to give him certain rights, but in Pickering’s estimation Forrester had followed too broad a definition of the goods and ships that were supporting the British military when Pickering learned that Forrester had seized the property of an Italian citizen carried aboard one of Forrester’s British prizes. A chastising letter from Pickering to Forrester spoke of the tension for the United States, even by 1776, between abiding by the law of nations to promote treaty-worthiness in international relations and claiming broad commercial liberties as a sovereign right. Pickering wrote to Forrester of his “indignation” that the *Rover* had plundered Italian property, and he insisted with language that Forrester return the property in the name of justice. There were legal and accepted

⁶³ The original March 23, 1776 resolution by the Continental Congress to grant privateering commissions authorized American privateers to seize vessels belonging to the inhabitants of Great Britain “according to the laws and usages of Nations.” *Journal of the Continental Congress*, 4:230.

⁶⁴ “Instructions to the commanders of private ships or vessels of war,” April 3, 1776, *Journal of the Continental Congress*, 4: 253-4; Petition for Commission for Simon Forrester to Command the Massachusetts Privateer Sloop *Rover*, July 12, 1776, printed in *NDAR*, 5:1034-5.

⁶⁵ John Lempriere, Consul at Faro, to Robert Walpole (Copy), September 1, 1776, SP 89/83, PRO.

limits to privateering, even by those of an independent nation, and Pickering reminded Forrester that he had agreed to these limits upon signing his bonds before voyage. “The property of an Italian and of any other foreigners not an enemy to the American States is secured by the laws of nations,” Pickering lectured Forrester, and the United States must observe these laws, he warned, “if we expect the Heaven’s protection, or the countenance of foreign states.”⁶⁶

Salemites protected their corporate interest as a commercial hub through the use of Pickering’s maritime court and Massachusetts’s restrictive limits on admiralty appeals, but they also relied on the congressional prize court as a means to the same end. As local interests clashed in state admiralty courts throughout the union, complaints by libellants began to turn more and more to the congressional appeals to court for a final and more balanced hearing.⁶⁷ Privateering entangled Salemites with other ships and traders throughout the United States: American ships captured by the British could then be recaptured by American privateers, muddling the condemnation process; privateers from different ports often worked in consort with one another to capture British prizes; many American ships carried British papers to cover them against possible run-ins with British naval vessels, or they continued to trade to British markets, leading to controversies in admiralty courts about the legality of certain captures; further, privateering operated on an Atlantic scale, and American privateering law allowed captors to bring their prizes to any ports in the United States with an admiralty court. As Salem ships entered other American ports and prize courts as captors or as prizes, they began to rely on the congressional prize court of appeals as a source of orderliness in the trial process and as a check on the local interests that shaped outcomes in other states’ courts, just as in Salem.

⁶⁶ Timothy Pickering, Jr. to Simon Forrester, November 12, 1776, TPP, MHS.

⁶⁷ For complaints about the state admiralty courts in New Hampshire and in Massachusetts, including the court in Salem, for irregularities and the idea that the congressional court would see more cases as a result, see William Whipple to Josiah Bartlett, September 15, 1776, *NDAR*, 6:831.

In 1777, Timothy Pickering took a position in the U.S. Army Quartermaster's Office and moved to Philadelphia, where he served as an informal advocate for the Salem mercantile community in their privateering cases through that port. As Salem prizes regularly entered this domestic but distant port, the agents, crews, and owners of the privateers relied on Pickering, a trusted townsman, to negotiate on their behalf, push cases through the sluggish appeals process, transmit prize proceeds back to Salem, and even bid on their condemned prize vessels at auction to help drive up the sale price.⁶⁸ As Americans adopted familiar admiralty court practices from the British model of the colonial period to meet the new context of American independence, Pickering was a key asset for Salem merchants in this process.

In 1779, for example, Pickering negotiated over the legal rules of prize distribution as an advocate for privateers owned by Elias Hasket Derby in partnership with other Salem men. Derby's ships the *Centipede* and *Lexington* had captured a prize vessel in company with a Rhode Island privateer, the *St. John*, and the *St. John's* owners had claimed a large share of the prize money based on English precedents that divided prizes according to the number of guns on each privateer. Pickering recognized that the swivel guns, swords, and spears that were the only weapons carried aboard the Derby vessels would not qualify them for any share of the prize, despite allegations that the *St. John* had made no appreciable contribution to the seizure under question. To advocate for Derby's interest, Pickering argued that "Our mode of privateering is different...small privateers & even open boats & canons have means adequate, when alone, to the

⁶⁸ For some examples see Timothy Pickering to Captain Nathan Nichols, February 5, 1779, Timothy Pickering to Messrs. John Hodges and Richard Manning, September 6, 1779, Timothy Pickering to Joseph Pierce, September 6, 1779, memorandum of letter from Timothy Pickering to George Williams, November 17, 1779, TPP, MHS.

capture of vessels, and therefore every species of arms capable of being used, should be allowed for.”⁶⁹

Pickering’s Salem friends found his presence in Philadelphia as an in-person advocate to be a critical asset, especially since even the Confederation admiralty judicial process could still be manipulated by local interest groups. Pickering could judge when to proceed with a case and when to negotiate for an out-of-court settlement. In 1780, Pickering oversaw the condemnation case for a Salem privateer *General Pickering* bearing his own name but owned by George Williams. In September 1779, the *General Pickering* had taken a British ship, the *Hope*, carrying guns and provisions and had sent it into Philadelphia for trial. As the case of the *Hope* proceeded through the state admiralty court, a group of Pennsylvania merchants came forward claiming that they had owned the *Hope* before the war and that it had been taken from them by the British in 1775.⁷⁰ When the jury awarded these merchants half of the prize money from the *Hope*, Pickering and Williams eagerly appealed the decision as they sought out evidence that the *Hope* had been condemned in a Halifax admiralty court.⁷¹

By the time the *Hope* case moved to the congressional appeals court, arguments in another Pennsylvania case regarding the privateer *Active* had claimed that the congressional court had no authority to re-examine the factual findings of a Pennsylvania jury. Pickering sent Williams a recently published pamphlet on the *Active* case and noted how he expected the same argument to appear in other cases including that of the *Hope*.⁷² If the congressional court

⁶⁹ For information on the two Derby vessels see Allen, *Massachusetts Privateers*, 99, 204. EHD regularly hired Pickering to advocate for the prizes his crews sent into Philadelphia and transmit the proceeds back to Salem. Timothy Pickering to Andrew & Ward, February 21, 1779, TPP, MHS.

⁷⁰ *Harraden v. Hope*, Records of the Court of Appeals in Cases of Capture, 1776-1787, Microfilm, National Archives and Records Administration.

⁷¹ George Williams to Timothy Pickering, December 12, 1779, TPP, MHS.

⁷² Timothy Pickering to George Williams, March 1, 1780, TPP, MHS; Pickering likely sent Williams the pamphlet *The Case of the Sloop Active, &c.* (Philadelphia, 1779).

overturned the *Hope* decision from the Pennsylvania admiralty court, which Pickering expected based on trial proceedings to that point, the Pennsylvania admiralty judge would have to execute this decision. “The only chance I had of success was founded on the firmness and integrity of the present judge of admiralty, Francis Hopkinson,” Pickering wrote to Williams, but Hopkinson had dual loyalties, one to Congress as Treasurer of Loans and one to the Pennsylvania Assembly as the state’s admiralty judge. If Pickering kept the case in the federal court of appeals, he faced a “great probability” that the court would decide in the *Pickering’s* favor, but on the other hand, “it was not certain that the judge of admiralty would have executed that decree, or if he attempted it there is a high probability that the assembly wd interfere...that it would revive a dispute between Congress and the state of Pennsylvania, which must prove injurious to the common interest.” Amid so much uncertainty about the case’s future, Pickering decided to settle with the Pennsylvania merchants outside of court and divide the proceeds of the *Hope’s* hulk and ship fixtures. This would ensure a more immediate and likely higher payment to the *General Pickering’s* owners and crew who were eager for the income.⁷³

IV

Wartime privateering and the system of adjudicating prizes brought on early debates over the political economy of the new American union and the forms of trade that would best serve national and mercantile interests alike. In the colonial period, Salem traders had extended the port’s Atlantic commerce and lessened its dependence on larger ports like Boston by engaging in opportunistic commerce, often to non-British markets and in non-British goods, under the claim that expanding commerce served the larger good of the British empire. As the American union

⁷³ Timothy Pickering to George Williams, March 1, 1780, TPP, MHS. Pickering had previously agreed with the *Hope’s* former owners that the *General Pickering* would receive full proceeds from the *Hope’s* cargo on board at the time of capture.

inherited the empire in North America in 1776, Americans now had to define how commerce in its many forms served the larger good of the union. As Salem sustained and expanded its own corporate interest through privateering, this wartime commerce at times put Salem's interest at odds with other ports, with the Confederation government, and with non-mercantile communities.

The opportunism of privateering seemed particularly troublesome to its critics given the newness of the union, wartime pressures on state-building, and the uncertainty of national authority. In an ongoing 1778 debate over the merits of privateering between two former New Hampshire members to the Continental Congress, William Whipple wrote to Josiah Bartlett that he feared the evils of privateering “would operate with more violence in this country, in its present unsettled state, than in a country where all the powers of government can be vigorously exercised.”⁷⁴ In a 1778 letter to Pickering Mansel Alcock wrote that privateering would help the American economy by increasing the supply of commodities through prize goods, but Alcock regretted that “its very hard, the Circumstances of the Times admits not the Sea Ports to exert their strength in the little Maritime War we are able to carry on, without incurring the Jealousy & Envy of the Country People.” Nonetheless, after starting the war as a strong supporter of privateering, Mansel observed the army struggling for men in competition with the flow of seamen to privateers, and he switched “from a Warm advocate for Privateering [to] almost a convert to the Interests of the Army.”⁷⁵

⁷⁴ William Whipple to Josiah Bartlett, July 12, 1778, printed along with a number of letters from Whipple to Bartlett, including some on the topic of privateering, in “William Whipple’s Letters,” *The American pioneer: a monthly periodical, devoted to the objects of the Logan Historical Society; or, to collecting and publishing sketches relative to the early settlement and successive improvement of the country*, Vol. II (Cincinnati: J.S. Williams, 1842-1843), 75. For a discussion of the Whipple-Bartlett correspondence on privateering see Michael J. Crawford, “The Privateering Debate in Revolutionary America,” in *The Northern Mariner*, XXI No. 3 (July 2011), 229-231.

⁷⁵ Mansel Alcock to Timothy Pickering, April 1778, TPP, MHS.

Even within Salem, the port's mercantile community divided over the forms of trade that served the larger good of the nation, and by extension of Salem. As colonial pan-Atlantic traders, Salemites were accustomed to trading in non-British markets, particularly as a means to compete against other ports like Boston and to capitalize off their particular commercial circumstances, such as their proximity to the fishery and their available tonnage for transatlantic shipping. During the war and the Confederation period, the Salem community now confronted a debate over what forms of foreign trade would build Salem's interest while also serving the common national good, especially considering the long-term interest of the union as a commercial republic in peacetime. Just as they had debated the line between indulgences and smuggling in the colonial period and later would divide between interests in free trade and neomercantilism with Great Britain after the Constitutional period, Salemites during the war disagreed over what bounds, if any, the American national interest should place on opportunistic commercial activity.

Richard Derby, Jr. found himself at the center of this debate in wartime Salem as he decided during the war to maintain substantial trade with British markets in the West Indies and in Nova Scotia. Like many merchants in Salem who were accustomed to trading in the colonial period with markets in the West Indies and in Canada, Richard Derby, Jr. now found much of his traditional commerce outside the bounds of sanctioned American commerce under the rules of the Continental Congress by 1775. In December 1775, word reached Salem from the camp of General George Washington that Derby's ship *Kingston Packet* had been taken by two of Washington's armed schooners off Nova Scotia on suspicion that the ship had been trading in violation of the Association.⁷⁶ The brig had sailed from Jamaica after departing to Nova Scotia,

⁷⁶ Stephen Moylan to the Salem Committee of Safety, December 5, 1775, printed in *NDAR*, 3:1284; *Journal of the Continental Congress*, 1:79.

and had departed on a voyage to Cape Francois, a customary trade route within Salem's colonial shipping patterns.⁷⁷ Derby claimed that the brig was not a proper prize, and as the Salem Committee began investigating the matter, per Association guidelines, it found the town's merchant community largely in agreement.

Due in part to this discovery, Committee chairman John Pickering, Jr. wrote back to Washington's camp that the Committee had declined adjudicating the matter: "It appears many merchants have considered the prohibition in the same light with the owner of the above brig — many vessels being thus employed."⁷⁸ Even though Pickering declined adjudicating the Derby ship case due to local commercial practice in Salem, he nonetheless recognized the need for legal clarity on American commercial matters. He wrote to Washington: "Should the Committees in different towns give different judgments, it would lead to great difficulties. We must therefore request that this important question be determined by judges whose jurisdiction is general."⁷⁹ Even within Salem, there was strong disagreement over Derby's actions, and the public censure Derby received there induced him to address the town through a letter to the Committee. He promised not to send the brig again to Nova Scotia, nor have any dealings with that province, "until matters are settled or Liberty is granted for so Doing."⁸⁰

In September of 1776, Derby's *Kingston Packet* was seized again, this time by a Rhode Island state ship off of Cape Breton and sent in to Providence for trial. The *Kingston Packet* carried a load of dried and pickled fish, along with papers that claimed she was owned by a merchant in Kingston, Jamaica. But sailors aboard the ship testified that the vessel's captain,

⁷⁷ For a description of this 1775 voyage of the *Kingston Packet* see Testimony of Thomas Conway, October 31, 1776, *Hopkins v. Derby and the Kingston Packet*, Records of the Court of Appeals in Cases of Capture, 1776-1787, Microfilm, NARA.

⁷⁸ John Pickering, Jr. to Stephen Moylan, December 7, 1775, *NDAR*, 4:215. Ultimately, Washington ordered the brig restored to Derby.

⁷⁹ John Pickering, Jr. to Stephen Moylan, December 7, 1775, *NDAR*, 4:215.

⁸⁰ Richard Derby, Jr. to Salem Committee of Safety, December 9, 1775, *TPP*, MHS.

Samuel Ingersoll, had informed them that Derby was the *Kingston Packet's* true owner. Others recounted how the ship had sailed for Essex County after leaving the West Indies but had been chased by a British war ship towards Nova Scotia, where the combination of foggy weather and unfriendly ships in the vicinity encouraged them to sail east and put into Canso for the remainder of the summer. There they sold their rum and molasses to fishermen in exchange for fish before being captured by the Rhode Island vessel.⁸¹ The Rhode Island state admiralty court declared Derby's ship a lawful capture.⁸²

In his claims that his commerce remained legal and that his trading strategies reduced the prohibitive risks of wartime commerce, Derby found some support within the Salem community and within the congressional admiralty court that eventually overturned the Rhode Island decision. Through his representative at court, Derby claimed ownership of the *Kingston Packet* and its cargo. Salem insurance officers who had underwritten a policy on the *Kingston Packet* for this particular voyage testified that Derby had believed the vessel lost when it did not return to Massachusetts at the expected time and that the insurance policies generally gave ships wide latitude to return to any number of ports in North America due to the regular presence of British warships on the coast.⁸³ Sailor John Burrows testified that he was with Captain Ingersoll in Jamaica when Ingersoll had acquired papers listing the *Kingston Packet's* owner as a Jamaican

⁸¹ Testimony of John Gordon, October 16, 1776, and Testimony of John Burrows, November 1, 1776, *Hopkins v. Derby and the Kingston Packet*, Records of the Court of Appeals in Cases of Capture, 1776-1787, NARA. The Rhode Island court condemned Derby's ship as a lawful prize, but the congressional court of appeals reversed this decision.

⁸² The Continental Congress Prize Court overruled the judgment by the Rhode Island Admiralty Court. *Hopkins v. Derby and the Kingston Packet*, Records of the Court of Appeals in Cases of Capture, 1776-1787, NARA.

⁸³ Testimony of Samuel Ward, October 31, 1776, *Hopkins v. Derby and the Kingston Packet*, Records of the Court of Appeals in Cases of Capture, 1776-1787, NARA. The policy on the *Kingston Packet* insured the ship on a voyage from Salem to one or more islands in the West Indies, with distinction, and then back to the North American continent. See copy of the insurance policy dated January 11, 1776 in *Hopkins v. Derby and the Kingston Packet*, Records of the Court of Appeals in Cases of Capture, 1776-1787, NARA.

merchant, and that Burrows had frequently heard Ingersoll claim that he had done so “only to protect the said Brigantine from the British ships.”⁸⁴

The ongoing war made Derby’s trading with the enemy seem treacherous to many, even in Salem. In February 1779, Williams sent Pickering news of the recent exploits of a Salem privateer plying the waters off of Barbados. The privateer had boarded a passing brig only to find that she was owned by Richard Derby, Jr., bound out of Salem carrying both Halifax and Massachusetts papers. The Salem privateer had sent the Derby vessel into Martinique for condemnation. Derby’s trading, especially his double papers, alarmed Williams, who remarked to Pickering that it was “high time for Congress to make a Resolve against such vile practices.”⁸⁵ In 1778, Alcock reported to Pickering that the Massachusetts General Court had recently begun to debate a measure pushed by Richard Derby, Jr. to outlaw privateering commissions to small ships under a certain tonnage in order to cut down on the seizures of ships around Nova Scotia. “The Popularity of the Derbys lessened much on this Motion,” Alcock wrote, particularly due to the recent news that a Massachusetts privateer had just taken a Derby ship involved in the Halifax trade. “Had this Motion of the Derbys past our Legislature, it might have been adopted by the whole Continent without knowing the sinister motive of it,” Alcock wrote, “and 1/3 or 1/2 of our Advantages by Privateering [would] have been struck of.”⁸⁶

⁸⁴ Burrows had given his statement under oath, but he still had good reason to offer testimony supportive to Derby’s case: Derby was a wealthy and familiar figure in the Salem community, and Burrows and his family depended on Derby for their income. As evidence of his awareness that Derby was the *Kingston Packet*’s true owner, Burrow testified that Derby had always paid his wages, presumably on earlier voyages, and that when Burrows was at sea Derby had made sure to give these wages to Burrows’s wife. Testimony of John Burrows, November 1, 1776, *Hopkins v. Derby and the Kingston Packet*, Records of the Court of Appeals in Cases of Capture, 1776-1787, NARA. For the relationship between merchants and sailors, particular the dependency of sailors on merchants for credit, see Vickers, *Young Men and the Sea*.

⁸⁵ George Williams to Timothy Pickering, February 20, 1779, TPP, MHS.

⁸⁶ Mansel Alcock to Timothy Pickering, April 1778, TPP, MHS.

Although his trade was opportunistic, self-serving, and against the wartime laws of the Continental Congress, Derby was nonetheless adapting his ideas of the political economy of the British empire to the new context of American union. As the United States made war on North Americans' colonial-era allies in the British West Indies and British Canada, Derby considered the peace. Derby had led the nonimportation effort in Salem as a temporary means to affect political change within his own domestic government in London, and his political protests prior to 1776 had targeted the British administration and Parliament, leaving open the possibility that American allies remained in individual British merchants throughout the Atlantic, in addition to the French.⁸⁷ Once wartime restrictions were removed, these markets could still anchor American trade in the broader Atlantic world, and Derby sought to maintain good trading relationships with these British ports in order to aid his future commercial exploits as a trader of the independent American union. As he pressed the measure in the Massachusetts General Court to limit privateering commissions, he cast the small American privateers that swarmed the waters off of Nova Scotia as pirates, and he argued that the disruptions to private trade they incurred in British Canada harmed America's allies in Nova Scotia.⁸⁸

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As they managed their wartime commerce, Salem traders considered the peace that would come eventually. From his post in Philadelphia, Pickering supplied the Salem mercantile community with trusted information that helped his townspeople make strategic adaptations in their commercial pursuits as conditions changed with the army or with congress. The distance from Philadelphia and the ever-changing wartime conditions made first-hand information a

⁸⁷ For one example of this argument from a Salem newspaper see *American Gazette, or Constitutional Journal*, July 9, 1776.

⁸⁸ Mansel Alcock to Timothy Pickering, April 1778, TPP, MHS.

valuable asset for those who wanted to survive and prosper in business amidst the upheavals of war. “Your friends, &c. depends on what you writ,” Williams told Pickering, “I am often called on to know if you have writ to me, for there is no dependence on Accounts & Reports in General.”⁸⁹ In Salem counting houses and on Salem wharves, merchants sought their commercial advantage in finding the right balance between investing in trade and investing in privateering. By 1778, British convoys and the arming of British merchant vessels increased the risks of American privateering, while the American alliance with France opened up new and alternative trading opportunities for American merchants.⁹⁰ With the departure of the British from Philadelphia that same year, Williams anticipated new commercial prospects and encouraged Pickering to keep him informed of military actions, “as it will Serve me much in Trade, if we should enter into it.”⁹¹

In June of 1780, Williams reported to Pickering that while privateering for the season had turned out poorly in Salem, “the merchants of this town in the Spring Voyages have been successful.”⁹² Williams himself was beginning to make his return to trade, and he was happy to welcome his privateer *General Pickering* back from her cruise from the West Indies in the spring of 1780 not with prizes in tow, but with a full cargo of sugar, cotton, cocoa, and rum. Following more conventional trading patterns made for “a much better Cruise than privateering,” he wrote

⁸⁹ George Williams to Timothy Pickering, November 3, 1777, printed in *Revolutionary Letters*, 320. See also George Williams to Timothy Pickering, November 27, 1777, printed in *Revolutionary Letters*, 323.

⁹⁰ Buel, *In Irons*, 103-104. Amid his usual accounts of the goods arriving in Salem as prize cargoes, Williams began to report to Pickering on clothes for the army, for example, that were arriving in Salem on American ships from France. George Williams to Timothy Pickering, May 4, 1778, printed in *Revolutionary Letters*, 11.

⁹¹ George Williams to Timothy Pickering, July 10, 1778, printed in *Revolutionary Letters*, 14. Adding further to these considerations about trade was the loss of a number of Salem privateers in the summer of 1779 when the town sent a naval force to participate in what would be a failed expedition against the British at Penobscot, Maine. George Williams to Timothy Pickering, July 3, 1779 and December 12, 1779, TPP, MHS.

⁹² George Williams to Timothy Pickering, June 6, 1780, TPP, MHS. Williams wrote to Pickering in the fall of 1780 that he was tentatively entering back into trade, though he expected to return to privateering that spring if there was no news of peace. George Williams to Timothy Pickering, October 24, 1780, TPP, MHS.

to Pickering.⁹³ Williams quickly sent the *General Pickering* loaded with sugar for Bilboa on a cruise that combined armed commerce with traditional trade. The *General Pickering* took British prizes, including the British warship *Achilles* in a much-celebrated three-hour battle off the coast of Spain, and traded her cargo of sugar in Bilboa with Messrs. Gardoqui & Sons.⁹⁴

In Salem and throughout Massachusetts, merchants began to take out commissions for letters of marque, permissions given to trading vessels that authorized them to arm for their own defense, rather than privateers as a strategy to strike a less risky balance between commerce and combat. Traditional commerce still carried potentially devastating risks for American ships in the Atlantic, as Williams found in the spring of 1781 when he lost the three commercial vessels he had recently sent to the West Indies to a British warship. Williams jumped quickly back into investing into armed commerce to save his business.⁹⁵ By 1779 in Massachusetts letters of marque accounted for more commissions issued by the state than privateers.⁹⁶ In Salem, Williams's regular list for Pickering of the privateers sailing out of Salem and Beverly included by 1779 a note that there were others under construction, and that these would sail with letters of marque.⁹⁷ Salem merchant Elias Hasket Derby had taken out commissions for twenty-two armed vessels from the beginning of the war to 1779, and only two of these had been for letters of marque. From 1780 to the end of the war, he requested letters of marque rather than privateering commissions for eight of the seventeen armed vessels he put to sea in that period.⁹⁸

⁹³ George Williams to Timothy Pickering, April 19, 1780, TPP, MHS.

⁹⁴ George Williams to Timothy Pickering, April 19, 1780 and September 21, 1780, TPP, MHS. For accounts of the battle between the *General Pickering* and the *Achilles* see *The Independent Chronicle* (Boston, MA), August 17, 1780; Allen, *Massachusetts Privateers*, 151.

⁹⁵ George Williams to Timothy Pickering, April 21, 1781 and June 12, 1781, TPP, MHS.

⁹⁶ Letters of marque were less costly to outfit with arms and men than privateers. Buel, *In Irons*, 104, esp. fn.79.

⁹⁷ George Williams to Timothy Pickering, May 17, 1779, in *Revolutionary Letters*, 207.

⁹⁸ See the list of Derby's armed vessels during the American Revolution in Peabody, *Derbys of Salem*, 25.

Privateering and armed commerce left Salem poised and ready to compete again in the Atlantic economy as the war came to a close. Despite the loss of much of Salem's fishing fleet in the course of the war, armed commerce had helped build Salem as an Atlantic commercial hub, by solidifying commercial connections between the Salem mercantile community and foreign ports throughout the Atlantic, and by adding ships to the port's mercantile fleet. Elias Hasket Derby had lost a number of his privateers to the British during the war, but overall he had made a good profit. In 1780 Derby had arranged for the construction of the largest privateering vessel yet in Salem, the 300-ton *Grand Turk*, which he outfitted with twenty-eight guns and a crew of 120 men.⁹⁹ During cruises over the next two years in the West Indies, in Southern Europe, and off the coast of Ireland, the *Grand Turk* seized many prizes that sold for large sums in both Bilbao, through Messrs. Gardoqui & Sons, and in Salem. The *Grand Turk's* prizes funneled money to Derby and his crews and provided ships for the Salem merchant community to use in future commercial exploits. Derby put the ship *Pompey*, the largest of the *Grand Turk's* prizes, up for sale in Salem in the spring of 1781. She was purchased by his brother-in-law, George Crownsinhiel, who renamed her the *America* and began outfitting her for the merchant trade.¹⁰⁰

Ships taken as prizes or built as privateers in Salem during the war were larger than the vessels Salemites had normally sailed in their Atlantic commerce prior to the war. In peacetime, Salem merchants would have to adjust their commerce to capitalize on these vessels' capacities. By 1782 and 1783, Elias Derby's confidence that Salem's Atlantic commercial geography, now bolstered with open commerce to French markets, would support trade in these larger vessels pushed him to refit his armed ships for mercantile service. In 1783, he loaded the *Grand Turk*

⁹⁹ Crew size according to 1781 privateering commission. Peabody, *Logs of the Grand Turk*, 11-13.

¹⁰⁰ Peabody, *Logs of the Grand Turk*, 30.

with fish, provisions, and lumber, and sent her on a voyage to the West Indies. He instructed the captain to trade in the French ports of Martinique and Guadaloupe and then to Jamaica if he was allowed entry. Williams was to load the *Grand Turk* with rum and return to Salem by way of Charleston, South Carolina, where he could sell his rum for rice. If at any time Williams needed additional funds, he could draw on Champion & Dickerson, a merchant house in London.¹⁰¹ In 1782, Derby began construction in Salem on an even larger vessel, the 360-ton *Astrea*, which he outfitted that year to sail to Nantes, France under a letter of marque.¹⁰²

Elias's brother Richard Derby, Jr. was less hopeful about the prospects for America's future as he considered American political society near the end of the war. After he had "breakfasted, dined & sup'd on Politics for 9 or ten years," he wrote to Timothy Pickering in Philadelphia in 1780, "I am sick of the great world." He watched as the price of provisions rose twenty percent in two days, and he doubted whether his investment in public funds would ever be worth something due to depreciation. During the war, he had experienced consistent criticism for his trade. He reported to Pickering that he had decided to retire to a farm in Beverly previously been owned by the loyalist William Browne. Though he always intended to remain in public life, the changing times had forced Derby to think otherwise. "Men & manners have taken quite a different turn," Derby wrote, "and you may in vain inquire for the virtue so apparent in every man's actions in 1775, for I assure there is not the least trace of it to be found."¹⁰³

¹⁰¹ *Grand Turk* manifest and orders to Captain Samuel Williams, September 24, 1783, printed in Peabody, *Logs of the Grand Turk*, 34-39.

¹⁰² Peabody, *Derbys of Salem*, 28.

¹⁰³ Richard Derby, Jr. to Timothy Pickering, April 18, 1780, TPP, MHS.

In his reply, Pickering was far more optimistic about America's future, as well as his own.¹⁰⁴ From his posting in the quartermaster's office in Philadelphia, Pickering had immersed himself in the commerce and commercial community of that city on behalf of his Salem friends, not only by serving as an advocate for their privateering endeavors, but also by obtaining payments on loan certificates, transferring money between the ports, and handling various purchases for their mercantile trade.¹⁰⁵ He recognized that New England merchants and their ports benefitted from having a trusted associate in a major market like Philadelphia to handle their trade and serve as advocate for their commercial interest. As he anticipated the coming of peace, he believed the best chance he had of providing for his family was to remain in the Philadelphia commission business managing the commerce of New England merchants. In this early stage of planning, Pickering wrote to Richard Derby, Jr. that his plan would only work if "the commercial transactions of the eastern merchants with this place should furnish sufficient employment & I could obtain their confidence so far as to be intrusted with the management of their business on commission."¹⁰⁶

Pickering began building an interstate and transatlantic network of associates for his commission business as the means by which he believed he would compete successfully in post-war commerce. By 1783, while stationed at Newburgh, New York, he arranged to partner with Samuel Hodgdon, a former Boston merchant whom Pickering had worked with at the Quartermaster's Office, as a way to improve the reputation and commercial know-how of his new merchant house and gain more business from Boston merchants. Hodgdon was still in Philadelphia, where he met with local merchants to seek out their commercial advice and gain

¹⁰⁴ Timothy Pickering to Richard Derby, Jr., May 6, 1780, TPP, MHS.

¹⁰⁵ For some examples, see Timothy Pickering to Richard Derby, Jr., February 5, 1779, Timothy Pickering to Elias Hasket Derby, February 21, 1779, Timothy Pickering to Captain Jonathan Peele, Jr., January 6, 1780, TPP, MHS.

¹⁰⁶ Timothy Pickering to Richard Derby, Jr., May 6, 1780, TPP, MHS.

potential customers. Pickering drew on his family and political connections as he brainstormed about the people that would connect him to broad networks of trade. When John Taylor Gilman, merchant and congressional representative from New Hampshire, visited Pickering at Newburgh, Pickering took the opportunity to inform Gilman of his intention to enter the commission business, and Gilman “promised to make the merchants in New Hampshire acquainted with the plan.” As Gilman departed, Pickering entrusted him to carry letters from Pickering to his cousin of Hampton, New Hampshire and to William Whipple of Portsmouth with news of Pickering’s new merchant house and with a request that they “procure as many merchants as possible in that quarter to favour me with their commands.”¹⁰⁷

Pickering consulted about his plans with his brother-in-law George Williams, and from Salem, Williams worked to secure for Pickering the business of merchants throughout New England. In addition to visiting with merchants in Salem, Boston, Charleston, Marblehead, Cape Ann, Portsmouth, and Newburyport, Williams encouraged Pickering to print a circular letter announcing his new business, which Williams promised to distribute among the seaport towns and the Massachusetts countryside. Williams had heard that Nantucket’s leading merchant, William Rotch, was heading to Philadelphia to visit Congress, and he advised Pickering that if he could meet with Rotch and gain his business in the lucrative whale oil trade to Philadelphia “it would be great, & they can serve you with the other merchants of that island.” After hearing of Pickering’s plan, Salem merchant Joshua Grafton told Williams, his uncle, that he would write to his brother Joseph Grafton in business at Havana and alert him to Pickering’s Philadelphia merchant house. Salem’s commercial presence in Philadelphia was not new; Pickering’s plans represented a reinstatement of this inter-urban commerce after the disruptions of the

¹⁰⁷ Timothy Pickering to Samuel Hodgdon, April 6, 1780, TPP, MHS.

Revolutionary war. Williams likewise consulted with Salem merchant Benjamin Goodhue, Pickering's cousin and a veteran of the pre-war Philadelphia market, who gave Williams specific advice on where Pickering should establish his store, the goods he should keep on hand, and how to negotiate with the Philadelphia-region millers, bakers, and iron merchants.¹⁰⁸

Pickering passed news of Williams's efforts on to Samuel Hodgdon and remarked with promise that "We seized the proper moment for proposing the commission business at Philadelphia."¹⁰⁹ The soundness of the idea was apparent not only in the promise of potential customers, but in the fact that this trade was attracting competitors. A few days after meeting with George Williams in Salem, Benjamin Goodhue admitted to Williams that a group of Salem merchants had already identified the need for a trusted post-war commission business in Philadelphia to handle their trade to that port and had asked Goodhue to return to Philadelphia to fill that role. Goodhue knew the proposal had promise, and he was still considering his options.¹¹⁰ Meanwhile, Williams also believed the time was right for Pickering's entrance into Atlantic trade from Philadelphia. American trade with foreign markets looked promising once again. Williams observed how two Salem ships belonging to Elias Hasket Derby and Joshua Grafton would soon arrive home loaded with French brandy. He subsequently advised Pickering that if he could find out the quantity of brandy currently in Philadelphia and the surrounding markets and be the first to send this information back to Salem, Pickering might gain the sale of Derby or Grafton's brandy in Philadelphia as those merchants looked to sell their goods throughout Salem's Atlantic world.¹¹¹ On May 10, 1783, the two partners officially entered into

¹⁰⁸ George Williams to Timothy Pickering, March 23, 1783 and April 8, 1783, TPP, MHS; Timothy Pickering to Samuel Hodgdon, April 2, 1783, TPP, MHS.

¹⁰⁹ Timothy Pickering to Samuel Hodgdon, April 2, 1783, TPP, MHS.

¹¹⁰ George Williams to Timothy Pickering, March 23, 1783, and Timothy Pickering to Samuel Hodgdon, April 2, 1780, TPP, MHS.

¹¹¹ George Williams to Timothy Pickering, April 8, 1783, TPP, MHS.

business as Pickering & Hodgdon, and by June George Williams had distributed the printed announcements of this new commission house through the towns and seaports of New England.¹¹²

Many Americans had reason to be optimistic about America's commercial future, even as they were uncertain about the future of the new United States. Americans had cheaper shipping costs than many of their global competitors, they could use their commercial adeptness with various cargoes and trade routes to jump from market to market, and they had used these qualities to gain trade in foreign markets for as long as the current generation of traders could remember. The view looked differently, however, once observers like Richard Derby, Jr. began to worry about how the United States would create and sustain a functioning, sovereign government as Americans had experienced under the British empire. Other observers began to consider how Americans would manage their great commercial aspirations within the legal structure of the law of nations and against the British Navigation Acts.

James Putnam, a Salem native, pondered this question about America's commercial future from his new home in Saint John, New Brunswick, to which he had fled in 1776 as a loyalist. By claiming independence from Great Britain, Americans had also claimed their independence from the British Navigation Acts, and Putnam believed these Navigation Acts, on balance, had offered Americans an overall advantage. By 1786, he observed how the British government was particularly determined "to admit no foreigner, on any pretence whatsoever into a participation of their own carrying trade." Putnam believed that France, Spain, Portugal, and Holland would also come to adopt policies barring foreigners from their carrying trades, and he saw no opening for Americans into this system. "Your southern states having exports that will

¹¹² Partnership agreement for Pickering & Hodgdon, May 10, 1763, TPP, MHS; George Williams to Timothy Pickering, June 11, 1783, TPP, MHS.

answer in some foreign markets may do something,” Putnam wrote to his brother Ebenezer in Salem, “but I can’t conceive how the northern [states] can expect ever to become a trading people.”¹¹³

¹¹³ James Putnam to Ebenezer Putnam, November 4, 1786, Putnam Family Papers, AAS.

Chapter 4

The Atlantic Origins of Early American Trade to the Indian Ocean

William Buchanan knew that James Madison had just made his job very difficult. In the spring of 1802, Buchanan served as U.S. Commercial Agent to the Isle of France, known also as Mauritius, a French island in the Indian Ocean to the east of Madagascar. He had just received instructions from Madison, the Secretary of State, requesting Buchanan to send back to the United States information on ship arrivals and the trade of American vessels at his post.

Buchanan was a central figure among the community of Americans at Mauritius. Arriving captains made Buchanan's office their first stop once in port, and Buchanan assisted them as needed in their dealings with French customs officials or French merchants. Buchanan lodged American officers at his home. American captains and supercargoes visiting the island gathered nightly at Buchanan's dinner table where they spent the evening in "licentious and obscene conversation."¹ Still, Buchanan did not believe that he could gather the information Madison requested. Instead, he reported, these captains preferred to keep their trade and their cargoes a secret.²

As American traders expanded their commerce to the Indian Ocean in the immediate years after the American Revolution, they did so by applying their long-established Atlantic commercial practices to this new region for trade.³ They used secrecy because they recognized

¹ William Fitz Paine to Dr. William Paine, September 9, 1803, Papers of William Fitz Paine, Paine Family Papers, American Antiquarian Society, Worcester, Massachusetts [cited hereafter as AAS]. Paine made this observation during his 1803 visit to Mauritius as an officer aboard a merchant vessel from Boston.

² William Buchanan to James Madison, May 30, 1802, July 31, 1802, and September 8, 1802, *Despatches from United States Consuls in Port Louis, 1794-1906*, Microfilm T-118, National Archives and Records Administration [cited hereafter as NARA].

³ Many scholars have asked how novice Americans expanded their commerce so successfully to the Indian Ocean by 1800, and the answers have ranged from exalted claims of American adventurism, to the commercial opportunities that war created for neutral carriers, to recent revelations of the commercial cooperation between British and American merchants, particularly in India. For American exceptionalism and adventurism see James Duncan Phillips, *Salem and the Indies: The Story of the Great Commercial Era of the City* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin

the ease with which their American competitors could adapt their Atlantic methodologies to the Indian Ocean marketplace. Despite their specie shortages, in the mid-1780s enterprising early American traders recognized that they could use knowledge of ports and markets to quickly enter the Indian Ocean marketplace using the familiar commercial strategies that they had used in the Atlantic rather than the transportation of specie. Overcoming their knowledge deficit about Indian Ocean markets and navigation would be faster than overcoming their capital shortages. Using resources at hand such as small ships and diverse cargoes of Atlantic provisions, Americans traded in new markets around the Indian Ocean in the 1780s and 1790s as they had traded for centuries in the Caribbean and in Europe: on short, circuitous voyages that they modified *en route* as they gathered new information about surrounding ports. Specific route and market information about current prices, the location of harbors, or sailing directions directed American voyages, and in contrast to deep knowledge of an entire region, this information was comparatively easy to acquire from newspapers, observation, conversation, or correspondence. American traders knew that their strategy of pursuing market- and route-based knowledge to get ships from point to point lowered the threshold of information needed to trade to a new market,

Company, 1947); alternatively, other historians have done important work to explore the merchant skills and culture of commercial enterprise that constituted early American merchant entrepreneurialism and enabled diversified commercial growth in the post-Revolutionary era. See Stuart Bruchey, *Robert Oliver: Merchant of Baltimore, 1783-1819* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1956) and Thomas M. Doerflinger, *A Vigorous Spirit of Enterprise: Merchants and Economic Development in Revolutionary Philadelphia* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1985). For the increased demand war created for American shipping and produce, particularly through the re-export trade, see Douglass C. North and Robert Paul Thomas, eds. *The Growth of the American Economy to 1860* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1968); Cathy Matson, "The Revolution, Constitution, and New Nation," in Stanley L. Engerman and Robert E. Gallman, eds., *Cambridge Economic History of the United States*, Vol. 1 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000). James Fichter argues against the neutral trade thesis and offers instead a claim that Anglo-American cooperation facilitated American commercial success in the Indian Ocean and transformed both American capitalism and British trade policy in Asia. James Fichter, *So Great A Proffit: How the East Indies Trade Transformed Anglo-American Capitalism* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2010). For similar claims to the importance of circuitous trading, cooperation with British traders, and trade to markets like Batavia and the Isle of France see Tyler Dennett, *Americans in Eastern Asia* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1922).

allowed flexibility in trade with relative ease, and facilitated quick geographic expansion of American commerce in the Indian Ocean as in the Atlantic.

In mid-size ports like Salem, where merchants sought their commercial advantage not only against each other but also against larger commercial centers like Boston, New York, or Philadelphia, traders adapted their familiar Atlantic commercial strategies built around short, multilateral voyages to pursue new commercial endeavors. Most Americans in the Indian Ocean sailed in smaller ships than those in the fleets of European East India companies, moved quickly between ports to lower costs, brought Atlantic provisions when they could not get specie, and entered the coasting trade between Indian Ocean ports.⁴ Many of the earliest Salem ships to the Indian Ocean used the Dutch Cape Colony, which they referred to as the Cape of Good Hope, and the French islands of Bourbon and Mauritius as gateway markets like St. Eustatius, Dominica, or Barbados where they could sell Atlantic provisions and obtain commercial information about the broader regional marketplace.⁵ Salem ships traded with British, French, Dutch, and Spanish settlements in the Indian Ocean just as they had in the Caribbean. In the Caribbean Americans faced restrictions to their trade from European navigation acts, while in the Indian Ocean they faced similar restrictions from the monopoly rights granted to European East India companies, and in both regions they capitalized on loose enforcement by authorities and private interests of company officials or individual traders to circumvent these *de jure* restrictions and engage in a rich *de facto* commerce. As they expanded their commercial knowledge about commerce beyond the southern tip of Africa, Salem traders began to trade in

⁴ Most of the first American vessels to trade in the Indian Ocean were between 100 and 150 tons. European vessels trading in the Indian Ocean could reach 1000 tons. Dennett, *Americans in Eastern Asia*, 12.

⁵ For early American trade to these Mascarene Islands see Auguste Toussaint, *Early American Trade with Mauritius* (Port Louis: Mauritius National Archives, 1954).

India, China, the islands of Southeast Asia, and eventually East Africa and the Arabian Peninsula.

The Confederation period was a critical period for American commercial expansion and the development of American political economy.⁶ Salem traders learned and applied knowledge of foreign commerce in the Indian Ocean during the Confederation period of the 1780s. The transfer of American commercial practice from the Atlantic to the Indian Ocean was the product of a particular moment for Americans after the Revolutionary War in which Americans faced great commercial opportunity in the global marketplace as shippers and suppliers of provisions. Americans had the advantage of their newfound freedom to trade widely after independence, but lacked the resources to advance their endeavors to expand trade, so they deployed their familiar commercial habits, small ships, and trade goods. The enterprising efforts of Salemites and other maritime Americans contrasts with the traditional narrative of Confederation-era economic stagnation, salvaged only by the ratification of the U.S. Constitution and the commercial opportunities created by international war in 1793. The American solutions of trading circuitously as carriers, concentrating their trade at ports that served as hubs of information, and

⁶ Like historian John Fiske, who interpreted the Confederation period as one in which European restrictions on American commerce, inflation, and competition among the states had crippling effects on American commerce, Curtis Nettels in the 1960s foregrounded economic depression in his interpretation of the era. John Fiske, *The Critical Period in American History 1783-1789* (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin and Company, 1888); Curtis Nettels, *The Emergence of a National Economy 1775-1815* (New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1962). Historian Merrell Jensen, alternatively, argued that the Confederation period was one of great commercial growth. Merrell Jensen, *The New Nation: A History of the United States during the Confederation 1781-1789* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1967). Studies of American political economy have cast the Confederation period in terms of economic stagnation caused by the impotence of state actions against European restrictions, economic depression, and interstate rivalries, solved by constructing a strong union under the federal Constitution in 1789. Cathy Matson and Peter S. Onuf, *A Union of Interests: Political and Economic Thought in Revolutionary America* (Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 1990). For the claim that international war in 1793 and the commercial opportunities of neutral trade created the market conditions for the expansion of the American economy, see Douglas North, *The Economic Growth of the United States 1790-1860* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, Inc., 1966). For a discussion of the entrepreneurial activities of Philadelphia merchants during the Confederation period, see Thomas Doerflinger, *A Vigorous Spirit of Enterprise: Merchants and Economic Development in Revolutionary Philadelphia* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1986), esp. Chapter 7.

entering regional coasting trades emerged out of this particular moment, although these strategies were common to people throughout the Atlantic and Indian Oceans as a means to survive and compete in the global marketplace.⁷ Only over time, as Americans gained greater knowledge of the Indian Ocean and as the American merchant community acquired greater access to capital, did American East India ships grow bigger and direct voyages between the United States and single Indian Ocean markets along with the exportation of specie become more commonplace.

With the Revolutionary War over, Salem merchant Elias Hasket Derby faced the dilemma of how to structure his commerce as a trader of the newly independent United States. On April 4, 1783, his ship the *Astrea* had returned to Salem from its voyage under a letter of marque to France bringing the first confirmation to reach America of peace between the United States and Great Britain. On April 5, a rushed notice appeared in a Boston newspaper of the news that had just arrived in Salem.⁸ Soon newspapers up and down the eastern seaboard began publishing the peace documents that had come aboard the *Astrea*. “A Declaration of the Cessation of Arms, as well by Sea, as Land, agreed upon between His Majesty the King of Great Britain and the United States of America” announced the ratification of the preliminary articles of peace.⁹ From his counting house in Salem, where Derby was one of the wealthiest merchants in port, Derby pondered the future of his shipping enterprise. He and his father had traded

⁷ For the Portuguese see Richard L. Kagan and Philip D. Morgan, eds., *Atlantic Diasporas: Jews, Conversos, and Crypto-Jews in the Age of Mercantilism, 1500-1800* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2009); Malyn Newitt, *A History of Portuguese Overseas Expansion* (New York: Routledge, 2005). For the Dutch and Danish see Holden Furber, *John Company at Work: A Study of European Expansion in India in the Late Eighteenth Century* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1948). For the English in the sixteenth and seventeenth-century see Alison Games, *Web of Empire: English Cosmopolitans in an Age of Exploration, 1560-1660* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008); N.A.M. Rodger, “Guns and Sails in the First Phase of English Colonization, 1500-1650,” in Nicholas Canny, ed., *The Origins of Empire* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 79-98; Nuala Zahedieh, “Overseas Expansion and Trade in the Seventeenth Century,” in Canny, *The Origins of Empire*, 398-422.

⁸ *Boston Evening Post*, April 5, 1783.

⁹ Some publication examples include *Independent Ledger* (Boston, MA), April 7, 1783; *Pennsylvania Packet* (Philadelphia, PA), April 19, 1783; *The New-York Gazette, and Weekly Mercury* (New York, NY), April 21, 1783.

heavily with Jamaica before the rupture with Great Britain, but now Derby's ships reported poor markets in the West Indies and difficulty getting into Jamaican ports.¹⁰ Derby found it difficult to fill the holds of his outgoing vessels without going into significant debt, particularly after building such huge privateering ships like the *Grand Turk* late in the war.¹¹ He wrote to London merchants Champion & Dickerson in April 1784, "It is exceedingly difficult to do business in this state with large ships as we have nothing to Export & but little money left."¹²

Derby tried many strategies to revive and expand his maritime commerce during peace and centered these efforts at first around trade to London. To fund his transatlantic voyages, Derby worked to reestablish the relationship that his late father had built with London firm Lane, Son & Fraser, while Derby also took advantage of credit offered by Champion & Dickerson, another London merchant house, through the firm's American representative who visited Salem in 1783.¹³ Derby sent his vessels loaded with New England rum and other provisions to trade for sugar, coffee, and cotton in the West Indies or for tobacco and rice in the Mid-Atlantic States. His ships then sailed for London, where they sold their American products on account with a London merchant house and acquired freight or manufactured goods for the return journey.¹⁴ But this cycle put Derby deeper and deeper into debt to London merchants who provided credit if markets along Derby voyages proved poor, which markets often did in the 1780s. Meanwhile,

¹⁰ Elias Hasket Derby [hereafter cited as EHD] to Champion & Dickerson, December 15, 1783, Derby Family Papers, Peabody Essex Museum, Salem, Massachusetts [hereafter cited as PEM]; EHD to Thomas Dolleare, January 1, 1785, Derby Family Papers, PEM; EHD to Unknown, January 3, 1785, Derby Family Papers, PEM.

¹¹ EHD to Lane, Son & Fraser, December 25, 1783, Derby Family Papers, PEM; EHD to Champion & Dickerson, April 15, 1784, Derby Family Papers, PEM. In 1780, Derby built the *Grand Turk*, a 300-ton vessel with 28 guns, to serve as one of his privateering ships. After the war, *Grand Turk* remained as one of Derby's vessels engaged in ocean-going commerce. Richard H. McKey, Jr., "Elias Hasket Derby and the American Revolution," in *Essex Institute Historical Collections* 97 No. 3 (July, 1961), 189. See also Chapter 3 above.

¹² EHD to Champion & Dickerson, April 15, 1784, Derby Family Papers, PEM

¹³ EHD to Lane, Son & Fraser, December 25, 1783, Derby Family Papers, PEM.

¹⁴ EHD to Champion & Dickerson, December 10, 1783, Derby Family Papers, PEM.

the high duties Derby faced in London on his American exports cut into the proceeds he had available to outfit return voyages.¹⁵

As a result, Derby looked to strike up a trade in American commodities with other European ports as an alternative to such unfavorable trade in London. By the summer of 1784, Derby initiated his own commercial ventures to the Baltic and sent his ships laden with West Indies sugar direct to St. Petersburg or Gothenburg. Later voyages went first to London with Virginia tobacco or South Carolina rice and took the credit from their sale in England to the Baltic to exchange for iron, candles, soap, and other naval materials. Derby relied on the merchant house of Lane, Frazer & Son in London to direct his ships to the most advantageous markets upon their arrival in London, whether to the Baltic or to other ports in France, Spain, or Holland. Following the advice of his London associates, Derby's ships exchanged their Atlantic cargoes in these European ports for liquors, clothes, and bills of exchange on London, but Derby continued to find himself at a disadvantage in these voyages.¹⁶ In October of 1785, Derby wrote to Lane, Frazer & Son in London:

I have three or four ships equal to any in [Europe] but the trade from the continent is so much against us I don't know which way to employ them to advantage, and suppose must continue so while the Exchange is so much in favour of Great Britain, should anything turn up which you might think would be advantageous in the mercantile lines, you will please to write me.¹⁷

¹⁵ During the *Nancy's* 1784 voyage to Baltimore, Derby's captain William Patterson found little demand for the Salem goods he was to unload with James Cary & Company in exchange for James River Tobacco. As Cary loaded tobacco on to the *Nancy*, he consequently acquired a large balance due him from Derby from the imbalance of sales. Derby instructed Cary to draw on Champion & Dickerson for the balance, and the *Nancy* continued on across the Atlantic with her goods from the London market. EHD to James Cary & Company, January 25, 1784, Derby Family Papers, PEM. Derby expected to receive payments in sterling for freight work from London back to the United States. Salem ships leaving London often stopped in the Mediterranean on the way back to the United States, where they used additional credit from the London associates to purchase goods for sale back in Salem. EHD to Champion & Dickerson, December 10, 1783, Derby Family Papers, PEM.

¹⁶ EHD to Lane, Frazer & Son, June 19, 1784 and EHD to Captain Buffington, May 20, 1785, Derby Family Papers, PEM; EHD to Camp & Cazalet, May 20, 1785, Derby Family Papers, PEM; EHD to John Cox, November 30, 1785 and EHD to Henry Craig, December 7, 1785, Derby Family Papers, PEM.

¹⁷ EHD to Lane, Son & Frazer, October 22, 1785, Derby Family Papers, PEM.

By this time, Derby had already informed his tobacco supplier in Baltimore, James Carey, that he planned to send the next shipment of tobacco to the Cape of Good Hope.¹⁸

Salem traders and many Americans envisioned that the new era of American independence would give rise to their long-sought model of political economy in which Americans would enjoy open access to all global markets and would find high demand for their goods and shipping services.¹⁹ From Philadelphia, U.S. Finance Minister and merchant Robert Morris wrote to Secretary of Foreign Affairs John Jay in Paris reiterating their shared sentiment that “Commerce should be as free as Air.”²⁰ The expanding range of markets that were now opening to American traders would make American merchants competitive in foreign trade, he wrote. If the British restricted American ships from their markets, Americans had the French, and if the French pursued the same restrictions, Americans could trade with the Dutch.²¹ As many American merchants began to explore trade beyond British markets, concerned merchants in London extended liberal terms of credit to American buyers and at times petitioned the British government to make import duties in London more advantageous to American shippers, lest

¹⁸ EHD to James Carey, September 28, 1784, Derby Family Papers, PEM

¹⁹ Richard Chew discusses the pervasive confidence in a promising future for American commerce immediately after the Revolution and the nation-wide desire for “full, fair, and free trade with every nation.” Richard Chew, “The Measure of Independence: From the American Revolution to the Market Revolution in the Mid-Atlantic” (Ph.D. diss., The College of William and Mary, 2002), 106. See Chapter 2 as well. See also Cathy D. Matson, “Capitalizing Hope: Economic Thought and the Early National Economy,” *Journal of the Early Republic* 16 (1996): 273-291; Cathy D. Matson and Peter S. Onuf, *A Union of Interests: Political and Economic Thought in Revolutionary America* (Lawrence, Kan.: University Press of Kansas, 1990).

²⁰ At the time, Jay was serving in Paris as a commissioner to negotiate a treaty between the United States and Great Britain. Robert Morris to John Jay, November 27, 1783, Elizabeth M. Nuxoll and Mary A. Gallagher, eds., *The Papers of Robert Morris 1781 – 1784, Volume 8: May 5 – December 31, 1783* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1999), 785-786; John Jay to Robert Morris, September 12, 1783, *Papers of Robert Morris, Vol. 8*, 506-507.

²¹ Robert Morris to John Jay, November 27, 1783, Nuxoll, *The Papers of Robert Morris 1781 – 1784*, 8:786. Many American statesmen and merchants shared this view that high demand for American goods would encourage Great Britain to end restrictions on its trade with the United States. See, for example, Rufus King to John Adams, December 4, 1785, *Life and Correspondence of Rufus King*, Vol 1 (New York: G.P. Putnam’s Sons, 1894), 116; Stephen Higginson to unidentified, April 1784, “Letters of Stephen Higginson,” *American Historical Association Annual Report, Volume 1* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1896), 714; James Madison, April 26, 1783, William T. Hutchinson and William M.E. Rachal, eds., *Papers of James Madison*, Volume 6 (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1969), 489.

Americans be convinced by other nations to “separate from their present connections and mercantile attachments” in Britain.²² In August 1783, the *Salem Gazette* in Salem, Massachusetts captured these great American expectations in its report of the arrival of the first American commercial vessel in Denmark on its way to Riga in modern-day Latvia: “We have at an earlier period than the most sanguine Whig could have expected, or even hoped, or than the most inveterate Tory feared, very pleasing prospects of a very extensive commerce with the most distant parts of the Globe.”²³ Writing from London in 1785, John Adams wrote to Jay that, “There is no better advice to be given to the merchants of the United States, than to push their commerce to the East Indies as fast and as far as it will go.”²⁴

II

Americans drew on their experiences in the Atlantic as they sought ways to expand their trade to the Indian Ocean. As capital-poor traders, colonial Americans required methods of trade that lowered entry costs to commerce, and for many that meant trade to the Caribbean.²⁵ The strategies of American commerce to the Caribbean relied on quickness in trade and willingness

²² Chew, 109. “Humble Memorial of George Moore to the Honorable Lords of His Majesty’s Privy Council,” April 30, 1785, Records of the Public Records Office, Board of Trade Records, American Intercourse with Newfoundland and Nova Scotia, Microfilm, Library of Congress, Washington, DC.

²³ *Salem Gazette*, August 21, 1783.

²⁴ John Adams to John Jay, November 11, 1785, The Papers of John Jay Online, Columbia University, Accessed November 30, 2014.
<http://www.wapp.cc.columbia.edu/ldpd/jay/search?mode=search&action=search&match=all&p=1&aut=John+Adams&submit=Search&recip=&keywd=&rep=&jayid=&y1=1785&m1=11&d1=11&y2=&m2=&d2=&sort=date&resPerPage=25>

²⁵ Despite their competing political or commercial interests, the North American and Caribbean colonies had existed in a symbiosis of trade. The island populations created a strong demand for the diversity of provisions, livestock, and artisan goods produced in North America. Diverse cargoes from North America were cheaper and quicker for American shippers to acquire than single-item, specialized cargoes, and the relatively low volume of any one good mitigated trade risks by protecting ships against glutted Caribbean markets. The journey to the Caribbean was short relative to European voyages, and American traders, even those of middling means, could sail to the Caribbean and back in small vessels they could afford to build, buy, or outfit. Caribbean products like sugar, molasses, and rum, met a high demand in North America and could be re-exported to other Atlantic markets. Profits from the sale of American goods in the Caribbean and the sale of Caribbean goods in North America or Europe helped to offset the debts North Americans owed to British creditors, particularly through the acquisition in the Caribbean of specie and of bills of exchange on London. Richard Pares, *Yankees and Creoles: The Trade Between North America and the West Indies Before the American Revolution* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1956), 38, 46, 153-154.

to trade across national boundaries in order to find the best markets of the moment. Americans traded circuitously from island to island often in vessels under 100 tons. These small ships made them well suited to capitalize quickly on new commercial information with short, improvised voyages.²⁶ Prices fluctuated from island to island and from month to month, and the cargoes that Americans sought for their return voyages were not always available at the port where they stopped first.²⁷ In hopes of finding the best prices and the quickest sales for their cargoes, ship owners gave their captains wide latitude to respond to the local circumstances they encountered once they arrived in the Caribbean and trade to multiple islands. Sailing orders to captains contained recommendations for the markets to visit in the Caribbean, but they often informed the captains to use their discretion and their observations to trade in any method that best served the interests of the owners.²⁸

With an interest in finding the best markets rather than a dependence on direct trade to any single market, American traders in the Caribbean relied on the gathering of information to direct their trade. George Crowninshield, a retired captain in Salem, counseled his five sons as they left for their first Atlantic voyages to ask for information about surrounding markets from merchants in the ports they visited and to offer gifts or favors when necessary “for the benefit of knowledge.”²⁹ As his son Richard embarked on his first voyage, Crowninshield advised: “Mix in with Company & Seem to say much but always little of your own business....Hear as much of

²⁶ In 1768, the average size of ships trading at Jamaica was 91.2 tons. James F. Shepherd and Gary M. Walton, *Shipping, Maritime Trade, and the Economic Development of Colonial North America* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1972), 196.

²⁷ Pares, *Yankees and Creoles*, 58.

²⁸ As one example, Timothy Orne of Salem and his fellow owners of the brig *Betsy* concluded their sailing instructions to Captain Jacob Crowninshield in 1763 with the phrase, “In all cases & circumstances do that which shall be most for our Interest.” Timothy Orne et al to Jacob Crowninshield, August 23, 1763, original in the Papers of Timothy Orne, Peabody Essex Museum, Salem, Massachusetts. Printed in Harriet Tapley, ed., *Early Coastwise and Foreign Shipping of Salem: A Record of the Entrances and Clearances of the Port of Salem, 1750-1769* (Salem: The Essex Institute, 1934), 5. See also Pares, *Yankees and Creoles*, 66-67.

²⁹ George Crowninshield to John Crowninshield, June 6, 1791, Crowninshield Family Papers, PEM.

others as you can & get by that as much information as possible. Seem always to ask your company for information & appear diffident of your own judgment & by some such mode you will get information & knowledge.”³⁰ In this role as information gatherer, Richard was an important link in the Crowninshield web of trade that stretched across the globe. As Richard departed for Philadelphia, his four brothers were aboard ships trading in the Indian Ocean, and George Crowninshield stressed to Richard that the commercial news he could gather from Philadelphia would help his brothers in their trade abroad. “Mind & make all inquiry about India & write to your 4 brothers there if you have any chance,” George wrote to Richard, and “if you hear any news communicate it, as you may hear by some Mozambique ships via Isle of France.”³¹

Trade to regional entrepôt markets anchored this circuitous Caribbean commerce. Many Americans made initial stops at Barbados or Jamaica as they began their voyages through the Caribbean. As the largest of the windward islands, Barbados’s position along the regular shipping routes from North America to the Caribbean made it a natural stop for American ships. The large populations on both islands offered good opportunities to quickly sell American provisions and to gather commercial news.³² As entrepôt markets, Barbados and Jamaica drew in goods and maintained commercial connections with surrounding islands. Free ports like Dutch St. Eustatius and Spanish Monte Christi offered similar benefits and, accordingly, saw similarly heavy American activity. At these ports Americans could quickly purchase items that had been imported from more distant islands, many of which were legally off limits to the ships

³⁰ George Crowninshield to Richard Crowninshield, May 31, 1793, Crowninshield Family Papers, PEM. In Philadelphia, merchant Louis Deblois handled selling the cargo of New England goods and advertising the ship for charter to either the West Indies or Madeira. *Dunlap’s American Daily Advertiser*, June 5, 1793.

³¹ George Crowninshield to Richard Crowninshield, May 31, 1793, Crowninshield Family Papers, PEM. Spellings corrected for ease of reading.

³² Since Barbados was the windward-most Caribbean island, winds and currents naturally made Barbados the first stop for ships coming from North America. Pares, *Yankees and Creoles*, 48.

of British North America and later the United States. They could gather news about surrounding markets, purchase trading permits, or acquire freighting contracts and adapt their voyage plans accordingly.³³

Similar dynamics undergirded American trade to Europe in this period, although the distance between ports existed on a larger scale. Americans carried diverse cargoes of Atlantic goods, and although ships sent to Europe were larger than those in the Caribbean trades, they were still smaller than many European counterparts. Unsure what their captains would find at European markets after a sail across the Atlantic, merchants sent their vessels first to large entrepôt ports where they could gather commercial news and, if advantageous, make trades or gain contracts to freight goods for European merchants that could propel them on further patterns of circuitous trade. Merchants trusted that their captains needed only this market-based information about current prices to quickly adapt their voyages, sail to the strongest markets, and trade to advantage. When Elias Hasket Derby sent his ship *Astrea* from Salem to Europe in 1785, he gave his captain, Benjamin Hodges, wide latitude to seek out the best markets for the *Astrea*'s cargo of American products, including tobacco, rice, indigo, and tar.³⁴ To put the ship in the best position to gain information about surrounding markets, Derby instructed Hodges to sail first for London and meet with the merchant house of Lane, Son & Fraser, Derby's long-time London trading associates, who could provide Hodges with news about European markets, credit for regional commerce, and possibly a pass for trade in the Mediterranean. If the London market was poor, Derby directed Hodges to sail for France, Holland, St. Petersburg, or Gothenburg depending on the market news he could acquire in London. Additionally, Hodges could sail for

³³ Pares, *Yankees and Creoles*, 49, 84, 154.

³⁴ Invoice of Goods Shipped by EHD on Board the *Astrea*, June 1785, *Astrea* Shipping Papers, Derby Family Papers, PEM; See also Account of Sales by Benjamin Hodges in L'Orient, September 1785, *Astrea* Shipping Papers, Derby Family Papers, PEM.

Malaga if he could buy flour for that market or gain a freighting contract for that voyage in London. Carrying British ship's papers would help Hodges to "avoid trouble" and ease this circuitous trading, and Derby instructed him to get this Register ready as soon as Hodges left the American coast.³⁵

As American merchants and diplomats looked to the Indian Ocean after the American Revolution as a new market for American ships, they sought ways to transfer the methodology of Atlantic trade to this new marketplace. Robert Morris had sent the *Empress of China* through the Indian Ocean to Canton in 1784 as a personal investment scheme and "to encourage others in the adventurous pursuits of Commerce," but the distance and capital required to trade directly with China made the same voyage prohibitively risky and too expensive for most American merchants who were accustomed instead to trading on shorter, more circuitous, and less specie-dependent routes to the Caribbean.³⁶ To facilitate American commercial expansion eastward around the Cape of Good Hope, American merchants and diplomats sought ways to conform this trade to the Atlantic trading practices in which American traders already engaged and that they could finance with their limited access to capital. The key for easing entry to these new trades was in finding ways to shorten voyages, thus allowing American trade to occur in smaller vessels than European East Indiamen, and securing access to entrepôt or stopover markets where Americans could acquire commercial news and sell their traditional cargoes of lumber, foodstuffs, tobacco, and other Atlantic goods. .

³⁵ EHD to Benjamin Hodges, June 4, 1785, *Astrea* Shipping Papers, Derby Family Papers, PEM. Hodges did sail for London, where he did not find the terms of trade agreeable for his cargo. He then sailed for L'Orient in France, where he sold his cargo and purchased silks, tea, brandy, salt, and French calicoes. Invoices of Goods Purchased by Benjamin Hodges, September 1785, *Astrea* Shipping Papers, Derby Family Papers, PEM.

³⁶ Robert Morris to John Jay, November 23, 1787, The Papers of John Jay, online edition, Columbia University.

The model of Atlantic commerce informed American diplomacy regarding commercial arrangements after the peace of 1783. As Minister to France and with the aid of Gouverneur and Robert Morris, Thomas Jefferson negotiated for concessions for Americans in the Indian Ocean that would overcome the obstacles that capital-poor Americans faced in that region as in the Atlantic. In a May 1784 letter outlining the importance of opening free ports to Americans in the Indian Ocean, Gouverneur Morris wrote to the Marquis de Chastellux that Americans needed silver in order to trade to India and that the means open to Americans to obtain this silver were limited to Atlantic trading. Further, Morris cited the problem of distance for American traders whose ships were much smaller than French and British East India vessels: “The length of the voyage without intermediate port is an objection.”³⁷ As a solution, the Morrises and Jefferson advocated to French officials that they open the island of Mauritius and its neighbor, Bourbon, as a free port to American ships. Use of these free ports would align the practice of American trade in the Indian Ocean with their commercial practices in the Atlantic.

Americans would flock to these islands because they could sail there in the small vessels they already owned or could most easily acquire. Soon a diversity of goods would be available at these markets, since open foreign trade would encourage subjects of other European powers, especially individual servants of other East India Companies, to trade there on their private accounts, thus opening an entrepot market for American trade that mirrored free ports of the West Indies. Further, these market conditions would quicken sales for American ships that were already primed in their Atlantic commerce to lower costs through expediency of trade. Most

³⁷ Gouverneur Morris to Marquis de Chastellux, May 14, 1784, Elizabeth M. Nuxoll and Mary A. Gallagher, eds., *The Papers of Robert Morris 1781-1784, Volume 9: January 1 – October 30, 1784* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1999), 340-1.

importantly, Atlantic provisions would be in demand at Mauritius and Bourbon, and “American productions might enter into [them] with advantage.”³⁸

With favorable recommendations from French officials who believed American traders would help turn Mauritius into a regional entrepôt, by the spring of 1784 France announced a series of allowances that opened Mauritius trade to American ships. Notices began to appear in American newspapers announcing these measures and how they would help to shift the terms of trade in the Indian Ocean towards those familiar commercial practices that Americans could reasonably finance and undertake. On August 3, 1784, the *Salem Gazette* reported the opening of Mauritius as a stopover market where Americans, who lacked a provisioning port of their own in the Indian Ocean, could enjoy “all the protection and liberty in going to and from China.”³⁹ In November of 1784, French authorities extended these allowances. Now American ships could import American produce to the islands of Mauritius and Bourbon and exchange them for money or for the products of the Mascarenes, of India, or of China.⁴⁰ Mauritius became an entrepôt of East Indian goods, and American ships would be freer under this “liberal arrangement” to use the islands as a gateway for extensive trade in the Indian Ocean. An announcement submitted to American newspapers, including the *Salem Gazette*, by the French Minister of the Marine declared that American vessels trading at Mauritius or Bourbon could “continue their route to the continent of Asia, they may return to the islands, may sell their cargoes there, or proceed farther, and shorten considerably their voyage.”⁴¹

III

³⁸ Robert Morris Diary, May 15, 1784, Nuxoll and Gallagher, eds., *The Papers of Robert Morris 1781-1784, Volume 9*, 338, 343; Gouverneur Morris to Marquis de Chastellux, May 14, 1784, Nuxoll and Gallagher, *Papers of Robert Morris, Vol. 9*, 340-1.

³⁹ Nuxoll and Gallagher, *The Papers of Robert Morris, Vol. 9*, 337-338. *Salem Gazette*, August 3, 1784.

⁴⁰ The Mascarene islands included Mauritius and Bourbon, now called Reunion.

⁴¹ Nuxoll and Gallagher, *The Papers of Robert Morris, Volume 9*, 338. *Salem Gazette*, December 7, 1784

Salem merchants, and many merchants throughout the American union, quickly moved to use Mauritius as a gateway market that helped them transfer their Atlantic trading practices to the Indian Ocean marketplace. With a population of 7,921 people in 1790, Salem was the seventh largest urban community in the United States, but its physical size and population lagged behind the larger cities like Philadelphia and Boston (Figure 3.1), and Salem merchants were eager to find a competitive advantage against these larger ports. Elias Hasket Derby had already sent his ship the *Grand Turk* on her first of many voyages to Mauritius in December 1785 in hopes that the ship could sell her Atlantic provisions at a profit and, if possible, gain freighting contracts for further trade throughout the region. Like his fellow Salem townspeople, Derby had taken notice when the Boston ship *Harriot* returned from the Cape of Good Hope in the summer of 1784, having sold her American ginseng to British vessels returning from China in return for Chinese teas. The *Salem Gazette* had celebrated this news with claims that American commerce was now free “to extend to every part of the globe,” and Derby had followed by sending his 300-ton *Grand Turk* in the *Harriot*’s wake, loaded with Atlantic provisions for Cape Town, where she had sold these goods for teas purchased off the private accounts of a British East India officer.⁴² But the market at the Cape seemed too small and uncertain to sustain any kind of significant advantage for Derby due to supplies that already came by way of the Dutch East India Company. To find a stronger market for his Atlantic goods, Derby sent his next ships to Mauritius.⁴³

⁴² *Salem Gazette*, August 10, 1784. EHD to James Carey, September 28, 1784, Derby Family Papers, PEM; *Salem Gazette* (MA), September 7, 1784. *Grand Turk* Shipping Papers, Derby Family Papers; Phillips, 44; Robert Peabody, *The Log of the Grand Turks* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1926), 43.

⁴³ John Ingersoll to EHD, April 8, 1785, quoted in Peabody, *The Log of the Grand Turks*, 46.

City	1790 Population
New York, NY	33131
Philadelphia, PA	28522
Boston, MA	18320
Charleston, SC	16359
Baltimore, MD	13503
Salem, MA	7921
Newport, RI	6716
Providence, RI	6380
Marblehead, MA	5661
Portsmouth, NH	4720
Newburyport, MA	4837
Norfolk, VA	2959

Figure 4.1: 1790 population statistics. Source: U.S. Census Bureau.⁴⁴

Mauritius put American ships in a strong position to sell their traditional Atlantic cargoes and gain profitable work carrying goods in the broader Indian Ocean marketplace. When the *Grand Turk* departed Salem for Mauritius in December 1785, she left with a diverse cargo of Atlantic provisions.⁴⁵ Derby had gained important information about the Mauritius market from the French firm Meier & Company who had handled the sale of goods aboard Derby's vessel the *Astrea* on a visit to L'Orient in France, the center for trade between France and the East Indies, in 1785.⁴⁶ Using this information, Derby pieced together a diverse cargo using goods arriving in Salem from all over the Atlantic. Iron came from the Baltic, as did hemp, which Derby sent to

⁴⁴ "Population of the 24 Urban Places: 1790," U.S. Bureau of the Census, Accessed September 14, 2014, <https://www.census.gov/population/www/documentation/twps0027/tab02.txt>.

⁴⁵ *Invoice of Merchandise Shipt Aboard the Grand Turk*, *Grand Turk* Shipping Papers, Derby Family Papers, PEM; Printed in Peabody, *The Log of the Grand Turks*, 63-64.

⁴⁶ Accounts and Invoices for *Astrea*, August to September 1785, *Astrea* Shipping Papers, Derby Family Papers, PEM. EHD to Meier & Company, July 27, 1786, Derby Family Papers, PEM.

Philadelphia, Baltimore, or New York to purchase flour for cargo to the Indian Ocean.⁴⁷ Other hemp went to Benjamin Hall in Medford, Massachusetts to pay for beef, pork, and other ship stores for his outgoing vessels to the East Indies.⁴⁸ Tobacco, tar, turpentine, and pitch continued to come from Virginia and Maryland. Rum, cotton, claret wine, and sugar came from the West Indies.⁴⁹ Derby sent rum, hemp, liquors, and other goods to the merchant house of Ludlow & Goold, and in return this merchant house shipped a constant stream of dollars back to Salem along with hams, rice, butter, flour, and other goods for Derby's Indian Ocean ships.⁵⁰ When Derby's *Grand Turk* arrived at Mauritius in 1787, she found low demand for American goods, but high demand for American shipping, and the ship's officers soon negotiated a freighting contract with a French merchant that brought the ship to China.⁵¹

As Derby sent four ships into the Indian Ocean from 1785 to 1787, he advised his captains to use the Cape and especially Mauritius as they would use entrepôt markets in the Caribbean, as places to sell Atlantic provisions and put his ships in strong positions to expand their trade into the regional coasting trade and to new markets.⁵² Derby instructed his captains to sell their Atlantic cargoes at the Cape or at Mauritius, where Derby expected he could fetch a 100% profit, in return for Spanish dollars and paper money that would serve as currency in other markets. At every stop he encouraged his captains to obtain freighting contracts to other more

⁴⁷ *Light Horse* shipping papers; EHD to Pickering & Hodges, October 27, 1786, EHD to Ludlow & Goold, October 18, 1786, Derby Family Papers, PEM.

⁴⁸ EHD to Benjamin Hall, January 1, 1787, Derby Family Papers, PEM.

⁴⁹ Peabody, *The Log of the Grand Turks*, 63-4; Phillips, *Salem and the Indies*, 47.

⁵⁰ Ludlow & Goold to EHD, May 4, 1785, Derby Family Papers. Ludlow & Goold to EHD, November 12, 1785; Ludlow & Goold Shipping Papers, October 26, 1785, EHD to Ludlow & Goold, October 18, 1786. Derby Family Papers, PEM.

⁵¹ Peabody, *The Log of the Grand Turks*, 72-73, 89. Vans and West to EHD, nd, in Peabody, *The Log of the Grand Turks*, 91. From 1784 to 1795, five Derby ships went to Canton, yet only one sailed direct. Of the four others that arrived in Canton via the Indian Ocean, three ships took on freighting contracts for their China voyages at Mauritius, and the fourth acquired its freighting contract at Batavia.

⁵² For a broader study on American trade to Mauritius see Toussaint, *Early American Trade with Mauritius*.

distant ports. Derby also expected Mauritius to serve as an entrepôt market where he could purchase goods from throughout the Indian Ocean and South China seas without having to venture his ships into these new waters. If the ships returned home directly from Mauritius, Derby instructed his captains to purchase hides, tea, saltpeter, handkerchiefs, pepper, and other spices, along with coffee and cotton, the products of Mauritius and the neighboring French island of Bourbon, and he provided his captains with the prices that would make these items competitive with those purchased in the West Indies. Derby instructed his captains to contract with merchants in these ports whenever possible for subsequent deliveries of Atlantic provisions aboard Derby ships, a strategy that would secure for Derby a market for his goods amidst both the risks of such a long journey and as more and more Americans began shipping their goods to this new port for American trade.

Other merchants echoed Derby's enthusiasm for the commercial advantages that Mauritius and the neighboring island of Bourbon provided to American ships. By 1787, the French had opened Mauritius as a free port for all foreign trade, and when Salem merchant and former member of the Continental Congress Stephen Higginson heard this news he believed the island would now become the "Key to the Indies" due to the many routes of trade that would now pass through that market. "It will be the great deposit both for our exports and those of Asia," he wrote to Nathan Dane in 1788.⁵³ That year fifteen American vessels arrived at Mauritius. All came from New England, and four came from Salem. Derby owned two of the Salem vessels, including the *Grand Turk* that arrived from Salem and the *Sultan* that arrived from Bombay, where Derby's son had recently purchased it using proceeds from his circuitous trade between Mauritius and India. Salem merchant William Vans owned the *Cadet*, which

⁵³ Stephen Higginson to Nathan Dane, May 22, 1788, "Letters of Stephen Higginson," 760.

arrived at Mauritius under the command of Captain Jonathan Carnes by way of Madeira, the Cape of Good Hope, and then the French port of Pondicherry on the southwestern coast of India. The Salem ship *Dauphin* arrived at Mauritius by way of Batavia and after completing its trade departed for Ostend in Belgium. The remaining ships all arrived from Boston. By 1789, thirty American ships arrived at Mauritius, including twelve from Salem and seven from Boston. The geography of American ports trading with Mauritius expanded, and the 1789 total included three ships from Baltimore and two from Philadelphia.⁵⁴

In a 1789 letter to John Adams, Higginson estimated that 3,000 tons of American shipping had visited the Mascarene islands the previous year, and he expected that number to rise in the coming year. Even though Americans were free to trade in India, Higginson wrote, “it is not easy for us at once to Supply them direct, nor till we shall have more knowledge of their navigation and trade.” Stopover markets like Mauritius lowered the risks and entry costs of American trade to the Indian Ocean, Higginson claimed. “Voyages to [India] would be too long and tedious for our common traders of small Capitals to pursue them,” Higginson wrote, and he praised how Mauritius had become a market at which Atlantic goods like beef, pork, butter, flour, fish, tobacco and naval stores met high demand. “We shall carry to them all the various products of America that will answer in those Seas and shall want in return the produce & exports of the east.—our vessels will lodge the former and take the latter in return.” This was important for cash-strapped Americans who lacked the funds to travel directly to India,

⁵⁴ The primary materials for tracking and tabulating American arrivals at Mauritius in this period are French customs records. *Admirauté, Registre de déclarations d’arrivées, 1788-1791*, Mauritius National Archives, Port Louis, Mauritius. These records provide the date of arrival, the name of the ship captain, the port to which the vessel belonged, and general information about the markets and goods in which each ship had traded. Secondary sources that provide additional information about ship owners and routes of trade before or after visits to Mauritius include Auguste Toussaint, *Early American Trade with Mauritius* (Port Louis: Mauritius National Archives, 1954); Auguste Toussaint, *La Route des îles : contribution à l’histoire maritime des Mascareignes* (Paris : S.E.V.P.E.N., 1967); James Duncan Phillips, *East India Voyages of Salem Vessels before 1800* (Salem: Essex Institute, 1943).

Higginson stated. “Those [voyages] to Mauritius are as much so as the persons who have sent there can in general bear.” Not only did Americans undersell their French competitors with the Atlantic provisions they brought to Mauritius, but they also regularly made the short sail to neighboring Bourbon to trade directly with Bourbon coffee producers when they found prices offered by Mauritius brokers too high. In response to these tactics, French officials by 1789 worked to bar Americans from sailing to Bourbon for coffee, and Higginson wrote to Adams in hopes that he and Jefferson might advocate to end these restrictions, lest Americans be forced to “abandon the Trade.”⁵⁵

Mauritius was well-connected to the broader regional marketplace, and Americans soon capitalized on the commercial news and commercial opportunities at the island to expand their trade to new markets in the Indian Ocean. By 1788, Derby’s son Elias Hasket Derby, Jr. had arrived at Mauritius to begin a three-year stint coordinating Derby’s Indian Ocean trade from this island base (Figure 4.2). During his stay he observed all around him how other traders were using Mauritius as a gateway to expanded commerce throughout the Indian Ocean.⁵⁶ Elias reported to his father that “the largest part of the foreign trade of [Mauritius] consists in sending vessels to....Bombay for cotton for which they export very little else but cash...Again [foreigners] carry away a vast quantity of Doll[ars] to Mosambique for the purchase of slaves both for this place & for the West Indies. In this trade there are a vast number of vessels imployed & those that are convenient for that business will be allways well sold.”⁵⁷ He wrote his father of the advantages this stopover market would have for American ships:

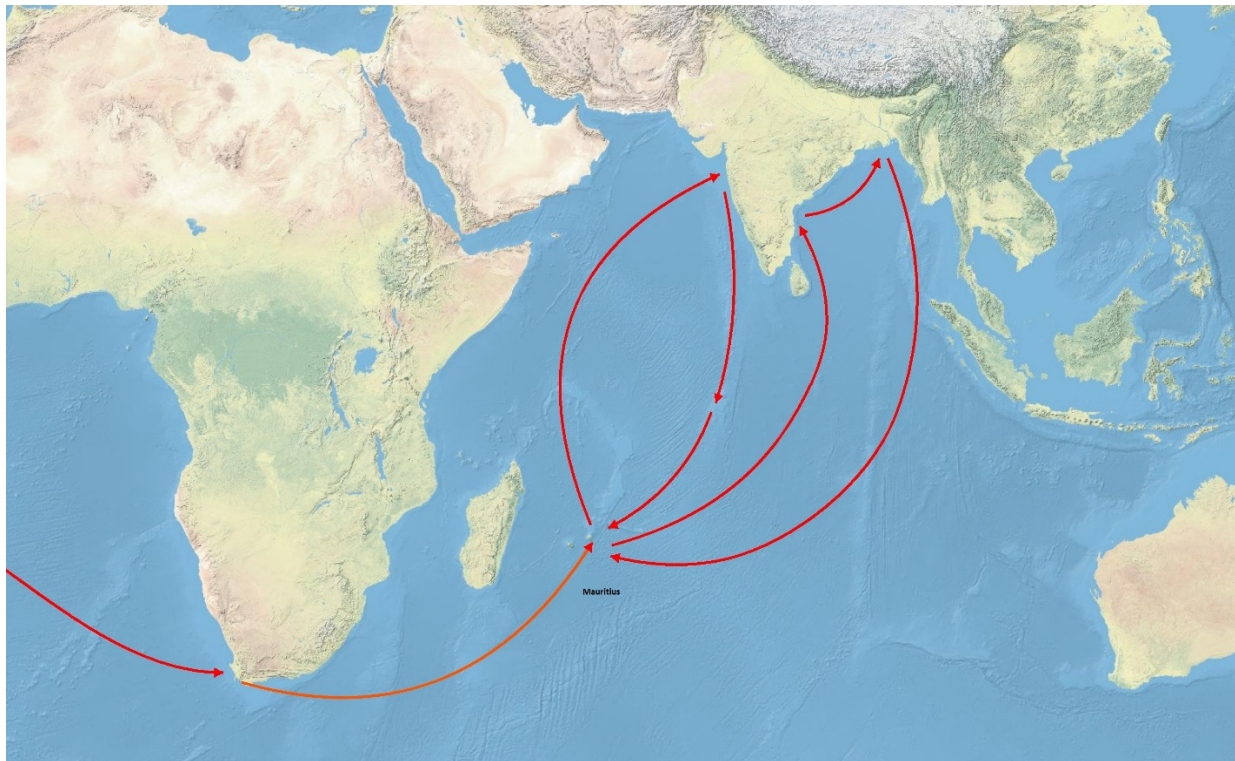
⁵⁵ Higginson to John Adams, January 17, 1789, “Letters of Stephen Higginson,” 762-765. Four American ships stopped at Mauritius in 1787, three of them Derby’s, and by 1788 sixteen American vessels made trading stops at the island that year. In 1789, twenty-three American vessels stopped at Mauritius, ten of which were from Salem. Toussaint, *Early American Trade with Mauritius. Salem Gazette*, August 31, 1790.

⁵⁶ Elias Hasket Derby, Jr. to EHD, April 13, 1788, Derby Family Papers, PEM

⁵⁷ Elias Hasket Derby, Jr. to EHD, August 14, 1788, Derby Family Papers, PEM

By touching at the Isle of France [a ship] may have news from home; possibly may sell her sugar to 100 percent profit as the ships from Batavia have done this year...she might perhaps meet with one of your ships on her return to America & by this vessel it might do for her to send on her spices, pepper, and coffee & proceed for [Bombay] with either her sugar or cash which would give her a cargo of cotton, saltpetre, and some course goods of Invat for home.⁵⁸

In exchange for their Atlantic goods, he continued, Americans could acquire both cash and blackwood, items they could then carry to India and China and expect strong sales.⁵⁹ At Mauritius Elias observed Americans winning contracts for short trips to and from Bourbon or India and longer trips to China or Europe. He advised his father to freight his ships from the French port of Bordeaux, “which can be easily done by putting them under the French flag.” He continued: “they may again be freighted back or may be employed in bringing cattle from Madagascar [to Mauritius] or in carrying cotton to Chiny which is perhaps the best business in the wourld.”⁶⁰



⁵⁸ Elias Hasket Derby, Jr. to EHD, September 1788, Derby Family Papers, PEM.

⁵⁹ Elias Hasket Derby, Jr. to EHD, April 13, 1788, Derby Family Papers, PEM

⁶⁰ Elias Hasket Derby, Jr. to EHD, July 16, 1789, Derby Family Papers, PEM

Figure 4.2: The voyage of the *Grand Turk* in the Indian Ocean, 1788-89. Source: Elias Hasket Derby, Jr. Letterbook, PEM.

Elias Derby Jr.'s own journey proceeded from Mauritius to Bombay, where he sold the remnants of his Atlantic cargo and purchased enough cotton to send back one ship direct to Salem and another back to Mauritius. At Bombay he also left a cargo of blackwood he had purchased at Mauritius for retrieval by his father's ship the *Astrea* for eventual sale in Canton. Back at Mauritius, Elias sold the Bombay cotton for a mix of cash and sugar, and hired his ship out for some short freight work. After convening with other Derby ships at Mauritius under the command of Captain Jacob Crowninshield, Elias later sailed to Madras and Calcutta, where he acquired a return cargo for Salem of sugar, hides, white ginger, course cotton, shirts, muslins, and bandanas, and saltpeter.⁶¹

As an officer aboard the ships of Boston merchant Thomas H. Perkins, William Fitz Paine made similar observations about the value of Mauritius as a trade and information-gathering post during his visits to the island beginning in 1801. In his journal, Paine noted how ships arrived at Mauritius from all over the Indian Ocean and from Europe: "These isles are enriched with the fruits of various quarters of the world—the East & West have both contributed to this variety."⁶² Sugar and rice came from Batavia, a Dutch entrepôt market at modern-day Jakarta; ships from Canton sold tea and nankeens; vessels from Europe brought specie; piece goods and India cloth came from Madras; slaves and rice came from Mozambique and Madagascar in exchange for specie and cloth.⁶³ French brokers at Mauritius allowed Paine access to their books to inform him about regional markets. In his journal from an 1804 visit to Mauritius, Paine copied many notes from Mauritius merchants, including a cargo inventory of a

⁶¹ Elias Hasket Derby, Jr. to EHD, January 2, 1789, Derby Family Papers, PEM

⁶² Memorandum, November 1803, Papers of William Fitz Paine, Paine Family Papers, AAS.

⁶³ Memorandum, November 20, 1803, Papers of William Fitz Paine, Paine Family Papers, AAS.

French ship recently arrived from Marseilles and lists of goods from China, Bengal, and the Coromandel Coast that would sell well at Mauritius. One broker provided Paine with detailed information on how to trade to the Persian Gulf and the markets of the Arabian Peninsula. The broker's notes included lists of the items Paine could both sell and purchase at Muscat; the prices and methods of selecting high-quality black galls in Basra—modern-day Iraq; the best season for sailing to Mocha; and the customs duties Paine should expect to pay at these ports.⁶⁴

Mauritius anchored early American endeavors to trade circuitously among the ports of India as participants in the India coasting, or country trade. In the 1790s, Elias Derby Sr.'s instructions to his captains reflected the new ability of American ships to expand their trade from Mauritius, making multiple short voyages to regional markets, particularly those in India. In 1791, Derby wrote to his captain John Gibaut in the *Astrea* not just to stop at Mauritius, but to sell provisions and lumber at Mauritius according to a contract worked out the previous year, then sail to the Malabar coast of India and the island of Ceylon to purchase pepper, then go to India's Coromandel Coast to exchange the pepper for salt, and then sail on to Calcutta to sell the salt and hopefully win a contract to freight rice from Calcutta back to Ceylon, with payment to be made in pepper.⁶⁵

As trade to Mauritius propelled further American commerce through the Indian Ocean, Americans replicated the process of seeking out information hubs and trading quickly among ports. Like Mauritius, the India coasting trade offered a way for capital-poor American traders to sell their Atlantic goods and gain regional freight work for cash, while the multiplicity of markets in close proximity to one another released Americans from risky dependence on any single market. "I know nothing so profitable as a ship in the [India] country trade," Salem

⁶⁴ William Fitz Paine Notebook, 1804-1805, Papers of William Fitz Paine, Paine Family Papers, AAS.

⁶⁵ EHD to Captain John Gibaut, May 12, 1791, *Astrea* Shipping Papers, Derby Family Papers, PEM.

Captain Benjamin Carpenter wrote in his journal during a 1789-1790 voyage to the Indian Ocean.⁶⁶ Carpenter noted that the provisions Americans typically brought from the Atlantic were “in general demand and if in good order seldom fail to command a good price.”⁶⁷ At Madras, for example, Carpenter wrote about the high prices inhabitants there paid for goods from Europe, China, elsewhere in India, Ceylon, the Cape of Good Hope, and Batavia.⁶⁸ Carpenter made particular notice of the money Americans could make shipping or freighting Bengal rice and Bombay cotton to markets throughout the Indian Ocean and of the added trade security that came from having so many market options. “In a voyage from Bengal to Ceylon you have many advantages rising from the general demand of rice at every port on the Malabar coast,” Carpenter wrote. “For instance, suppose you were disappointed in a market at Point de Galle, you have then Columbo, Anjengo, Comorin and Cochin. These are places where you may never be at a loss to sell at.”⁶⁹ This open trade of the Indian Ocean made it advantageous and accessible to American traders and freighters who could operate at a fraction of the cost of their competitors. “If you have not sufficient funds to employ the ship and cargo in India, it is an easy matter to remit the proceeds of the cargo home and let your vessel pursue the freighting business,” Carpenter wrote. “For if the country ships that sail at three times the expense of our ships make such rapid fortunes, surely we cannot fail to find our account in it.”⁷⁰

In recognition of the circuitous trading and diverse Atlantic cargoes that made up American commercial strategies in the Indian Ocean in the 1790s, Salem merchants competed with each other and other Americans in large measure by controlling information. News of

⁶⁶ Quoted in Susan Bean, *Yankee India: American Commercial and Cultural Encounters with India in the Age of Sail, 1784-1860* (Salem, MA: Peabody Essex Museum, 2001), 59. Original from the Journal of the *Ruby*, 1789-1790, PEM.

⁶⁷ Quoted in Bean, *Yankee India*, 53.

⁶⁸ Bean, *Yankee India*, 53-55.

⁶⁹ Quoted in Bean, *Yankee India*, 55.

⁷⁰ Quoted in Bean, *Yankee India*, 59.

prices and of ship movements enhanced a merchant's or a captain's ability to adapt his trading strategies to advantage. Limiting the information available to competitors, therefore, weakened their ability to engage in these forms of trade that were fundamental to American commerce in both the Atlantic and Indian Oceans. At the Salem Fire & Marine Insurance Company office in 1802, for example, Jacob Crowninshield failed to acquire insurance for the family's ship *Fame* before it departed for modern-day Vietnam because he refused to disclose the particulars of the ship's intended journey and asked instead that it be given wide latitude to trade beyond the Cape of Good Hope.⁷¹ After securing his desired terms at a Boston insurance office instead, Jacob wrote to his brother that the family's trading plans were safe from prying competitors: "You see here we can go anywhere beyond the Cape for 8 pct (& one or more times too)...I think the terms very favourable, & and we have the advantage of not disclosing her voyage tho' twenty people think they know all about it, & in guessing have named half a dozen ports, which proves they have obtained no correct information on the subject."⁷²

Letters provided news about foreign markets and the trade of competing ships that allowed merchants to make adjustments to their own trading strategies. Some merchants refused to carry letters for other merchants, causing purposeful and significant delays in the exchange of commercial information. In the 1740s, Marblehead merchant Robert Hooper bristled when Salem merchants refused to carry his letters on their ships sailing to Atlantic markets, and similarly, in 1810, Boston merchant Henry Lee struggled to find an East India merchant who

⁷¹ Jacob Crowninshield to Richard Crowninshield, December 28, 1802, January 15, 1803, and January 29, 1803, Crowninshield Family Papers, PEM. Baltimore merchant Robert Oliver also exemplified this dilemma. He was a director in two Baltimore marine insurance companies by 1802 and also the head of a shipping business with trade to the Indian Ocean, Europe, and the West Indies. The insurance applications Oliver reviewed allowed him to keep tabs on ships departing for Vera Cruz that would compete with his business there. Bruchey, *Robert Oliver*, 318.

⁷² Jacob Crowninshield to Richard Crowninshield, February 18, 1803, Crowninshield Family Papers, PEM.

would carry his own correspondence to his agent at Madras, in India.⁷³ “It has become so much a practice to refuse letters,” Lee wrote, “that it is quite uncertain whether it will be suffered.”⁷⁴ Salem merchant Joseph Peabody had refused to carry Lee’s letters aboard his ship the *Francis*, and Lee’s request to have a letter sent aboard the *Atlas* departing from Philadelphia had similarly come back “refused & returned.”⁷⁵ Even if merchants could get their letters aboard ships, they worried that competing merchants or ship captains would open them to acquire the commercial intelligence contained within.⁷⁶ While most merchants applied a distinct, recognizable seal to their letters to protect against intrusion, Henry Lee also instructed his captains in India to hide letters for the United States in outgoing cargo:

it would be worth while to put some of your papers into a Bale, they would come home safe—you can refer to it by some notice in the letter—in this way—look at Bale No. ___ there are some choice goods in it—I shall know what it means—it is so important to get our letters, Accts., etc. that it might be worth while to pay 150 rupees a Ton for 2 @ 3 Tons for the sake of safe conveyance.⁷⁷

As Salemites and Americans expanded their Indian Ocean commerce by learning the routes of trade in this new region, markets filled with American ships and goods, driving merchants and captains to seek new ports of call as a way to circumvent rising competition. Writing from Mauritius in March 1796, Captain John Crowninshield found money scarce and coffee prices exorbitant. “God bless him that arrives last,” he wrote home, knowing the many

⁷³ Christine Leigh Heyrman, *Commerce and Culture: The Maritime Communities of Colonial Massachusetts, 1690-1750* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1984), 347.

⁷⁴ Henry Lee to Edward Norton, October 18, 1810, Henry Lee Letterbook, Lee Family Papers, MHS.

⁷⁵ The difficulty of getting letters accepted on competitors’ ships saddled Lee with a two-week delay in sending his correspondence to Madras. For revenge, Lee counseled his captain to visit all of the American officers at Madras and offer to carry their letters home. Henry Lee to Edward Newton, October 19, 1810, Henry Lee Letterbook, Lee Family Papers, Massachusetts Historical Society, Boston, Massachusetts; Kenneth Porter, *The Jacksons and the Lees: Two Generations of Massachusetts Merchants, 1765-1844* Volume 1 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1937), 68.

⁷⁶ In Henry Lee’s attempts to send his letter to Madras, for example, he declined one offer to send letters aboard the *Leander* “because We know the owner of her.” Underlining in original. Henry Lee to George Lee, November 8, 1810, Henry Lee Letterbook, Lee Family Papers, MHS.

⁷⁷ Henry Lee to unknown, no date, quoted in Porter, *Jacksons and the Lees*, I, 68.

American ships headed to the island. He heard from a Salem captain that “the straight going to Batavia & China is so full of Americans that it is almost impossible to get threw them.”

Crowninshield expected that Mauritius “will stink of us Americans soon,” and by June his fears had materialized.⁷⁸ He observed five or six thousand tons of American shipping in port, all with unsold American or European cargoes, and wrote home that “it appears to me that Americans can when they please overstock any market at all.”⁷⁹ In August, Salem Captain Nathaniel Silsbee found Mauritius similarly glutted with “every kind of merchandise that can be brought from America” and Calcutta crowded with American ships. “The Americans are now swarming (& I believe in general, greatly to their disadvantage) in all parts of this country,” he wrote home to Salem. “We hear of them from every quarter, scarce a harbor in India that don’t contain more or less of them.”⁸⁰ When news of low prices for cotton at Bourbon in 1803 reached the Crowninshields in a letter from a London merchant house, Jacob counseled Richard: “I wd not speak of the information for it will induce people to drive out & effect the price of produce, etc.”⁸¹ Due in part to this quick entrance of competitors into new markets and to seasonal fluctuations that could make markets uncertain, merchants sought to avoid dependence on any single market, just as they had done in the Atlantic.⁸²

IV

⁷⁸ John Crowninshield to George Crowninshield, March 19, 1796, Crowninshield Family Papers, PEM.

⁷⁹ John Crowninshield to George Crowninshield, June 1, 1796, Crowninshield Family Papers, PEM.

⁸⁰ Nathaniel Silsbee to Captain Peirce, August 5, 1796 and November 17, 1796, Silsbee Family Papers, PEM.

⁸¹ Jacob Crowninshield to Richard Crowninshield, June 27, 1803, Crowninshield Family Papers, PEM. When Jacob first heard of the low prices he wrote to Richard: “This is an extraordinary price & we must keep the information to ourselves & proffit by it if we can.” Jacob Crowninshield to Richard Crowninshield, April 11, 1803, Crowninshield Family Papers, PEM.

⁸² Demand for Atlantic goods at Mauritius could change rapidly, while coffee and cotton grown on Bourbon or Mauritius could be costly or take months to arrive at market if an American captain arrived at the wrong season. Vans and West to EHD, April 27, 1786, in Peabody, 71. With the outbreak of Anglo-French war, occasional embargoes could keep American ships at Mauritius for months. When ships returning from Mauritius each brought different accounts of the market over a short period of time, Jacob Crowninshield mused to his brother Richard, “What an unus’l market, there is no sort of dependence on it.” Jacob Crowninshield to Richard Crowninshield, May 5, 1797, Crowninshield Family Papers, PEM.

In the mid-1790s, many captains like Silsbee and the Crowninshields, who had sailed Derby ships on early ventures to the Indian Ocean, now sought their own entry into this commerce. They had trained in the Atlantic before gaining promotions to the Indian Ocean trade, and as they ventured out on their own as merchants they sought information on new markets to which they could voyage from the now familiar Cape Town, Mauritius, and the many ports of India. With an interest in circumventing their competition, increasing market options for their ships' destinations, and acquiring staple goods directly from producers as they had done in the Atlantic, these Salem traders gradually learned the methods of the pepper trade at the Indonesian island of Sumatra. The sail from Mauritius to Sumatra took three weeks to a month.⁸³ Americans had traditionally purchased Sumatran pepper in Holland and England and in East Indies markets like Mauritius, Batavia, and Madras.⁸⁴ In the late eighteenth century, both the Dutch and the British East India Companies maintained trade posts along the southwestern coast of Sumatra where they purchased pepper from surrounding communities and shipped it to larger markets.⁸⁵ The British East India Company had barred Americans from purchasing pepper in their ports, and when British officers did agree to sell pepper to the first wave of American

⁸³ John Crowninshield to Captain William Brown, May 30, 1801, John Crowninshield Letterbook, Crowninshield Family Papers, PEM.

⁸⁴ American pepper imports in 1791 reflected the central role of these two European suppliers. In Pennsylvania, 67% of the state's pepper imports came from the Dutch colony at the Cape of Good Hope. In New York, 95% of imported pepper entered from the United Netherlands, and the remaining 5% arrived from England. In Virginia, 98% entered from England and the remaining 2% entered from the United Netherlands. *American State Papers, Volume VII: Commerce and Navigation* (Washington: Gales and Seaton, 1832), 170, 176, 180, 186, 190. Captains employed by EHD found considerable amounts of pepper for sale at Mauritius, most of which had likely come from Dutch sources. Derby's son also found Sumatran pepper for sale at Bombay. Elias Hasket Derby, Jr. to EHD, April 29, 1788, April 22, 1788, and September 1788, Derby Family Papers, PEM. From 1799 to 1800, Salem native Dudley Pickman served as supercargo aboard the Crowninshield ship *Belisarius*, and on a visit to Madras, Pickman observed Sumatran pepper moving through this port and the neighboring Danish port of Tranquebar. Dudley Pickman, *Journal of the Belisarius*, printed in Susan Bean, *Yankee India*, 93.

⁸⁵ In 1786, British government in Sumatra consisted of thirty-six civil officers spread across eight posts. Half of these officers served at Bencool. Court to Fort Marlborough, April 12, 1786, printed in John Bastin, *The British in Western Sumatra (1685-1825)* (Kuala Lumpur, University of Malaya Press, 1965), 84, fn. 273. The British military establishment at Bencool by the 1780s consisted primarily of British soldiers and Sepoys from India. Bastin, *British in Western Sumatra*, xvii-xix.

ships to Sumatra in the late 1780s and early 1790s, they did so at high prices and in return for specie in order to offset their persistent operating deficits.⁸⁶

Instead, enterprising Salem merchants began trading in Sumatran ports outside of British or Dutch settlements. They deployed this strategy in order to buy direct from pepper producers without having to worry about the unpredictable restrictions from European East India Companies and, especially in the earlier years of this trade, to gain an opportunity to compete with other American merchants that had greater access to specie. Trading to a new region, unfamiliar to Americans, proved challenging. In the early 1790s, American navigators professed little knowledge of Sumatra's reef-covered coast beyond the vicinity of established British and Dutch settlements, and available maps and pilot guides were little help (Figure 4.3).⁸⁷ While southwestern Sumatra appeared adequately detailed with even some sounding depths in a prominent atlas for American mariners, the northwest and northeast coasts where Salem merchants sought to trade appeared as a blank patch of white on available maps.

⁸⁶ As American ships entered the China trade by 1784, some stopped on Sumatra for water. Peabody, *Log of the Grand Turks*, 74. From 1789 to 1791, at least seven American merchant ships had visited the British pepper post at Bencoolen and the Dutch post at Padang. James Gould, *Americans in Sumatra* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1961), 109. During a stop in the Malaysian port of Penang in 1796, Nathaniel Silsbee heard that the *Rose* from Boston and the 110-ton *Fairy* from Beverly, two ships carrying cargoes of specie, had both been at Bencoolen and had departed for home with pepper long before Carnes would have been able to load his ship. Nathaniel Silsbee to Daniel Pierce, November 17, 1796, Silsbee Letterbook, Silsbee Family Papers, PEM. A. Frank Hitchings, *Ships Registers of the District of Salem and Beverly Massachusetts, 1789-1900* (Salem: The Essex Institute, 1906, 57).

⁸⁷ Samuel Dunn, *A New Directory for the East Indies* (London: Henry Gregory, 1780). In 1790, New York book and map salesman James Rivington advertised in a city newspaper that he had recently imported from London "Dunn's maps and charts of the East India Seas with his large volume of directions for the assistance and information of commanders." *The Daily Advertiser* (New York, NY), July 20, 1790.



Figure 4.3: Two sections from the same 1794 British chart of the coast of Sumatra. Left: The southwestern coast of Sumatra, where the British and Dutch East India Companies maintained their pepper ports, with multiple soundings and detailed coastal markings. Right: The northwestern coast of Sumatra, where Americans concentrated their pepper trade, with few details. *Chart of the Straits of Malacca and Singapore, By Thomas Jeffrys, Geographer to the King, 1794*, published in *The Oriental Pilot* (London: Robert Laurie and James Whittle, 1801).⁸⁸

In 1795, Captain Jonathan Carnes departed from Salem as master of the 120-ton *Rajah* on a voyage to the pepper ports of Sumatra. Carnes had been to Sumatra twice before, first in 1789 as captain of the *Cadet* alongside supercargo William Vans, who had served as Derby's

⁸⁸ Full title *The Oriental Pilot: East-India Directory: Containing a Collection of Charts Both General and Particular, for the Navigation not Only of the Indian and Pacific Oceans, with the China Seas, but also of those between England the Cape of Good-Hope; Improved and Chiefly Composed from the Last Edition of the Works of Mr. D'Apres de Manneville, with many Additions and Corrections, and the Insertion of All the New Discoveries made by the English, Dutch, French, and Spaniards, Etc., The Whole Compiled from Draughts, Surveys, and Journals, Communicated by the Officers and Marine Surveyors of the East-India Company, and Others, Being a Useful Selection, from the Complete East-India Pilot* (London: Robert Laurie and James Whittle, 1801). Original copy reviewed at the MHS. Pencil markings on this map of Sumatra made by Samuel Endicott in the Salem ship *George* that visited Sumatra in 1815 suggest that the location of the coastline in this part of Sumatra was incorrect on this 1794 chart in the 1801 edition of the *Oriental Pilot*.

supercargo on the *Grand Turk* during its voyage to Mauritius and then China.⁸⁹ Carnes and Vans traded within the geography of British and Dutch trade posts, and they had returned to Boston in 1790 carrying gold dust, cinnamon, camphor, frankincense, and pepper.⁹⁰ On his next voyage to Sumatra in 1793 as a captain for Elias Hasket Derby, Carnes took on a pilot at the British post of Bencoolen who guided him north to the Dutch post of Padang. There, Carnes noticed pepper arriving on boats manned by indigenous traders from even farther north.⁹¹ Upon his return to Salem—after losing his ship in a storm off Bermuda—Carnes invested his knowledge about the northern Sumatra pepper trade in the merchant business of his Salem uncle, Jonathan Peele.⁹² In secret, Peele, his brother Willard Peele, and their associate Ebenezer Beckford began building the *Rajah*.⁹³ In 1795, Carnes departed from Salem with instructions to sell part of his Atlantic

⁸⁹ *Salem Mercury* (Salem, MA), April 15, 1788. During his voyage in the *Grand Turk*, Vans had multiple opportunities to learn about the mechanics of the Sumatra pepper trade. The southern tip of Sumatra sat along one of the main shipping routes from the Indian Ocean to Batavia and China, and the voyage from Mauritius took Vans and the *Grand Turk* through the Sunda Straits between the southern edge of Sumatra and the northern tip of Java. At Canton, Vans met the officers of four other American vessels from New York and Philadelphia, and he discussed the mechanics of the China trade with Major Samuel Shaw, the American consul. Vans may also have observed on this visit that the British, as a means to bolster the British China trade using pepper as a substitute for bullion, had encouraged their own pepper trade direct to Canton from Bencoolen. Peabody, *Log of the Grand Turks*, 75, 90. Court to Fort Marlborough, January 19, 1787, printed in Bastin, *The British in West Sumatra*, 85-86. Upon returning to the United States, Vans wrote to Derby that he had information about the India trade that he would only share with Derby or Derby's captain Ichabod Nichols. Williams Vans, Jr. to EHD, May 18, 1787, *Grand Turk Shipping Papers*, Derby Family Papers, PEM.

⁹⁰ *Columbian Centinel* (Boston, MA), July 7, 1790; William Vans, *An Appeal to the Public* (Salem, 1827), 100. American Amasa Delano reported finding all of these items growing or for sale on Sumatra during this visit to the island in 1792. Amasa Delano, *Narrative of Voyages and Travels in the Northern and Southern Hemispheres: Comprising Three Voyages Round the World; Together with a Voyage of Survey and Discovery, in the Pacific Ocean and Oriental Islands* (Boston: E.G. House, 1817), 156-157.

⁹¹ James Gould used Dutch shipping lists to confirm that Carnes did visit Padang in the Derby's *Grand Sachem* in 1793. Gould, *Americans in Sumatra*, 105. J. N. Reynolds, *Voyage of the United States Frigate Potomac, Under the Command of Commodore John Downes, During the Circumnavigation of the Globe* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1835), 200. By 1790, northern Sumatran communities, where there was no European residential presence, began planting pepper along their coastal plains and in river valleys that were fertile areas for pepper cultivation. They had been encouraged in this endeavor by a group of British East India Company employees who had stationed themselves by the 1780s at Natal, a coastal trade post in central Sumatra. These Company servants traded on their private account but under the name of the British East India Company, and in an effort to become exporters of northern Sumatran pepper, they approached Sumatran Rajah Libbee Duppoh in 1790 with a proposal that he begin cultivating pepper in the north. Rajah Libbee Duppoh agreed, and other regional leaders followed, and by 1791 the first crop of pepper cultivated on these northern farms was being exported out of the northern port of Susu. Gould, *Americans in Sumatra*, 100-104.

⁹² Hitchings, *Ship Registers*, 75.

⁹³ Hitchings, *Ship Registers*, 152.

cargo of lumber, iron, shooks, and tobacco at the Cape of Good Hope for Cape wines and then proceed to Sumatra, where he was to trade gin, brandy, bottles, and the remnants of his cargo for pepper.⁹⁴ In the newspapers and at the customs office, the Peeles listed the *Rajah's* intended destination as India.⁹⁵

Carnes remained at sea for two years, during which time the Peeles were busy gathering information about Sumatran pepper ports beyond Dutch and English settlements. In July of 1796, one of the Peele brothers worked on a memorandum about Sumatran trade using accounts from contemporary sources like the published journals of the Captain Cook and likely from interviews, possibly of crew members aboard the ship *Eliza* that had been at Bencoolen and had returned to Boston from Canton that month. In the memorandum, Peele noted how pepper arrived at some British Sumatran settlements from the countryside, and he listed the “Rajahs” who reportedly had authority over these areas.⁹⁶ At Sumatra, Carnes had stopped first at the British post of Tappanooly, but finding long delays in acquiring pepper there, likely due in part to the presence of other American vessels, Carnes ventured north.⁹⁷ He discovered the port of Susu as the source for much of the Sumatran pepper that had been pouring into Padang a few years before, and his coasting efforts netted Carnes nearly 600,000 pounds of pepper for

⁹⁴ Jonathan Peele to Jonathan Carnes, November 3, 1795; Jonathan Carnes to Jonathan Peele, March 18, 1796 and April 11, 1796, Peele Family Papers, PEM. Carnes also carried a secret stash of \$8000, and to protect this specie in case of the *Rajah's* seizure by a cruiser that would expect her to be carrying cash, Carnes carried fake bills of exchange drawn by the Peeles on a merchant at the Cape. Invoice of Sundry Goods Shipped on Board the Schooner *Rajah*, November 3, 1795, Peele Family Papers, PEM.

⁹⁵ Outward Foreign Clearances from Customs District of Salem and Beverly Massachusetts, V31, National Archives and Records Administration, Waltham, Massachusetts [cited hereafter as NARA-Waltham]. Listing the ship's destination as India does not necessarily mean that the Peeles were trying to hide the ship's true course. Americans at this point often referred to the broader Indian Ocean marketplace as India. See Fichter, *So Great a Proffit*, 4.

⁹⁶ “Memo of the island Sumatra,” July 20, 1796, Peele Family Papers, PEM. Peele's memo has an informal nature to it, as if he was taken notes from a conversation or taking quick notes while reading. He also mentioned sailing times to Sumatra as listed in Cook's journals [give info and full citation!!]. For the *Eliza* at Sumatra see Gould, *Americans in Sumatra*, 109. For a ship *Eliza* returning to Boston from Canton in July 1796, see *Federal Orrery* (Boston, MA), July 4, 1796.

⁹⁷ “Extract of Hopkins Manfield's letter,” November 3, 1796, Peele Family Papers, PEM.

\$18,000. When Carnes returned to New York with his cargo, he wrote to the Peeles that the pepper was the best he had ever seen, and Carnes sold the cargo for a 700% profit.⁹⁸ He also returned with a signed contract from a Sumatran Rajah who believed there was a “prospect to negotiate business with Americans” and who agreed to sell pepper at a fixed price to any American merchant for the next two years who arrived carrying the contract.⁹⁹

The Peeles were selective in divulging their secrets about the specific northern Sumatran markets in which Carnes had purchased pepper since competitors sought this navigational information as a means to expand their trade. Once Americans arrived in these new markets, the practices of trade seemed familiar. The Peeles and the Crowninshields were commercial associates, and by the time of Carnes’s third voyage to Sumatra, the Crowninshields had two ships following close behind for Sumatran pepper.¹⁰⁰ Carnes himself served as a captain on two Crowninshield voyages to the pepper markets by 1805, spreading his knowledge and experience to another merchant house.¹⁰¹ John Crowninshield made his first visit to Sumatra in 1801 as captain of the family’s 654-ton ship the *America*. During a preceding stop at Mauritius, the

⁹⁸ Jonathan Carnes to the owners of the *Rajah*, July 14, 1797, Peele Family Papers, PEM. Gould’s research has confirmed this 700% calculation. Gould, *Americans in Sumatra*, 107. Carnes’s return appeared in the *Salem Gazette*, July 21, 1797. The next edition of the Salem newspaper mentioned that Carnes had been “off the coast of Sumatra, trading at a small port for pepper.” *Salem Gazette*, July 25, 1797.

⁹⁹ Jonathan Carnes to the owners of the *Rajah*, July 14, 1797, Peele Family Papers, PEM.

¹⁰⁰ When the Peeles sent the *Rajah* off to Bordeaux with her Sumatran pepper, they sent her with an adventure for the Crowninshield family on board. Phillips, *Salem and the Indies*, 95; George Granville Putnam, *Salem Vessels and the Voyages: A History of the Pepper Trade with the Island of Sumatra* (Salem: Essex Institute, 1922), 8. Jacob Crowninshield to Richard Crowninshield, April 22, 1798, Crowninshield Family Papers, PEM.

¹⁰¹ Phillips, p. 95. See also the inward manifest of the Crowninshield 141-ton ship *Concord* that sailed from Salem to Sumatra and purchased pepper in 1804 with Jonathan Carnes as captain. Manifest of ship *Concord*, November 16, 1803, Records of the Salem and Beverly Customs District, National Archives and Records Administration, Waltham, MA [cited hereafter as NARA-MA]. William Carnes [explain relation] also served as clerk aboard the Crowninshield 261-ton vessel *Belisarius* that sailed to the Indian Ocean in 1803. See Salem, Mass. Crew Lists Index, 1799-1879, Online database of the G.W. Blunt White Library, Mystic Seaport. Accessed November 29, 2014. <http://library.mysticseaport.org/initiative/SalemVessel.cfm?VesselId=962>.

community of American captains there had laughed at Crowninshield's plans, believing he was headed for Bencoolen where pepper prices were reportedly high.¹⁰²

Crowninshield, however, had plans to trade to the north with navigational information he had likely received from Carnes and the Peeles, and with the aid of a local coasting vessel, he located and landed at the Sumatran port of Meukek.¹⁰³ After long consultation on shore with Meukek's "head men," the group agreed that Crowninshield would purchase as much pepper as he wanted at \$8 a pecul.¹⁰⁴ "We see pepper more or less in all the places we pass by, the quantity is immense in this little place & then they bring a great deal from other places in their own boats or freighted in their neighbors when there is a prospect of a market," Crowninshield observed of Meukek.¹⁰⁵ He spent time on shore and found the people very accommodating, civil, and eager to trade with him, traits that he had not expected given the stories of treachery that Americans had heard from Dutch and British traders. "It is but late the Americans have traded with [the people of northern Sumatra]," Crowninshield wrote. "[Americans] have been afraid from the information they have received of the disposition of the natives but it must be remembered this information has been given by those whose interest it was to deceive with the view of keeping the trade in their own hands."¹⁰⁶ In only seventeen days, the massive *America*

¹⁰² John Crowninshield to Captain William Brown, May 30, 1801, John Crowninshield Letterbook, Crowninshield Family Papers, PEM.

¹⁰³ The names of these Sumatran ports appear with many different spellings in writing from this period. John Crowninshield referred to this port as Maca. A later Salem captain referred to it as Mukka. The modern spelling is Meukek, which I use here. Log of the *America*, printed in "John Crowninshield in the America III, at Sumatra, 1801," in *Essex Institute Historical Collections* 80 (April 1944), 142.

¹⁰⁴ "John Crowninshield in the America III," July 3, 1801, 142.

¹⁰⁵ I have corrected misspellings for ease of reading. Log of the *America*, July 17, 1801, printed in "John Crowninshield in the America III," 150.

¹⁰⁶ Log of the *America*, July 17, 1801, printed in "John Crowninshield in the America III," 150.

was filled with pepper. “Our dispatch has exceeded our most sanguine expectations,” Crowninshield wrote back to Salem. “The pepper is excellent.”¹⁰⁷

Large ships like the Crowninshields’ *America* could carry lucrative cargoes and monopolize pepper coming out of a single Sumatran port, but their size and the length of time needed to fill the ship’s holds made them vulnerable to competition from smaller ships. Crowninshield had purchased the *America* in Bourdeaux, and at the time she was the largest ship in commercial service for the U.S.¹⁰⁸ In 1802, the *America* was back at Meukek loading pepper, this time with Captain Jeremiah Briggs as master. By the time the *America* was half full, the 206-ton Salem vessel *Active* under Captain George Nichols sailed by after a stressful search for Meukek. The English *East India Pilot* that Nichols carried gave no accurate description of Meukek, nor its “wind & weather,” and the latitude for the port that Nichols had received from “several people” had been off by twelve miles, all of which had caused Nichols anxiety and several days of delay.¹⁰⁹ Finally spotting the masts of the *America*, Nichols landed at Meukek.¹¹⁰

Just as Crowninshield had done in 1801, Captain Nichols met first with the local political leader, a man he called the Governor, to negotiate buying pepper, but the Governor refused to begin loading the *Active* until the *America* was full.¹¹¹ Nichols urged Captain Briggs to split the pepper between the two ships, but Briggs refused.¹¹² With both ships anchored in port, Nichols,

¹⁰⁷ John Crowninshield to George Crowninshield & Sons, July 20, 1801, John Crowninshield Letterbook, Crowninshield Family Papers, PEM.

¹⁰⁸ Hitchings, *Ship Registers*, 8.

¹⁰⁹ Log of the *Active*, East India Marine Society Logs, quoted in Patricia Johnston, “Depicting Geographic Knowledge: Mariners’ Drawings from Salem, Massachusetts,” in Martha McNamara and Georgia B. Barnhill, eds., *New Views of New England: Studies in Material and Visual Culture, 1680-1830* (Boston: The Colonial Society of Massachusetts, 2012), 35-36.

¹¹⁰ Account of the *Active* from the memoirs of George Nichols, master of the *Active* on its 1802 journey to Sumatra. George Nichols, *A Salem Shipmaster and Merchant: The Autobiography of George Nichols* (Salem, MA: Four Seas Company, 1921), 66-67. Hitchings, *Ship Registers*, 3.

¹¹¹ After Nichols announced he would leave port if he could not get pepper sooner, the Governor agreed to begin loading the *Active* in one week, regardless of the *America*’s status.

¹¹² Nichols, *A Salem Shipmaster*, 67.

like Briggs, observed that much of the pepper came from inland villages across a river from Meukek, carried by locals on their backs. Briggs and Nichols began sending their men farther and farther inland to get pepper more quickly than the other ship.¹¹³ One night from the deck of his ships, Nichols watched the port around him, and he noticed a group of local coasting vessels landing a large quantity of pepper on shore. At dawn, Nichols gathered a group of his sailors and rowed to shore for the pepper, passing a surprised Captain Briggs as they rowed by the *America*. Briggs manned his own boat and followed Nichols to land, but “he was too late, he found to his great mortification, to obtain any pepper,” Nichols recalled. “We had it all.”¹¹⁴ Soon the *America* departed Meukek in search of another pepper source, and the Crowninshields sold the vessel in France shortly thereafter.¹¹⁵

American circuitous trading with short, rapid voyages in the Indian Ocean, as in the Atlantic, required route-based information to get ships from port to port, and once American commercial communities obtained navigational information about the coast of northwestern Sumatra, the island quickly became a congested market for American ships. By 1800, the British at Bencoolen had observed so many American vessels arriving at Sumatra that they worried Americans would soon “monopolize the [pepper] trade.”¹¹⁶ Salem captain Nathaniel Bowditch arrived in northern Sumatra in 1803 to find thirty American vessels on the coast and believed the price of pepper had risen considerably as a consequence.¹¹⁷ Jacob Crowninshield in Salem worried that this increasing traffic would weaken the pepper trade in which the family was

¹¹³ Nichols, *A Salem Shipmaster*, 68.

¹¹⁴ Nichols, *A Salem Shipmaster*, 68-69. Only a few days later, the 207-ton Salem ship *George Washington*, owned in part by the Peele’s former associate Ebenezer Beckford, sailed into Meukek. Not wanting to lose his hold on the local pepper supply, Nichols asked the *George Washington*’s captain to postpone his pepper loading “till my vessel was loaded.” Nichols, *A Salem Shipmaster*, 71. For information on the owners of the *George Washington* see Hitchings, *Ship Registers*, 72.

¹¹⁵ Hitchings, *Ship Registers*, 8.

¹¹⁶ Ewer to Dundas, April 9, 1800, and May 31, 1801, printed in Bastin, *The British in West Sumatra*, 97, 116.

¹¹⁷ Log of the *Putnam*, quoted in Fichter, *So Great a Profitt*, 85.

heavily invested. One ship could bring back 300,000 pounds of pepper or more, and at that rate Jacob knew that there would only be enough pepper for the first wave of ships that arrived at the pepper ports in a single season.¹¹⁸ When the family identified other merchants' ships clearing out for Sumatra, they trusted in the navigational skills of their captains to get their ships to market first.¹¹⁹ Jacob circulated misleading information about the state of the pepper market through the Salem maritime community to try to dissuade others from sending their ships to Sumatra, even as the Crowninshields prepared to send theirs to the same ports. He wrote to his brother:

I tell all these folks that are going after pepper that the news of the Peace [of Amiens] is now in India & all the country ships will go over to the West Coast for pepper & carry over ash, opium, & [piece] goods. The French privateers being called in, [the country ships] will swarm over [to Sumatra], as there will be no danger. This seems to alarm them a little & some no doubt owing to this & the news of Peace will give up their voyages. So much the better.¹²⁰

As Jacob learned of competitors contracting for pepper in Sumatra for twelve dollars per pecul in 1803, he estimated that this agreement would raise the standard purchase price for pepper to such an extent that it would injure the three Crowninshield pepper voyages currently underway by at least £10,000.¹²¹ The competition in this market encouraged the Crowninshields to plan voyages along different Indian Ocean trade routes to balance their trade for pepper.¹²²

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¹¹⁸ Jacob Crowninshield to Richard Crowninshield, July 16, 1802, Crowninshield Family Papers, PEM.

¹¹⁹ In 1802, Jacob wrote to Richard in New York: "the Minerva is ready or so far so that she can sail immediately. A large ship the Governor Strong has sailed from Boston for Sumatra & Bowditch from Beverly two days since. I hope however ours will be out first. Capt. Ward will be ordered to push as hard as possible." Jacob Crowninshield to Richard Crowninshield, November 22, 1802, Crowninshield Family Papers, PEM.

¹²⁰ Jacob Crowninshield to Richard Crowninshield, November 25, 1801, Crowninshield Family Papers, PEM. In his private correspondence, Jacob wrote that the family must send the *America* for pepper, as "no other voyage will do so well." Jacob Crowninshield to Richard Crowninshield, November 28, 1801, Crowninshield Family Papers, PEM.

¹²¹ Jacob Crowninshield to Richard Crowninshield, March 22, 1803, Crowninshield Family Papers, PEM.

¹²² Jacob Crowninshield to Richard Crowninshield, January 3, 1802, Crowninshield Family Papers, PEM.

In July 1804, the Crowninshields' new 473-ton *America* departed from Salem in search of Sumatran pepper, and much to the owners' delight, she returned one year later instead with coffee. Pepper prices were high when the *America* left, but shortly after the ship's departure prices plunged as the product poured into the United States. Luckily for the Crowninshields, the *America* had received a valuable tip during an early stop at Mauritius where the ship met Henry Elkins, another Crowninshield captain, who was returning to Salem in the *Margaret* after his voyage to Mocha in modern-day Yemen. Elkins advised the *America* that there were "flattering prospects" of procuring a load of coffee at Mocha, and with this knowledge the *America* altered her course and sailed for the Arabian Peninsula.¹²³ At Mocha, Benjamin Crowninshield, Jr., the *America's* captain, purchased a large cargo of coffee, along with gums, hides, goat skins, and sienna for the return voyage. Meanwhile, Nathaniel Rogers, the *America's* clerk, acquainted himself with the crew of a nearby British cruiser and received permission to copy their charts of the Red Sea.¹²⁴ Before setting out for home, the *America* moved west along the coastline and completed her cargo of gums with short stops at Aden and Maculla farther to the east on the Arabian Sea.¹²⁵ After a four-month sail back home, the appearance of the *America* off Salem harbor was a welcome but apprehensive moment for the ship's owners who wondered how they would sell the expected cargo of pepper in a down market. Coffee prices, alternatively, were high. A Crowninshield family member later recounted that as the owners approached the *America* they convinced themselves that the coffee scent they detected from the ship was likely just a new pot brewing in the *America's* galley. The coffee filled the vessels cargo holds, and

¹²³ Excerpts of the log of the *America*, October 20, 1804, printed B. B. Crowninshield, "An Account of the Private Armed Ship 'America' of Salem," in *Essex Institute Historical Collections* 37 (Jan., 1901), 3.

¹²⁴ Log of the *America*, January 1805, printed in Crowninshield, "An Account," 4.

¹²⁵ Log of the *America*, February 2, 1805 and February 20, 1805, printed in Crowninshield, "An Account," 4-5. Both ports are in modern-day Yemen.

within eight days the Crowninshields sent the *America* off to Rotterdam where sales of her coffee netted a profit of \$100,000.¹²⁶

The Crowninshield's *America* altered her course from Sumatra to Mocha quickly and easily using commercial news gathered at Mauritius, and the family recognized that their American competitors could do the same, particularly as Americans had increasing access to specie for their Indian Ocean trade. "How people are apt to follow one another," Jacob Crowninshield lamented to his brother Richard about the Salem commercial community, "just like sheep over a wall."¹²⁷ By the 1790s, freight work and the sale of imports in the United States and the re-export markets of the Atlantic netted growing amounts of specie for American merchants, who then deployed this cash to make their circuitous patterns of trade in the Indian Ocean even more profitable.¹²⁸ In contrast to trading in diverse cargoes, specie often commanded quicker sales at better prices, and it allowed ships to bypass stopover markets. During wartime, each stop and each day at sea increased the risks of seizure. Salem merchant William Gray freighted specie in the 1790s for investors on his ships from Salem to India with the express condition that the ships were "not to touch at the Isle of France either out or home."¹²⁹ Even as he traded on circuitous routes through the Indian Ocean with diverse cargoes in 1795, Jacob Crowninshield recognized the advantages of trading in cash. "Nothing should be ventured upon from America to Bengal but dollars," he wrote to Richard in New York. "With

¹²⁶ Crowninshield, "An Account," 6. The *America* arrived in port on June 17, 1805. For the departure of the *America* for Rotterdam on June 25, 1805 see Clearance Book 1802-1805, Records of the Customs District of Salem and Beverly, NARA-Waltham. This story also recounted in Samuel Eliot Morison, *The Maritime History of Massachusetts 1783-1860* (Cambridge, MA: Riverside Press, 1923), 93.

¹²⁷ Jacob Crowninshield to Richard Crowninshield, November 28, 1801, Crowninshield Family Papers, PEM.

¹²⁸ Dennett, *Americans in Eastern Asia*, 10.

¹²⁹ Quoted in Samuel Eliot Morison, "The India Ventures of Fisher Ames, 1794-1804," in *Proceedings of the American Antiquarian Society* Vol. 37 (1927), 15-16. One investor, federal Representative Fisher Ames, regularly enjoyed a profit on his investments of twenty to thirty percent per annum and wrote Gray that "I see no better way of employing my capital than the India trade."

them every dispatch can be made, & they are sure & nothing else is or can be.”¹³⁰ By 1797, as Jacob returned home from the Indian Ocean he anticipated that the profits from this voyage would allow the family to send brother Benjamin with dollars on a direct voyage for India.¹³¹

As Americans gained more capital and more experience trading in the Indian Ocean by the 1790s, their trading practices reflected a new melding of traditional Atlantic strategies with new practices learned in the Indian Ocean. American ships bound to Cape Town and beyond departed with diverse cargoes of Atlantic goods in addition to specie, and many still departed for entrepôt markets. In 1803, the Salem 165-ton brig *Two Friends* departed for Sumatra with \$12,000, but also soap, meat, fish, candles, brandy, furniture, and tobacco. The ship *Good Hope* left for Mauritius with \$34,000, along with beef, butter, flour, tobacco, and salt. The 127-ton brig *Augusta* left for the Cape of Good Hope with rum, tobacco, flour, candles, lumber, and numerous other Atlantic provisions.¹³² At Mauritius in 1803, William Fitz Paine believed Americans arriving in small vessels maintained an advantage since they could avoid bad sales from too big a stock and quickly obtain a return cargo.¹³³ Americans with specie no longer relied on entrepôt markets like Mauritius to acquire dollars, but since specie commanded strong sales in a variety of ports, they continued to use stopover markets for commercial intelligence to direct their ships. In 1801, Paine recognized the continued value of Mauritius as a market for information, even as stops there put American captains in danger of seizure from British vessels and delays from the island’s frequent wartime embargoes. Mauritius was “very well situated for

¹³⁰ Jacob Crowninshield to Richard Crowninshield, November 15, 1795, Crowninshield Family Papers, PEM.

¹³¹ Jacob Crowninshield to Richard Crowninshield, November 15, 1795, Crowninshield Family Papers, PEM.

¹³² Clearance Book 1802-1805, Records of the Customs District of Salem and Beverly, NARA-Waltham; Hitchings, *Ship Registers*, 14, 189.

¹³³ Paine observed: “The best vessel to trade from the American States, to Mauritius would be a good Brig for, strange as it appears, a large Brig would not excite half the attention that a ship of much less size would. They form as estimate of the goods they carry by the masts, not conceiving that a two mast vessel can be larger than three.” Memorandum, November 1803, Paine Family Papers, AAS.

procuring information,” Paine wrote. “Ships bound on uncertain voyages should in my opinion touch at the Isle of France, where they are pretty certain of receiving information which may direct their subsequent voyage.”¹³⁴ Every merchant made these risk and reward calculations.

Direct trade with India could be lucrative, but it also carried risks, particularly after the Jay Treaty in 1795 barred Americans from the India coasting trade and required that American trading at British ports return directly to the United States. Consequently, despite the Crowninshields’ excitement over Benjamin’s prospects for direct trade with India in 1797, he arrived in Calcutta with goods carried on freight from the Danish Indian port of Tranquebar and was stopped by British authorities for violating to the terms of the new treaty. Crowninshield claimed ignorance, and the British allowed him to land his cargo with the warning that they would enforce the treaty on any “future, similar occasions.”¹³⁵ For the Crowninshields as for many of their competitors, using specie to maintain flexibility and diversity in their trade mitigated the risks of seizure or glutted markets. The Crowninshields’ *America* that had changed its voyage plans from Sumatra to Mocha carried 100 barrels of beef and 60 cases of wine, but its largest cargo consisted of \$71,300 of specie.¹³⁶

By 1800, the Crowninshields sought markets in East Africa and the Arabian Peninsula as alternative trading centers that would expand their commercial geographies beyond crowded, highly regulated, or unstable markets and allow them to acquire fine coffee and medicines directly from the regions that produced them rather than in India or Europe. Commercial

¹³⁴ William Fitz Paine Notebook, 1804-1805, Papers of William Fitz Paine, Paine Family Papers, AAS. In November 1803, Paine observed: “The Isle of France has connection with all India- ships coming there frequently either for supplies or to invest surplus funds or to sell. I think it would be advisable in most speculating voyages to touch here and get information, which may generally be obtained, respecting the places, which are the object of the destinations.”

¹³⁵ “Extract of Public Letter from Fort St. George,” October 16, 1797, India Office Records: Home Miscellaneous Series (Microfilm), British Library, London, UK.

¹³⁶ Clearance Book 1802-1805, Records of the Customs District of Salem and Beverly, NARA-Waltham.

connections at Mauritius provided them with important information for how to pursue this trade. As new as many Indian Ocean markets were to American merchants and captains, the threshold of knowledge needed to enter these new markets was low. As in the Atlantic, specific information about current prices, harbor locations, and sailing directions lowered the risks of trade enough to allow ship captains to make rapid changes to American voyage plans. These small bits of information could propel new trading opportunities, and they were extremely valuable to the first traders who learned them. As the Crowninshields worked to initiate their own trade with the Arabian Peninsula, they followed in the wake of Elias Hasket Derby. Derby had sent his 284-ton *Recovery* to Mocha in 1797, and it was the first American ship to enter that port. When the *Recovery* returned to Salem, Derby sent it back out to Mocha, but he sealed the voyage instructions and informed the captain not to open them until out at sea.¹³⁷ As the *Recovery's* captain, Luther Dana, approached the southern end of the Red Sea, he recorded his observations using references not only to his Atlantic experiences, but to his new familiarity with the Indian Ocean marketplace. Cape Guardafui in Somalia, he wrote, looked like “a large rigged vessel.” As Dana drew the entrance to the straights, he noted in his log that at first approach the land along the straights appeared like Gunner’s Quoin, a small island with a distinct slope off the northern coast of Mauritius.¹³⁸

Captain Henry Elkins, who commanded the 163-ton *Ulysses* on the Crowninshields’ first venture to the Red Sea in 1800, visited the ports of Mocha and Muscat and gathered information for the family to build on as it expanded its trade to these new markets.¹³⁹ Under the rule of the

¹³⁷ On its 1797 voyage, the *Recovery* sailed to Calcutta from Mocha and returned to Salem with a cargo of India sugar. On the second voyage, the *Recovery* returned to Salem carrying approximately 300,000 pounds of coffee. Phillips, *Salem and the Indies*, 188; Tyler Dennett, *Americans in East Asia*, 30. Hitchings, *Ship Registers*, 155. James Dana, *Memoir of the late Hon. Samuel Dana* (Cambridge, MA: John Wilson, 1877), 23.

¹³⁸ Log excerpts printed in Johnston, “Depicting Geographic Knowledge,” 29-30.

¹³⁹ The ship cleared for “India.” *Salem Impartial Register*, October 6, 1800 and October 19, 1801.

Qasimi imams, Mocha was another entrepôt market that linked trade between the Red Sea and the Indian Ocean and was the largest regional hub for trade in Arabian coffee (Figure 4.4).¹⁴⁰

Elkins made useful connections with the Mocha and Muscat mercantile communities, including with John Pringle, the acting British East India Company Agent at Mocha, and returned with a cargo of coffee, elephant teeth, goat skins, and a load of gums, aloes, galls, and other medicines.¹⁴¹ On his second journey to the Arabian Peninsula in the Crowninshield's

Telemachus, Elkins gathered additional market and navigational information that allowed him to venture further into the Red Sea. He sailed from Mozambique up to Zanzibar and then to

¹⁴⁰ For Mocha as a regional trade hub, see Nancy Um, *The Merchant Houses of Mocha: Trade and Architecture in an Indian Ocean Port* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2009). The existing trade and political networks that connected eastern Africa and the Arabian Peninsula to the broader Indian Ocean economy by the time American traders arrived would have provided many opportunities for American ship captains and merchants to learn about the mechanics of trade in these markets. A coasting trade in goods and slaves tied together the commerce of Mauritius, East Africa from Mozambique up through Zanzibar and Somalia, and the Arabian Peninsula. G.S.P. Freeman-Grenville, *The French at Kilwa Island* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1965); Richard Allen, "Licentious and Unbridled Proceedings: The Illegal Slave Trade to Mauritius and the Seychelles During the Early Nineteenth Century," in *The Journal of African History*, Vol. 21, No. 1 (2001): 91-116. From 1786 to 1790, the French East India Company, based in Mauritius, established agencies in the Persian Gulf and the Red Sea, and the French campaign in Egypt by 1798 brought an increased presence of British ships and traders to the Red Sea. The British East India Company maintained a factory at Mocha, where Company officers gathered trade goods from throughout the Red Sea for shipment back to Bombay. Surat and Bombay on the western coast of India were entrepôt markets for the gold, silk, coffees, and medicines that arrived from the Persian Gulf and the Arabian Sea. Holden Furber, *John Company at Work*, 161, 168; S.P. Sen, *The French in India 1763-1816* (Calcutta: Firma K. L. Mukhopadhyay, 1958), 424-5. The port of Muscat was the center of Omani trade, and Muscat's community of merchants from the Arabian Peninsula, eastern Africa, and India reflected the geography of commerce in and out of this port. Omani leaders appointed governors to serve in associated communities like Zanzibar on the east coast of Africa, and many of these political leaders were either merchants or closely aligned with mercantile communities. M. Reda Bhacker, *Trade and Empire in Muscat and Zanzibar: Roots of British Domination* (New York: Routledge, 1992), p. 3-14. Mocha coffee had a well-known reputation among consumers and traders throughout the global economy, including in the United States, as some of the highest quality coffee available. *Salem Gazette*, May 17, 1796. *The New-York Gazette and General Advertiser*, July 29, 1799.

¹⁴¹ *Salem Register*, January 11, 1802. Elkins carried letters between Salem Reverend William Bentley, a close friend and confidant of the Crowninshield family, and British and Arab officials in Mocha. These correspondents mainly exchanged literature and scientific publications. John Pringle of the British East India Company offered to Bentley: "For any information you may desire respecting this country I beg you will freely command my services." George Anneley put Bentley in touch with a local Arab leader, Said Aimed, and offered Bentley an early review of Anneley's published works on his Red Sea explorations: "By my arrival in England I think it probable I shall publish an account of my voyages in the Red Sea. I have since I wrote to you last acquired a great mass of information respecting the African shore...If I do publish I will do myself the pleasure of forwarding a copy to you." John Pringle to William Bentley, August 13, 1804, Lord Valentia to William Bentley, August 25, 1804 and October 9, 1805, William Bentley Papers, AAS. Additional correspondence between Bentley, Pringle, and Anneley (Valentia) exist in this collection. William Bentley, *The Diary of William Bentley, D.D., pastor of the East church, Salem, Massachusetts, Volume III* (Salem: Essex Institute, 1911), 3:194.

Maculla. Finding that the published longitudes and latitudes for this port were incorrect, Elkins had only located Maculla after a local coasting boat had agreed to pilot him into port.¹⁴² Once in port, Elkins had been well received by the local political leaders, who agreed to load the *Telemachus* in twenty days with goods from the nearby African coast, likely Ethiopia. Elkins had also scouted additional trading opportunities in the region, and he had received a letter from an Arab leader to the east of Maculla offering to load Elkins's vessel in just ten days. Jacob wrote to Richard about how useful this information would be for future Crowninshield voyages to these markets: "This is important information & if we do not make a doll\$ by this voyage....it shows us what can be done."¹⁴³

¹⁴²Jacob Crowninshield to Richard Crowninshield, May 2, 1803, Crowninshield Family Papers, PEM. George Annesley observed that the existing charts of this region had many errors during his 1805 journey. George Annesley, *Voyages and travels to India, Ceylon, the Red Sea, Abyssinia, and Egypt: in the years 1802, 1803, 1804, 1805, and 1806*, Volume 2 (London: F.C. & J. Rivington, 1811). The 1801 version of *The Oriental Pilot* also had incorrect longitudes and latitudes for sections of the coastline of both modern-day Yemen and modern-day Ethiopia. Endicott's copy of *The Oriental Pilot*, in which he kept notes from his journey in the ship *George* through the Indian Ocean, includes a notation on the map of the Arabian Peninsula and the Red Sea that the Yemeni port of Aden is drawn "57 miles too far Eastward" and pencil markings with Endicott's corrected locations for the Ethiopian coastline. See *The Oriental Pilot*, Endicott's original copy at the Massachusetts Historical Society.

¹⁴³ Jacob Crowninshield to Richard Crowninshield, May 2, 1803, Crowninshield Family Papers, PEM.



Figure 4.4: “View from the Factory at Mocha,” drawn by Henry Salt during his journey through the Red Sea with George Annesely, 1802-1804. Published in George Annesley, *Voyages and travels to India, Ceylon, the Red Sea, Abyssinia, and Egypt: in the years 1802, 1803, 1804, 1805, and 1806*, Volume 2 (London: F.C. & J. Rivington, 1811).

Jacob Crowninshield had incentive to keep Elkins’s secrets when the *Telemachus* arrived in port filled with better quality gums, aloes, senna, myrrh, and ivory than Crowninshield had ever seen. Once again he knew that the smallest pieces of information about the location of a market or the goods to trade in a market would lower risks just enough to send competitor ships to these new places for American trade. He wrote to Richard: “do not tell where she has been nor where she is from.”¹⁴⁴ Upon the *Telemachus*’s return, Crowninshield quickly announced to the *Salem Register* that the ship had returned from Arabia with no mention of the particular ports

¹⁴⁴ Jacob Crowninshield to Richard Crowninshield, May 2, 1803, Crowninshield Family Papers, PEM.

it had visited.¹⁴⁵ But Crowninshield had to reveal the ship's true path when he submitted her papers to the Salem Custom House, and despite his efforts with the Customs officer to keep this information from the town newspapers, the ship's return from Maculla made it from these public books to the town printer. Jacob wrote to his brother in New York:

With respect to the Telemachus entering from Maculla, you know we must always report the port to the custom house & I intended at the time to have requested the young man at the office not to give the [port] name to the printer, but in the hurry came away & the next day it appeared in the papers.... as it stands now few will know where Maculla is & none can find it.”¹⁴⁶

As Crowninshield sent his next ship, *Margaret*, out of Salem with Henry Elkins as captain and with orders to sail direct for Maculla, he cleared her just as he had the *Telemachus*, listing the *Margaret's* destination very purposefully and very generally as the East Indies.¹⁴⁷

Meanwhile, Elkins's reports of the American vessels he observed during his voyage suggested that the Crowninshields' competitors were just as determined to keep secrets. “Our Portsmouth friend has a vessel there, if not more than one,” Jacob wrote to Richard of Elkins's observations at Mozambique, and “Capt. Elkins wrote by one of these vessels & although I know [the vessel] arrived in the Havana 3 months ago, yet the letter was never sent to us.” As their competitors scrambled to piece together where the *Telemachus* had been and how Elkins had traded from the scattered bits of public information, the Crowninshields decided the best plan was to unload the ship as soon as possible and send her off with another family ship, the *Hind*, back to the ports of East Africa and the Arabian Peninsula. “The season is right & others will

¹⁴⁵ Jacob wrote to his brother: “I had previously sent an article to the *Register* reporting the Telemachus from Arabia, without throwing any more light upon it.” Jacob Crowninshield to Richard Crowninshield, June 13, 1803, Crowninshield Family Papers, PEM. *Salem Register* (Salem, MA), May 2, 1803.

¹⁴⁶ Jacob Crowninshield to Richard Crowninshield, June 13, 1803, Crowninshield Family Papers, PEM.

¹⁴⁷ Jacob wrote: “We have cleared out the Margaret as we did the Telemachus, for the East Indies generally.” Jacob Crowninshield to Richard Crowninshield, June 13, 1803, Crowninshield Family Papers, PEM. See listing for Telemachus as printed in *New York Price Current*, May 1, 1802. For Margaret listing see *Salem Register*, May 2, 1803.

push out & follow our plans & this Brig. can get ahead of all of them as she sails amazingly fast.”¹⁴⁸

Salem captains, even in remote ports like Mocha, continued their Atlantic strategies of cultivating commercial relationships with willing and trustworthy locals in order to maximize opportunities to capitalize on commercial news and adjust trading strategies to the strongest sales. American merchants and ship captains recognized cultural distinctions among their trading partners, but cultural or national differences mattered little, since Americans found familiar market behaviors in the many communities of traders they encountered in the Red Sea. American captains lived at the British Factory while in Mocha and they celebrated Christmas with the officers of the British East India Company, but Americans had no interest in remaining dependent on British cooperation for their trade in this region. At Mocha, George Annesley, a British politician on a journey for the British East India Company to chart the Red Sea from 1804 to 1805, described a group of Americans, including Captain Benjamin Crowninshield, as “sensible and intelligent” when presented to the Dola, the local Arab political leader.¹⁴⁹ American ships carried correspondence between Mocha’s Arab leaders and the French at Mauritius, and Annesley suspected these letters requested French assistance against the British.¹⁵⁰ Some American sailors abandoned ships and joined Arab communities on shore.¹⁵¹ During a Mocha festival commemorating a Sheik, American ships hoisted their colors and saluted, much to the surprise and disgust of British officers who considered it inappropriate for Christians to honor a Muslim leader. Annesley interpreted these American actions as ignorance rather than deliberate commercial strategy when he heard American officers explain that “they

¹⁴⁸ Jacob Crowninshield to Richard Crowninshield, May 2, 1803, Crowninshield Family Papers, PEM.

¹⁴⁹ Annesley *Voyages and Travels to India*, 195.

¹⁵⁰ Annesley, *Voyages and Travels to India*, 83

¹⁵¹ Annesley, *Voyages and Travels to India*, 406.

did not know that the colours were hoisted for; it was the Dola's doing; and was not he the master of the roads?"¹⁵² Captain Henry Elkins carried water pumps for Pringle in 1802 as a gift from the Crowninshields, but he resisted buying coffee exclusively from the British.¹⁵³ During a stop at Mocha, Elkins asked the Dola that Americans be allowed to purchase coffee from brokers other than the British East India Company. As Annesley reported it, Elkins "thought [Americans] should, by having an option of brokers, get it cheaper than from Mr. Pringle."¹⁵⁴

As American merchants and captains gained knowledge of this new marketplace they raced to get their ships to these ports before their competitors. Jacob Crowninshield wrote to his brother Richard in early 1802 that while the Crowninshields waited for more dollars and for the hull of their ship to be coppered, Salem merchants John Prince and Benjamin Pickman had already filled, coppered, and crewed their ship to sail in the next four or five days, "and I have no doubt will go to the Red Sea & Persian Gulf," Jacob concluded, "at least I fear so."¹⁵⁵ At Mocha, Annesley watched as more and more American ships arrived to trade for coffee. He noted that the American captains were often surprised to see one another, since upon leaving the United States "each captain has kept his departure a profound secret" and "they were not aware of the intentions of each other."¹⁵⁶ Americans engaged in the coffee trade at far lesser expense

¹⁵² Annesley, *Voyages and Travels to India*, 408.

¹⁵³ John Pringle to William Bentley, August 13, 1804 and February 24, 1806; Viscount Valentia (George Annesley) to William Bentley, October 9, 1805 and undated, William Bentley Papers, AAS.

¹⁵⁴ Annesley reported that the Dola, with orders from the capital city of Sana, rejected Elkins' request and instead mandated that Americans buy all of their coffee from a new Arab agent. Annesley, *Voyages and Travels to India*, 397.

¹⁵⁵ Jacob Crowninshield to Richard Crowninshield, January 19, 1802, Crowninshield Family Papers, PEM.

¹⁵⁶ *Voyages and Travels to India*, 2: 383. Annesley embarked on his exploratory journey through the Red Sea after his stay in India and his discussions with Lord Wellesley convinced him through "national reflection" of Britain's disadvantage that "a coast which had afforded a profitable and extensive trade in gold, ivory, and pearls, to the sovereigns of Egypt, should be a perfect blank in our charts, and that while new islands, and even continents were discovered by the abilities of our seamen, we should have become so ignorant of the eastern shore of Africa, as to be unable to ascertain many of the harbors and islands described by an ancient navigator in Periplus of the Erythrean Sea." He published a three-volume account of this travels under the name Viscount Valentia once he returned to England in 1811. Annesley *Voyages and Travels to India*, 2.

than their British counterparts, Annseley observed, but the increased number of American ships also drove up coffee prices. With orders from the capital city of Sana, the Dola had rejected Elkins's request to let Americans purchase coffee from multiple brokers, and the Dola required them instead to buy all of their coffee from a new Arab agent.¹⁵⁷ Forced to purchase coffee from a single source, Americans loaded their ships on a first come, first served basis. As more American ships arrived at Mocha and faced a wait of at least ten months for coffee under this arrangement, Annseley observed one American vessel departing from port, placing its confidence in the captain's navigational knowledge and news of better markets, and sailing north along the Yemeni coast in search of coffee.¹⁵⁸

VI

In 1804, Salem Captain James Cook decided to leave the Crowninshields' employment after years serving as master in their ships to markets in the Indian Ocean. In 1803, Cook had captained the Crowninshield's vessel *Two Sons* along the eastern coast of Africa and into the Persian Gulf, stopping at the Comoros Islands, Zanzibar, Basra, Bushehr, and Muscat. Letters from Cook back to Salem had provided details of his journey, but as Jacob Crowninshield had recounted Cook's letter to Richard, he warned: "Keep all such parts of the information to ourselves as may give a knowledge of places, or articles to be procured, etc."¹⁵⁹ As Cook left to find work with other merchants, Jacob lamented the trade knowledge that Cook would now provide to his new employer: "I regret exceedingly that Dr. Cook is going to leave our employ;

¹⁵⁷ Valentia, *Voyages and Travels to India*, 397.

¹⁵⁸ Valentia, *Voyages and Travels to India*, 349, 389, 397.

¹⁵⁹ In January of 1803, a letter from the *Two Sons*'s captain, James Cook, brought news of the ship's expected stop in Zanzibar. Cook wrote that he had stopped at Johanna in the Comoros Islands, where he heard of a Philadelphia ship that had wrecked nearby two years before, and as Jacob recounted the contents of Cook's letter to his brother Richard, he wrote that he would "draw up some acct of [the shipwreck], & give such parts as may be proper to Carlton to publish" in the *Salem Register*. But the account that Jacob supplied to the Salem newspaper left out any direct mention of Zanzibar. Jacob Crowninshield to Richard Crowninshield, January 18, 1803, February 26, 1803, Crowninshield Family Papers, PEM.

we shall loose a valuable man, & give his knowledge & experience to others, who will reap all the advantages of it.”¹⁶⁰

Americans successfully expanded their trade to the Indian Ocean by adapting their Atlantic practices to this new marketplace, and captains like James Cook, who gathered information about distant markets and waters as they sailed, played critical roles in this commercial expansion. The two decades immediately following the American Revolution marked an opportune moment for Americans who entered the Indian Ocean with a shipping capacity no other traders could match at a time when the outbreak of international war created demand for neutral shipping. Nevertheless, Americans still relied on Atlantic practices of gathering information and trading circuitously in order to capitalize on these new trading opportunities. As years passed, Americans adapted their commercial practices in the Indian Ocean away from Atlantic habits, though the two markets remained critically connected through the movement of goods, capital, and seamen. Some American merchants, like Elias Hasket Derby and William Gray, gained capital from their Indian Ocean commerce that allowed them over time to trade more like their European, and particularly British counterparts, using specie to trade directly with the markets of India, Africa, China, and Southeast Asia.¹⁶¹ But many traders in Salem and many rising traders throughout the United States retained the practice of trading circuitously across national boundaries their commercial specialty and their means to compete in foreign commerce.

The mercantile strategies that Americans pursued beginning in the 1780s drove future commercial growth, and they shaped ideas about American rights at sea that animated domestic

¹⁶⁰ Jacob Crowninshield to Richard Crowninshield, February 20, 1804, Crowninshield Family Papers, PEM.

¹⁶¹ For the argument that Indian Ocean commerce made American East Indies traders more like their British counterparts and eventually helped to create a new class of merchant financiers in the United States, see James Fichter, *So Great a Proffit*.

debates over American neutrality and foreign policy throughout the early republic. The Confederation period was a critical moment for American commercial expansion and a crucial step in the development of early national political economy. Commercial freedom to modify trade routes based on newly acquired information was a defining characteristic of early American overseas commerce and, for merchants like the Crowninshields, a critical component of neutral trading rights. In 1803, consequently, George Crowninshield wrote to his son Richard that “There is [a] large field open for Neutrals, but many will fall through for want of Knowledge & we must get as much of that as we can.”¹⁶²

¹⁶² George Crowninshield to Richard Crowninshield, July 6, 1803, Crowninshield Family Papers, PEM.

Chapter 5

Neutrality and the Problem of the Jay Treaty in the Indian Ocean

Defining American neutrality amid the onset of international war by 1793 divided the Salem maritime community. Disagreement over the terms of neutrality politicized American foreign trade and American commercial policy and ushered maritime Americans into the political process. As war presented both great opportunity and great restrictions for the routes of Salem's global commerce, Salem townspeople made risk and reward calculations in response to the momentary conditions of international geopolitics about the commercial policies that would best protect and promote their commerce. What arrangement best served the national interest, protecting American neutral access to select and important foreign markets through treaties, or accepting no international arrangements except those that guaranteed neutral American access to all foreign markets? The debate over Alexander Hamilton's revenue system in the first federal Congress had already primed the American populace to consider the role Great Britain, France, and other foreign nations should have in the American economy and in American government.¹ War heightened the stakes of this debate.

Different trading practices among Salem merchants meant that definitions of neutrality in political and commercial practice eluded consensus. For many Salem traders, especially the established merchants with the most capital, creating a secure legal marketplace for neutrality through international law by way of agreements like the Jay Treaty gave them added confidence in select trade routes to British markets, which they plied with their ships to seek the greatest profit. Other traders, however, feared their commerce would suffer because the Jay Treaty

¹ John Crowley, *The Privileges of Independence: Neomercantilism and the American Revolution* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993).

abandoned Americans' neutral right to trade in markets outside this legal marketplace. A free trade model for neutrality allowed these merchants to trade circuitously among markets of different nations as trade conditions changed and therefore gave them opportunities to lower the entry costs of trade and the costs of doing business in Salem relative to competitors like Boston. By the 1790s, this circuitous trade through the Indian Ocean was not only the strategy of capital-poor or rising merchants, but Salem's particular commercial specialty as an American port.

Salem had emerged out of the Confederation period with these new strategies of trade to markets beyond the Cape of Good Hope, and by 1793 Salem residents believed they were building one of the union's great commercial hubs. From 1790 to 1800, Salem's population grew by 20%, though ports like Baltimore and New York still greatly outpaced Salem in their own population growth (Figure 5.1). Revenue acts under the first federal Congress, where Salem merchant Benjamin Goodhue served as Salem's Representative, had established Salem as one of Massachusetts's ports of entry with Ipswich and Beverly annexed to it as subsidiary ports of delivery.² In the summer of 1793, subscriptions to build roads and infrastructure earned great support from Salem residents who already believed their town "to be among the first commercial Towns in all America." Salem Reverend and diarist William Bentley noted how "the market house is preparing with great expectations," how "the piers at the entrance of the Channel are supported by a subscription," and how "the Turnpikes, levelling, & railings of the Common are liberally supported."³ Salem's prosperity in wartime and its leading place among the great

² Ships with foreign imports had to land first at Salem to enter their cargoes with the customs officers before offloading their goods in Salem or proceeding to one of the ports of delivery in Salem's district. Benjamin Goodhue to Insurance Offices of Salem, July 12, 1789, printed in Charlene Bangs Bickford, Kenneth R. Bowling, Helen E. Veit, William Charles DiGiacomantonio, eds., *The Documentary History of the First Federal Congress of the United States of America*, Vol. 16, *Correspondence* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2004), 1010-1011.

³ Bentley, *Diary*, 2: 34.

commercial towns in the union if not the globe, residents believed, depended on the definition of neutrality that the federal government would adopt.

City	1790 Population	1800 Population
New York, NY	33131	60515
Philadelphia, PA	28522	41220
Boston, MA	18320	24937
Charleston, SC	16359	18824
Baltimore, MD	13503	26514
Salem, MA	7921	9457
Newport, RI	6716	6739
Providence, RI	6380	7614
Marblehead, MA	5661	5211
Portsmouth, NH	4720	5339
Newburyport, MA	4837	5946
Norfolk, VA	2959	6926

Figure 5.1: 1790 and 1800 population statistics. Source: U.S. Census Bureau.⁴

Historiography on the Jay Treaty debate and early American politics in general has framed the pro-treaty views associated with followers of Alexander Hamilton as a political model backed by commercial know-how and economic soundness, while the opposition promoted by James Madison and Thomas Jefferson is treated as an idealistic and largely impractical strategy of commercial warfare for political ends.⁵ But opponents of the Jay Treaty, those that would side with Jeffersonian ideas of political economy, were commercial thinkers too, who brought their trading experiences and interests to bear on commercial debates in the early republic. The debate over the Jay Treaty in Salem by 1795 revealed the incompatibility

⁴ “Population of the 33 Urban Places: 1800,” U.S. Census Bureau, Accessed September 14, 2014, <http://www.census.gov/population/documentation/twps0027/tab03.txt>.

⁵ For examples of this interpretation of the two sides see Gordon Wood, *Empire of Liberty: A History of the Early Republic, 1789-1815* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 192-196; John Crowley, *The Privileges of Independence*; Tucker and Hendrickson.

and deep opposition between these two models of American political economy and the competing understandings of American neutrality.⁶

In May 1793, Salem merchant Elias Hasket Derby moderated a Salem town meeting to prepare an address to President George Washington and voice the town's approval for Washington's recent neutrality proclamation.⁷ In accordance with Washington's pronouncement, town members promised to "adopt and pursue a conduct, friendly and impartial towards the Belligerent powers."⁸ Washington's declaration had given comfort to these maritime Americans who wondered how the United States would situate itself in international geopolitics now that France and Britain were at war with one another, particularly given the terms of America's 1778 treaty with France. News of the execution of the French king, arriving in Salem in March 1793, had caused the French to "lose much of their influence upon the hearts of Americans," Bentley noted in his diary, and in April news that France was at war with England and Holland was the "topick of the day" among a Salem community anxious "to know what part America is to take by the treaty with France."⁹ As Massachusetts newspapers began to print examples of certificates needed for wartime commerce and excerpts from treaties outlining actions towards foreign powers at war, conflict arose over the French minister Edmund-Charles

⁶ The treaty was such a politically divisive event in Salem because the terms of the treaty had real and significant effects on Salem's foreign commerce. In contrast to Todd Estes's work on the Jay Treaty, I argue that the commercial and geopolitical ramifications of the treaty animated political debate over the Jay Treaty, not political rhetoric or abstract ideas about the treaty. Todd Estes, *The Jay Treaty Debate, Public Opinion, and the Evolution of Early American Political Culture* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2006).

⁷ Boston and other Massachusetts towns called similar meetings with approved resolutions in favor of neutrality. Paul Goodman, *The Democratic Republicans of Massachusetts* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1964), 56. For the text of the Proclamation see "Neutrality Proclamation, 22 April 1793," Founders Online, National Archives (<http://founders.archives.gov/documents/Washington/05-12-02-0371>, ver. 2014-05-09). Source: *The Papers of George Washington*, Presidential Series, vol. 12, *16 January 1793–31 May 1793*, ed. Christine Sternberg Patrick and John C. Pinheiro. Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2005, pp. 472–474.

⁸ "To George Washington from the Citizens of Salem, Massachusetts, 31 May 1793," Founders Online, National Archives (<http://founders.archives.gov/documents/Washington/05-12-02-0523>, ver. 2014-05-09). Source: *The Papers of George Washington*, Presidential Series, vol. 12, *16 January 1793–31 May 1793*, ed. Christine Sternberg Patrick and John C. Pinheiro. Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2005, pp. 653–655.

⁹ Bentley, *Diary*, 2:13, 15.

Genet and whether or not manning and fitting out French privateers in American ports violated American neutrality.¹⁰ The Salem address assured the President that town members would be vigilant towards those who might wish to injure the American republic and that they would make every exertion to “prevent the Smallest deviations from the Strictest Neutrality.”¹¹

The declarations in Washington’s Proclamation that the United States would treat belligerent powers amicably expressed a spirit of neutrality but not a clear blueprint for its operation. To continue American foreign trade at manageable risk required clarification of the terms of neutrality in practice, particularly as the British and French began adjusting their definitions of contraband cargo to justify the seizure of American vessels. Washington’s neutrality proclamation stated that Americans would not carry to either belligerent “those articles, which are deemed contraband by the *modern* usage of nations,” leaving the definition of contraband open to reinterpretation and disagreement by belligerents and Americans alike.¹²

II

In November 1793, Salem Captain Thomas Ashby, master of Derby’s 63-ton ship *Dolphin*, experienced first-hand the need for both clarity and enforcement of American neutral trading rights when British naval forces seized his ship in the West Indies. Ashby had departed from Salem in June 1793 with instructions from Derby to sell his cargo of East India red wood, aloes, and cocoa in Hamburg and to take the return cargo to the West Indies.¹³ In Hamburg,

¹⁰ Bentley, *Diary*, 2:21. Wood, *Empire of Liberty*, 182, 185-189.

¹¹ “To George Washington from the Citizens of Salem, Massachusetts, 31 May 1793,” Founders Online, National Archives (<http://founders.archives.gov/documents/Washington/05-12-02-0523>, ver. 2014-05-09). Source: *The Papers of George Washington*, Presidential Series, vol. 12, *16 January 1793–31 May 1793*, ed. Christine Sternberg Patrick and John C. Pinheiro. Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2005, pp. 653–655.

¹² “Neutrality Proclamation, 22 April 1793,” Founders Online, National Archives (<http://founders.archives.gov/documents/Washington/05-12-02-0371>, ver. 2014-05-09). Source: *The Papers of George Washington*, Presidential Series, vol. 12, *16 January 1793–31 May 1793*, ed. Christine Sternberg Patrick and John C. Pinheiro. Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2005, pp. 472–474.

¹³ EHD to Thomas Ashby, June 1, 1793, Derby Family Papers, PEM. For ownership of the *Dolphin*, see Hitchings, *Ship Registers*, 42.

Ashby had loaded his ship in part with duck, used in making sail cloth, and as he sailed for the Dutch free port of St. Eustatius, or so his written orders from Derby has said, when he was captured by a British naval vessel off Martinique and taken into St. Vincent for trial.

Unbeknownst to Ashby or American merchants back home, the British government had passed a proclamation effective November 1793 calling for the seizure of neutral vessels trading with the French, but there had been no warning or reporting of the Proclamation to the United States along the usual channels. Text of the Proclamation had not been published in the *London Gazette* or reported to the British Minister to the United States. Ashby wrote home to the Derby merchant house reporting his ill-treatment by the British: he had been removed from his ship, stripped of his personal possessions and money, and told “not to think hard of my fate, for all Americans will be prizes to them, and there ere long.”¹⁴ As he awaited trial in St. Vincent, Ashby warned Derby that the “Americans are blind.....The English are taking our vessels and condemning them, and laugh in their sleeves to think how nicely they do it.”¹⁵

In February 1794, Captain Thomas Webb returned to Salem from St. Eustatius with news of the November 1793 Proclamation under which the British had been seizing American vessels for trading with the French, and this information sparked great alarm in Salem.¹⁶ The same week, Salem’s Captain Richard Crowninshield wrote from St. Kitts with a report that found its way to the *Salem Gazette* and confirmed Webb’s news: Crowninshield had been taken by the British navy and wrote that British forces were seizing all neutral vessels bound to French colonies.¹⁷ On March 11, the headline in the *Salem Gazette* read “Mercantile War!” with news

¹⁴ *Columbian Centinel*, December 28, 1793.

¹⁵ *Columbian Centinel*, December 28, 1793.

¹⁶ *Salem Gazette*, February 25, 1794, March 3, 1794.. Webb’s news was also published in newspapers beyond Massachusetts. For one example see *The Philadelphia Gazette and Universal Daily Advertiser*, March 8, 1794.

¹⁷ *Salem Gazette*, February 25, 1794.

of four Salem ships taken by the British into Montserrat.¹⁸ The paper soon began to publish reports from Salem captains throughout the West Indies who wrote of ship seizures and harsh treatment at the hands of British captors and of British Admiralty judges who “condemn all without distinction.”¹⁹ Derby himself wrote: “I do not see that we have anything to expect but War from such a piratical nation.”²⁰ By April 1, readers of the *Salem Gazette* found Captain Timothy Wellman’s report from the West Indies that 45 American vessels had been taken as prizes of the British into Montserrat, while 63 had gone to Dominica, 72 to Martinique, 50 to Antigua, 38 to St. Kitts, and 18 to St. Vincents.²¹ While Salem merchant Benjamin Goodhue served in Congress as Salem’s federal Representative, his brother Stephen managed his mercantile business back in Salem, and by March wrote with news that Goodhue’s brig *Lydia* had been captured by the British in the West Indies like so many other American ships.²² In light of the recent seizures, Stephen Goodhue informed his brother that Salem business was at a standstill, that Salem merchants were holding their ships in port, and that Salem insurers “will not underwrite on any vessel on a foreign voyage.”²³

In late 1793 and early 1794, news of British seizures in the West Indies added gloom to already unsettled conditions for American trade worldwide and constricted routes of safe commerce. In December 1793, Algerian corsairs were seizing American vessels going in and out of the Mediterranean, and Goodhue worried that if the United States government could not broker a peace with Algiers either through tribute or military force, “our European commerce at

¹⁸ *Salem Gazette*, March 11, 1794.

¹⁹ *Salem Gazette*, March 18, 1794.

²⁰ EHD to Edward Goold, March 22, 1794, Derby Family Papers, PEM.

²¹ *Salem Gazette*, April, 1794.

²² Stephen Goodhue to Benjamin Goodhue, March 19, 1794, Goodhue Family Papers, PEM.

²³ Stephen Goodhue to Benjamin Goodhue, January 8, 1794, March 4, 1794, March 19, 1794, Goodhue Family Papers, PEM. Other sources reported the alarm and the standstill in trade in Salem amid news of the British seizures. *Salem Gazette*, February 25, 1794, March 11, 1794; JC to RC, December 2, 1795, Crowninshield Family Papers, PEM; EHD to Edward Goold, March 1, 1794, Derby Family Papers, PEM.

least must nearly be extinguished.”²⁴ Derby believed the danger from Algiers made voyages to Spain prohibitively risky, and he instructed a departing captain to avoid obtaining freights for Lisbon or Cadiz.²⁵ Due to the unstable French government, Derby advised the same captain to avoid France altogether, and he recommended sailing instead for Hamburg or Russia.²⁶ But it was Derby’s vessel returning from Hamburg in November 1793 with Captain Ashby that the British had seized off Martinique. Earlier in the year Derby had already counseled his captains sailing in the West Indies not to take on French passengers or mention in their letters their intention to carry French property, as avoiding the appearance of French trade would help them gain a quicker release from the Spanish ships that were seizing American vessels near Saint-Domingue.²⁷ With Ashby’s news, Derby wrote to his captains with added urgency to avoid the West Indies if possible and return instead to Salem, Boston, or New York to sell their goods.²⁸ By March 1794, Goodhue told his wife Fanny in Salem to purchase all the foreign articles that the family would need for a year, fearing that war or no war, trade would be suspended to such an extent through the summer that foreign goods would become very expensive.²⁹

The dissemination of and reaction to this commercial information trickling back to Massachusetts about the troubles facing American shipping in the West Indies became increasingly politicized in late 1793. After hearing of Ashby’s detention at St. Vincent in late 1793, Derby was dismayed to read claims in Boston’s *Columbian Centinel* by editor Benjamin Russell in December 1793 that “the powers of Europe, now combined against France, have expressed the most amicable disposition towards the United States” and that talk of possible war

²⁴ Benjamin Goodhue to Stephen Goodhue, December 14, 1793, Goodhue Family Papers, PEM.

²⁵ EHD to Joseph Mosely, December 19, 1793, Derby Family Papers, PEM.

²⁶ EHD to Joseph Mosely, January 4, 1794, Derby Family Papers, PEM.

²⁷ EHD to Captain Stephen Phillips, October 14, 1793, Derby Family Papers, PEM.

²⁸ EHD to Samuel Very, December 25, 1793, EHD to Joseph Mosely, January 4, 1794, Derby Family Papers, PEM.

²⁹ Benjamin Goodhue to Stephen Goodhue, December 14, 1793, March 5, 1794, Goodhue Family Papers, PEM.

with Britain was only a “bugbear hung up to frighten the citizens of the United States.”³⁰ The absence of a published British proclamation encouraged disbelief in news of British seizures, but Derby still felt the *Centinel*’s “speculative opinions” did a disservice to American traders as they sought to understand commercial conditions in order to formulate commercial strategies. He sent Ashby’s letters for publication in the *Centinel*, believing that from facts alone “[Americans] can form a just idea of what they have to expect.”³¹ A few days after Derby’s letters appeared in the Boston paper, William Bentley in Salem heard news of another American seizure, this time by the French at Guadaloupe, and the captain reported similarly poor treatment. Bentley wrote in his diary that Salem people did not know what to believe and doubted the reports brought home by their neighbors: “When the sources of information are near us we find so little ingenuously done to purify them that we find insensibly an incredulity as to even common events.”³²

Risk and reward decisions about how best to proceed with trade in response to the commercial news sent home by captains like Ashby and Webb animated increasingly divisive political debate about how the United States should act in defense of its neutrality. Doubts about the accuracy of commercial news, especially in the press, made it difficult for American traders to gage the conditions into which they risked American ships and seamen, heightening distrust within maritime communities like Salem. When Derby learned Webb’s news of the British Proclamation in February 1794, he believed the British actions would soon bring on war, and he believed these events in the West Indies would have negative effects on his trade to other parts of

³⁰ *Columbian Centinel*, December 28, 1793.

³¹ *Columbian Centinel*, December 28, 1793.

³² Bentley, *Diary*, 2: 79.

the world, including to the Indian Ocean.³³ Yet in the *Centinel*, Russell's reprinting of Webb's report cast doubt on the news with a note that no corresponding Proclamation had yet been published in the *London Gazette*. Further, Russell claimed that he had heard from a "gentleman of veracity" that "many merchants in *Salem* give no credit whatever to the intelligence; but on the contrary, inform him that letters were received by Capt. Webb containing intelligence of a direct contrary nature."³⁴ With American traders relying as they did on accurate commercial information to plan competitive, profitable, and safe voyages, the *Centinel's* skepticism of British seizures seemed to many to be complicit if not collusive with British actions. In the *Salem Gazette*, Webb defended his reports and claimed that "Many, very many merchants in Salem" believed that Russell had received no such news about Salem from a "gentleman of veracity."³⁵ Further, "the suspension of their mercantile business," Webb wrote of Salem traders, "and the impossibility of getting insurance done but at extravagant rates, prove they fully believe [the news of the Proclamation]." Webb accused Russell of endeavoring "when there was real danger, to lull the apprehensions of the public, and lead the merchants blindfold[ed] to send their property to those countries from whose bosom it would never return."³⁶

The uncertainty about the extent of British plans to seize neutral American vessels heightened the risks of trade throughout Salem's broad commercial geography. Salem traders had little confidence in what routes or cargoes remained safe from capture and no certainty about Britain's policy intentions. Britain's decision to delay for two months any public announcement of its November proclamation authorizing the seizure of neutral ships had lured American ships

³³ EHD to Joseph Anthony & Company, February 22, 1794; EHD to Captain Mosely, February 22, 1794, Derby Family Papers, PEM.

³⁴ *Columbian Centinel*, March 8, 1794. February 26, 1794. Italics from original.

³⁵ *Salem Gazette*, March 11, 1794.

³⁶ *Salem Gazette*, March 11, 1794.

into a trap that they lacked the information to avoid. If the British could determine in secret to seize neutral American ships in the West Indies, Derby feared they could decide to seize ships elsewhere as well. By March, he wrote to Goold of his fear that his ships the *Henry* and *Benjamin*, currently trading in the Indian Ocean, had fallen into the hands of the British, and he heard from Philadelphia that his insurance policies on these ships with 10% premiums had been cancelled and premiums for the same coverage had now risen to 33%.³⁷ Under these conditions he calculated that even a voyage from Salem to New York was too risky a venture.³⁸

Britain's deceit over the November Proclamation revealed to Derby the unsettled and unequal relationship between the two nations. The *Salem Gazette* reported that after British "insults to our flag, abuse to our seamen, and destruction to our commerce....it is no longer doubted that the [British] *Government* authorizes that conduct, so destructive to all social intercourse. Indignation and resentment burns in every breast and retaliation in one way or another is the general wish."³⁹ Christopher Gore, the United States Attorney for Massachusetts, visited Salem in March 1794 and determined that "the merchants of Salem have not that spirit of forbearance" shown by merchants in Boston who remained hopeful that moderation and diplomacy with Great Britain could win back American financial losses and avoid a more disastrous war. Gore sent his observations of the Salem merchant community to Rufus King: "Heated and angry beyond the point that wo'd probably promote their interests, they talk of the advantages to be derived from privateering and exult that W. Gray & others, who have always

³⁷ EHD to Joseph Anthony & Co., March 20, 1794, EHD to Edward Goold, March 22, 1794, Derby Family Papers, PEM.

³⁸ EHD to Edward Goold, March 22, 1794, Derby Family Papers, PEM.

³⁹ *Salem Gazette*, March 18, 1794. Italics from original.

express'd their confidence in the justice of the British nation, are in danger of being ruin'd by the detention of their vessels in the W. Indies."⁴⁰

On March 15, the merchants of Salem gathered in a general meeting to craft a memorial to the United States Congress outlining their commercial grievances and calling for federal action that would gain restitution for their losses and safer trade for the future. The memorialists had been pleased by President Washington's proclamation of neutrality the previous year and wrote that they were sorry to find that their adherence to these terms of neutrality had nonetheless warranted the seizure of American vessels by the British under "secret instructions" from the King. Great Britain was "regulating the conduct of neutrals" and "legislating for the nations of world" with rules not made known to Americans until they had been seized. Such "violations of the laws of nations, and of the rights of neutral powers," the memorial read, was "humiliating" to American citizens and "singularly hostile to the interest and commerce of these States, and particularly to those of this town."⁴¹ The memorialists feared more losses and called for indemnification from the British. They argued for embargoing British trade and refusing clearances to British vessels currently in American ports as security while the United States government sought to retrieve financial restitution for its merchants from Great Britain.⁴² The memorialists sent their petition to Goodhue, who reported it on the floor of the House on March 24, 1794.⁴³ In a private letter to Goodhue a week later, Derby repeated many of the same

⁴⁰ Christopher Gore to Rufus King, March 15, 1794, printed in Charles King, *Life and correspondence of Rufus King: comprising his letters, private and official, his public documents and his speeches*, Volume 1 (New York: G. P. Putnam and Sons, 1894), 553.

⁴¹ According to the memorial, two-fifths of the town's trading capital was regularly engaged in trade to the West Indies, and the nineteen Salem ships that the British had already seized under the November 1793 Proclamation was a full one third of that capital, amounting to \$229,800.

⁴² The text of the memorial was printed in a number of U.S. papers after its reading in Congress on March 24, 1794. See for example *Columbian Centinel*, April 5, 1794, *The Baltimore Daily Intelligencer*, April 5, 1794. EHD sent many of the same sentiments in a private letter to Benjamin Goodhue. EHD to Benjamin Goodhue, March 29, 1794, Derby Family Papers, PEM.

⁴³ *Columbian Centinel*, April 4, 1794.

arguments for achieving certainty and balance in Anglo-American relations.⁴⁴ He advocated sequestering British credits and embargoing British ships in American ports to “oblige Brittain to send out commissioners to America to make compleat satisfaction for the destruction they have made with our property.”⁴⁵

III

Derby and many of his fellow Salem merchants sought a global marketplace made secure for American neutral trade through law. Unlike his father and his brothers, Derby had never been to sea. In his foreign ventures he risked his property, not his physical well-being. As a merchant in Salem, Derby had learned since American independence to trade in foreign markets along broad and transnational trade routes that he still utilized in 1794. Like many in Salem in 1794, he hoped to keep open broad routes of trade for American shippers and to retain the benefits of trading with both belligerents. Nonetheless, he sought greater confidence in his commercial decisions made possible through treaties that limited the geography of American neutral trade even as they gave legal security to select trade routes. To serve his commercial interest, Derby wanted an Anglo-American relationship that would establish and clarify mutually agreed-upon safe cargoes and routes of trade, and through which there would be a dependable means of financial restitution for any seizures made against these rules. He considered the recent British seizures the work of “pirates,” but if there could be certainty and advantage to trading with British markets, he would take the opportunity. Further, by the mid-1790s, his trade and his

⁴⁴ Derby wrote to Goodhue in hopes that Congress would act boldly: “I trust my government will never submit to such treatment, while we have it in our power to make them due[sic] us justice- should they resent this proceeding of ours we have spirit & ability to stand in our own defence. I am sure there is a disposition to do every thing Congress may think for the best & I hope you will not suffer us to further insulted by those pirates.” EHD to Benjamin Goodhue, March 29, 1794, Derby Family Papers, PEM.

⁴⁵ Misspellings from original. EHD to Benjamin Goodhue, March 29, 1794, Derby Family Papers, PEM. In the same letter, Derby further argued that British Admiralty courts would not suffice as restitution for American lost property because those courts routinely undervalued American ships and cargoes when determining reimbursement.

capital had grown so large that he could afford to have ships detained or delayed by foreign seizure as long as there was a reasonable chance of eventually obtaining some financial redress. Derby wanted Anglo-American Commissions to ensure necessary American oversight in prize cases instead of British Vice-Admiralty courts. Some trade might fall outside this legal arrangement between the two nations, but if he chose to trade outside these legal limits, Derby had capital enough to weather any potential losses from the increase risk of seizure and condemnation.

Salem captain Jacob Crowninshield developed a very different understanding of American neutrality while trading in the Indian Ocean. Derby wanted legal protections for important British markets, and Crowninshield believed instead that American foreign trade could only operate for the good of the nation and its traders if the United States insisted on securing American neutral access to all foreign markets. Crowninshield was employed by Derby, captaining his *Henry*, which along with Derby's ship *Benjamin* had been detained in the Indian Ocean as Derby had feared in his letters to Goold. But instead of being seized by British forces, both had been embargoed at Mauritius by the French for six months after news arrived in June 1793 of war with Britain. Detained in Port Louis along with Crowninshield in the *Henry* and Nathaniel Silsbee in the *Benjamin* were several other American ships from Boston, Providence, and Salem, including William Gray's *Aurora*.⁴⁶ French authorities embargoed the American ships under claims that they were carrying British property, and many of the American vessels caught in port during the embargo were venturing to the United States or to Europe from the

⁴⁶ For American ships caught in Port Louis under the embargo, see Petition from American Officers to Mauritius Colonial Assembly, June 18, 1793, *Assemblée Coloniale, Lettres et pétitions recues de divers*, Jan –June 1793, Mauritius National Archives; *Declarations diverse, 1787-1794*, Mauritius National Archives. For ownership of *Aurora* see Hitchings, *Ship Registers*, 15.

British ports of Calcutta or Madras.⁴⁷ French guards had gone aboard the American vessels to enforce the embargo. Some ships like Gray's *Aurora* had been forced to land property in Port Louis that had been consigned to British merchant houses, and a number of American captains had been imprisoned until the intervention of U.S. Consul William Macarty.⁴⁸ Crowninshield and the other American officers worked with Macarty to petition the Mauritius Colonial Assembly for their release with arguments that neutrality allowed Americans a freedom of commerce to trade where they wanted according to the best market conditions and that this liberty of commerce had been codified under the 1778 Treaty of Amity and Commerce between the United States and France.⁴⁹

In their petition on June 18, 1793 to the Mauritius Colonial Assembly, the American captains and supercargoes reported that their ships were deteriorating with each day of the embargo, likely from worms eating away at the hulls, how their dwindling supplies of provisions would impede further voyages once they finally gained release from Port Louis, and how many of their crews had abandoned them for work aboard French privateers.⁵⁰ They requested proof from the Assembly that they had been regularly petitioning for their release in order to avoid reproach from their ships' owners. As officers who competed for jobs and for advantageous

⁴⁷ The *Astrea* (Captain Dodge), *Chase* (Captain Tallman), from Madras; *Cleopatra* (Captain John Campbell), *Aurora* (Captain Meek), *Betsy* (Captain Page), from Calcutta. Declarations diverse, 1787-1794, Mauritius National Archives. Toussaint states that the French embargo at Mauritius was in retaliation to news that the British had seized French property aboard neutral Danish ships at Madras and that French officials were generally unsure of how to treat neutral ships during war. Toussaint, *American Trade with Mauritius*, 8.

⁴⁸ William Macarty to Thomas Jefferson, January 15, 1794, printed in Toussaint, *American Trade with Mauritius*, 24-25.

⁴⁹ William Macarty outlined this claim in more detail in a petition to the General Malartic and the Colonial Assembly that he submitted a month after Crowninshield was released from the embargo and departed Mauritius for Calcutta. Macarty did work with the American officers in port and presented the petition of [date] of which Crowninshield and Silsbee were both signers. William Macarty to Thomas Jefferson, February 2, 1795, Consular Despatches from Port Louis (Microfilm), NARA. See also attachment, William Macarty to Colonial Assembly, January 13, 1795, printed in Toussaint, *Early American Trade with Mauritius*, 26-31.

⁵⁰ Petition from American Officers to Mauritius Colonial Assembly, June 18, 1793, Assemblée Coloniale, Lettres et pétitions recues de divers, Jan –June 1793, Mauritius National Archives.

terms of employment with ship owners, these prohibitions on trade, counter to the terms of 1778 treaty could damage future employment prospects. Crowninshield had feared that Derby would lose everything on the *Henry* and the *Benjamin* due to the embargo. Finally in December 1793, most of the American vessels gained their release, and Crowninshield loaded a cargo of coffee on Derby's account that he hoped would prove advantageous. Writing home to Derby from Calcutta where he had ventured after Mauritius, Crowninshield expressed his anger that the American ships had been "unjustly detained" in Mauritius, and he expected that the owners "will undoubtedly be paid ample damages, at least our Government should demand it from the French nation, and they cannot refuse."⁵¹

Crowninshield had enough confidence in his expectation of financial restitution in part from the treaty between the two nations and in part from his understanding that neutrality guaranteed free and open access to all markets for neutrals. Free trade was not an abstract political ideal for Crowninshield, but a means by which he and many of his fellow Salem captains and merchants had learned to compete in international commerce, and they had expanded Salem's trade to the Indian Ocean by tying this trade into transoceanic networks of trade (see Figures 5.2 and 5.3). After returning to Salem in the *Henry*, Crowninshield purchased the ship from Derby and entered into trade with his family under the merchant house of George Crowninshield & Sons. He traded not according to any loyalty to the British, French, or other foreign powers, but according to his assessment of risk and reward. For traders like Crowninshield who lacked the capital of wealthier merchants like Derby or William Gray, maintaining access to information-gathering spots was key to commercial survival. He traded in British entrepôts from Calcutta to London whenever useful for his interests, but he often did so

⁵¹ Jacob Crowninshield to EHD, February 13, 1794, *Henry* Shipping Papers, Derby Family Papers.

as part of trade routes that also passed through non-British ports, and he likewise resisted any effort to limit American trade to British markets, a restriction he considered a British monopoly over American commerce. Crowninshield and many American traders often found they could buy and sell to greater advantage by trading directly with the producers and merchants in markets that would otherwise send their goods to these British commercial hubs and transshipment centers. He valued ports like Mauritius as markets of commercial news and information that propelled and enabled this free, transnational, circuitous trade.

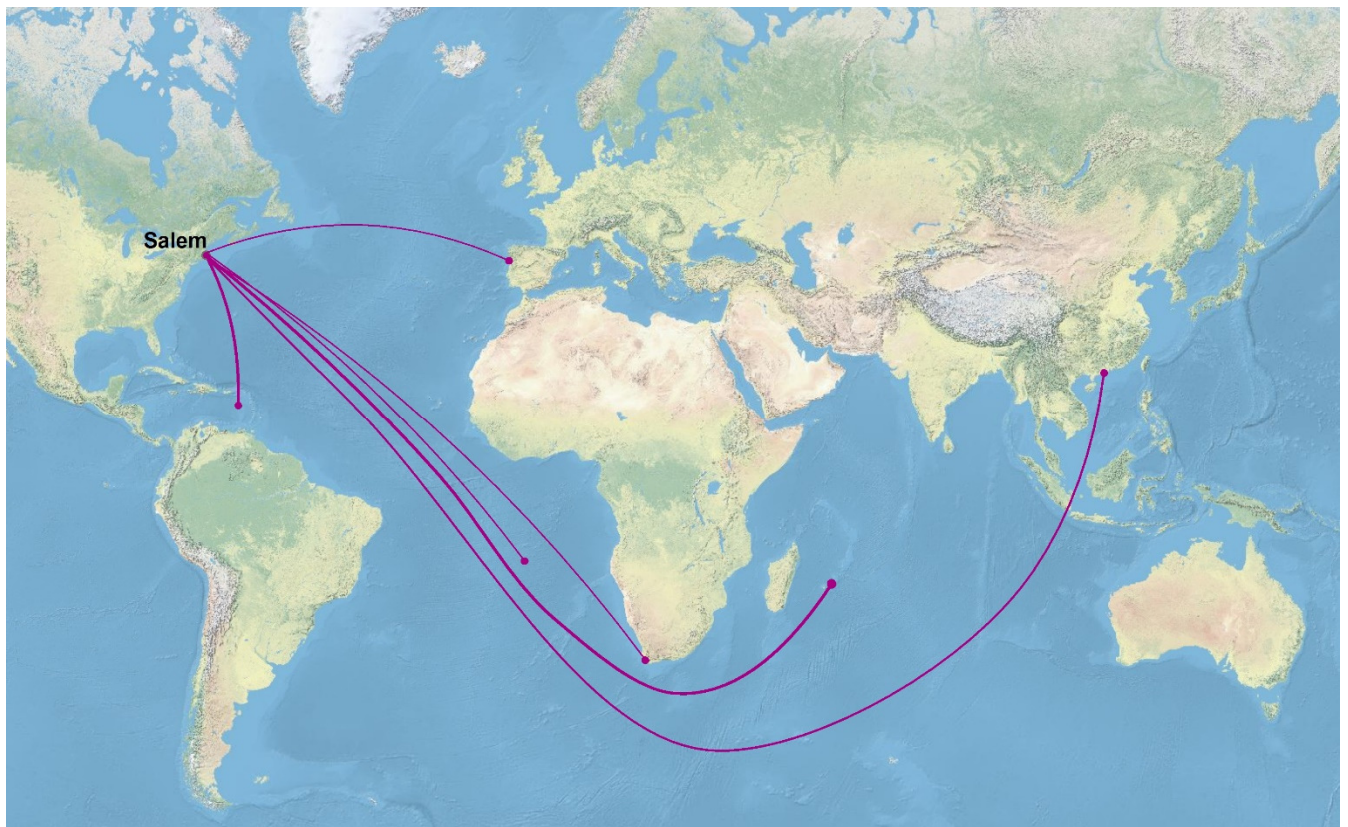


Figure 5.2: Ports of return for Salem Indian Ocean voyages, 1784-1789.
Source: Records of the Salem & Beverly Customs District, NARA-Waltham

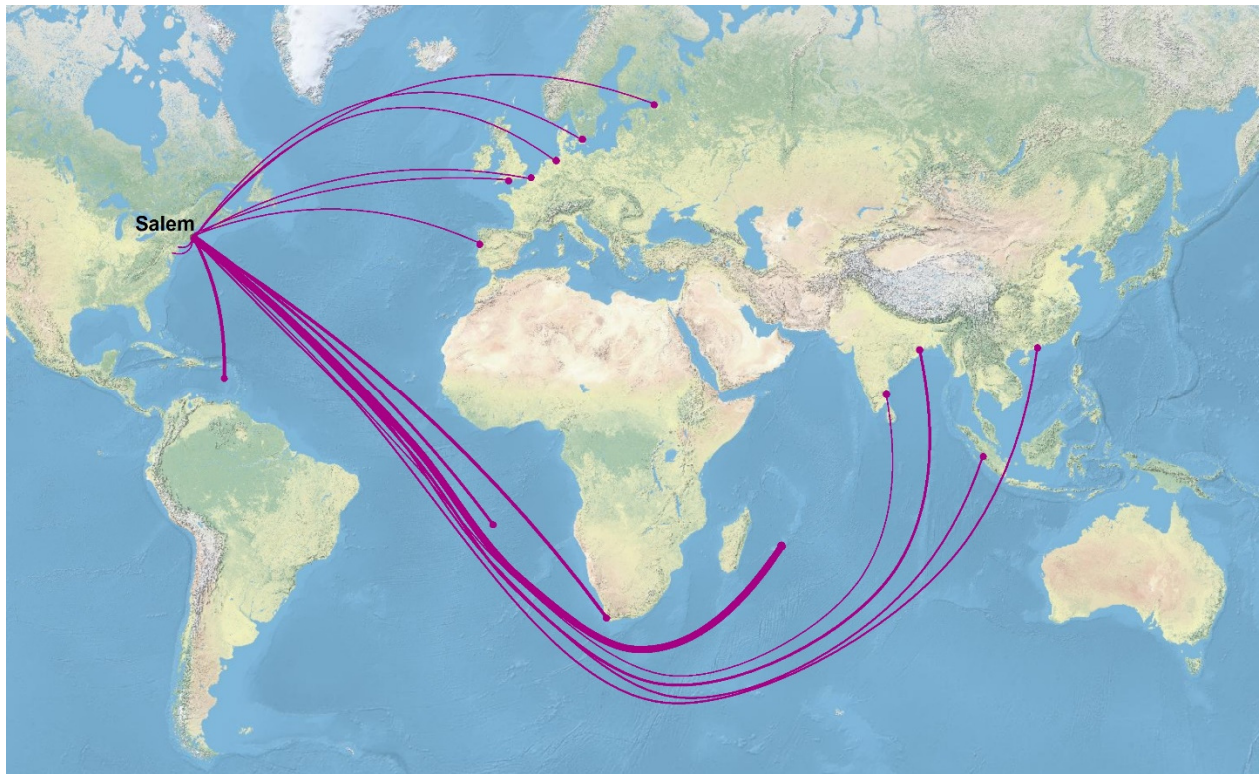


Figure 5.3: Ports of return for Salem Indian Ocean voyages, 1784-1796, scaled by number of departures.

Source: Records of the Salem & Beverly Customs District, NARA-Waltham

If anything, entrepot ports like Mauritius could become more valuable for American shippers during wartime, he believed. The growing European naval presence in the Indian Ocean, along with the fact that war increasingly cut off European settlements from their food supplies from Europe would lead to ever-growing demand for American provisions and shipping services. As he waited for his ship to load in Calcutta in 1794 and considered the opportunities that wartime created for American shipping. Crowninshield saw prices for European goods like iron and copper rise in the Indian Ocean and the British unable to supply the tonnage necessary to ship India goods back to London. He reported back to Derby regarding these potentially lucrative opportunities for Americans shippers: “If war is likely to continue and American to remain neutral, I think you would do well to send two or three large vessels to this country and

Europe [to bring] wheat to Mauritius & then come on [to India]- there can be no doubt that they will make you great freights.”⁵²

IV

The debate over neutrality occasioned by international war in 1793 brought these two visions of neutral trade—one of free trade, one of protected legal trade—to a head and revealed their incompatibility with new intensity. The contest between these two models had framed debate over the role that Great Britain, France, and other foreign powers should play in the American economy and in American foreign trade throughout the creation of the republic, particularly during the planning of the federal revenue system and over James Madison’s proposals of discriminatory commercial restrictions against nations without a commercial treaty with the United States, most notably Great Britain.⁵³ With the onset of war by 1793, partisan debate grew increasingly divisive over the model for American political economy that would be most advantageous and most natural for American neutral trade. Secretary of State Thomas Jefferson’s December 1793 *Report on the Privileges and Restrictions on the Commerce of the United States* argued that American commerce, once “relieved of its shackles,” would naturally spread throughout the globe and “expect welcome and friendly treatment in every market” because Americans carried the provisions that consumers needed and often accepted manufactured goods or surplus agricultural products in return.⁵⁴ With this confidence in the ability of American commerce to expand in a free trade environment, Jefferson believed that using British markets to distribute American cargoes created unnatural burdens for American

⁵² Jacob Crowninshield to EHD, February 13, 1794, *Henry Shipping Papers*, Derby Family Papers.

⁵³ See John Crowley, *The Privileges of Independence: Neomercantilism and the American Revolution* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993).

⁵⁴ “Report on the Privileges and Restrictions on the Commerce of the United States in Foreign Countries,” The Avalon Project. Accessed July 2, 2014. http://avalon.law.yale.edu/18th_century/jeffrep2.asp.

commerce—“the useless charges of an intermediate deposit, and double voyage”—and although he sought “the security of fixed law” to give added confidence to Anglo-American trade, he believed that commercial discriminations against Great Britain would be effective in removing British restrictions on American commerce.⁵⁵ In January 1794, as the House began to discuss Jefferson’s report, Representative James Madison proposed discriminatory commercial regulations aimed at winning concessions for American trade from foreign nations that did not have a commercial treaty with the United States, particularly Great Britain.⁵⁶

The rebuttal in Congress to Jefferson and Madison grew fierce, particularly by allies of Alexander Hamilton who believed that the Jefferson-Madison free trade and commercial discrimination initiatives threatened the securing of commercial relations with Great Britain, which they believed to be America’s best trading partner. Hamilton worked with South Carolina Representative William Loughton Smith to plan a lengthy speech Smith eventually gave in the House, opposing Jefferson’s misguided view, he claimed, that Britain was unfriendly to American commerce. Instead, Smith argued, “Great Britain is a more important customer to us than France,” and he argued that this close commercial relationship stemmed from the real and natural profitability of Anglo-American commerce for American traders.⁵⁷ Smith recognized that Americans often carried goods directly to Europe or other markets rather than ship them through British entrepôts, but he nonetheless valued the role that Great Britain served as an intermediary in trade between Americans and some foreign markets. “The intervention of Great Britain,” Smith argued, “may, in most cases, be considered as a means of extending instead of

⁵⁵ “Report on the Privileges and Restrictions on the Commerce of the United States in Foreign Countries,” The Avalon Project. Accessed July 2, 2014. http://avalon.law.yale.edu/18th_century/jeffrep2.asp; Crowley, *Privileges of Independence*, 156-159.

⁵⁶ Crowley, *Privileges of Independence*, 159.

⁵⁷ *Annals of Congress*, 3rd Cong., 1st Sess., 186.

abridging our commerce.”⁵⁸ Further, amid American capital deficiencies, no source had been better than Great Britain in supplying capital to “nourish the industry, the agriculture, and the commerce of this country.”⁵⁹ France certainly could not match Britain in this regard, Smith argued. Commercial restrictions against Great Britain, therefore, would threaten the broader channels of American foreign trade and infuse Anglo-American relations with a level of uncertainty whereby credit would cease to flow.

As Massachusetts Representative Fisher Ames joined the debate, he framed his remarks around the question of what measures would put American trade on the best footing. What policies were most likely to allow Americans to sell dear and buy cheap? “Have we a good market?” he asked of American commerce.⁶⁰ His answer: Yes, with Great Britain. Madison and his allies had begun to argue that protecting free trade was a means to “assist and extend our commerce,” but Ames believed this was just a tactic to avoid the truth that Great Britain purchased more American exports than France. “The footing of our exports under the British system is better than....the freedom of commerce, which is one of the visions for which our solid prosperity is to be hazarded,” Ames argued.⁶¹ To rely on other markets, particularly those of France, for American foreign commerce, Ames warned, “would be relying on what is not stable, instead of what is.” The free trade model proposed by Madison and Jefferson was impractical because the United States “lacked the power to give it effect” and because “such a state of absolute freedom of commerce never did exist, and it is very much to be doubted whether it ever will.”⁶² Instead, Ames argued, America’s best bet to put its commerce on a good footing was to

⁵⁸ Annals of Congress, 3rd Cong., 1st Sess., 188-189; Crowley, *Privileges of Independence*, 160-163.

⁵⁹ Annals of Congress, 3rd Cong., 1st Sess., 189-190.

⁶⁰ Annals of Congress, 3rd Cong., 1st Sess., 327-329.

⁶¹ Annals of Congress, 3rd Cong., 1st Sess., 333.

⁶² Annals of Congress, 3rd Cong., 1st Sess., 330.

secure and bolster trade that was already profitable in select and strategic places, rather than expect free trade everywhere.

As Salem's representative Benjamin Goodhue listened to debates over commercial discrimination in the House, he sided with Smith and Ames. He feared Madison's proposals would bring the United States into war with Great Britain. Conscious of his townspeople's anxiety over lost property from seizures by early 1794, Goodhue felt hopeful, like Derby, that clarifying legal arrangements between the United States and Great Britain would mediate their distress for the longer term.⁶³ After sharing his thoughts on commercial discrimination with his friend and business partner John Norris, Goodhue was happy to hear from Norris that these sentiments were generally "esteemed and approved" in Salem.⁶⁴ In March 1794, Goodhue wrote to his brother Stephen in Salem that the federal government was "in the dark" about British intentions in seizing American vessels and under "the greatest perplexity, our hands tied and no one knows what is best to be done." The thirty-day embargo recently implemented that month would save American vessels and allow for early war preparations, but Goodhue believed that future and lasting stability between the two nations would require direct diplomatic communications.

As news reached Philadelphia that the British had revoked the November Proclamation, Goodhue felt the prospects of war decrease as Congress waited "for more light to direct our measures."⁶⁵ He expected that a "person will probably be dispatched to G Britain to know of

⁶³ Benjamin Goodhue to Stephen Goodhue, December 28, 1793, January 1, 1794, Goodhue Family Papers, PEM.

⁶⁴ Benjamin Goodhue to Stephen Goodhue, January 22, 1794. When the House passed a preamble to commercial restrictions, Goodhue wrote home to his brother with multiple assurances that the full measure would never pass, expectant as he was that the Salem maritime community stood staunchly in line with his views on American commercial policy. Benjamin Goodhue to Stephen Goodhue, February 5, 1794, February 26, 1794, Goodhue Family Papers, PEM.

⁶⁵ Benjamin Goodhue to Stephen Goodhue, March 26, 1794, Goodhue Family Papers, PEM.

them on what footing we stand and to demand indemnification.”⁶⁶ Indeed, in April the President selected John Jay for this mission. Amid urgent calls for relief from his constituents, Goodhue believed that their best chance of securing redress through indemnification rested with the success of Jay’s negotiations.⁶⁷ He believed, as did his Federalist allies, that without legal securities over Anglo-American transatlantic trade, the United States could not expect Great Britain and its immense navy to abide to leave American shipping uninterrupted. Nonetheless, he recognized with displeasure that this would take time: “I am sensible while I am trying to serve them in a mode which promises them any kind of relief, they will think I am neglecting them.”⁶⁸

V

As the Salem community waited for resolution from Jay’s mission, divergent political economies aligned over their shared interests in stabilizing relations with Great Britain to win financial restitution and of securing free trade for American neutrals. The temporary consensus manifested itself in town requests for strong federal action against Great Britain, as Salem merchants joined with their counterparts from Boston, Charlestown, Marblehead, Newburyport, and other towns in coastal Massachusetts to petition Congress to obtain restitution for the property they had lost through condemnation in British Admiralty courts.⁶⁹ On May 10, 1794, a Salem town meeting voted to create a committee, which included Derby’s son Elias Hasket

⁶⁶ Benjamin Goodhue to Stephen Goodhue, March 1794 and March 26, 1794, Goodhue Family Papers, PEM.

⁶⁷ For the political and commercial background to the Jay Treaty see Samuel Flagg Bemis, *Jay's Treaty: a Study in Commerce and Diplomacy* (New York: The MacMillan Company, 1923).

⁶⁸ Goodhue wrote to his brother of his townspeople’s interest with Jay mission: “indemnification to them seems to rest principally if not altogether upon the success of the negotiation- so much as I know congress I would not give much for anything they will ever get in any other way.” Benjamin Goodhue to Stephen Goodhue, April 23, 1794, Goodhue Family Papers. For Goodhue’s awareness of and worry over the distress of his Salem constituents, see Benjamin Goodhue to Stephen Goodhue, April 9, 1794, Goodhue Family Papers, PEM.

⁶⁹ *Journal of the House of Representatives of the United States*, 3rd. Cong., 1st. Sess., 163.

Derby, Jr., to draft and present a memorial to the federal government calling for a continuation of the embargo on all foreign shipping beyond its initial thirty-day limit.⁷⁰

At sea and in the Salem counting houses, Salem traders continued to conduct business according to risk and reward calculations as they waited for news of Jay's negotiations in 1794 and early 1795. In April 1794, American ships that had been captured in the West Indies began returning home, and the immediate fear of war abated. When Jacob Crowninshield arrived safely in Salem in Derby's *Henry* and presented the further good news that Silsbee in Derby's *Benjamin* expected good trade as he continued on his East Indies voyage, Derby wrote to his Philadelphia associates that the risks to trade during this period, at least beyond the West Indies, had seemed worse than they were in reality.⁷¹ Derby's associate in New York, Edward Goold, wrote to Derby about how Anglo-French war had created new opportunities for Americans to ship Indian goods around the world. "From the number of ships gone out & going to India this season I was of opinion the Trade would be over done," Goold wrote, "but I am rather at present inclined to think differently in the present situation of the European powers, they can send but four vessels to the Est. Indies & whilst the present troubles last, several of them & the whole of the W. Indies must in a great measure look to this Country for their supply."⁷²

While home in Salem over the congressional recess in late 1794, Benjamin Goodhue similarly pondered the future of his mercantile business, and he made a plan to send specie to India aboard a vessel belonging to William Gray. Once back in Philadelphia, reports of a French decision to seize all neutral vessels trading in British ports or with British property made him

⁷⁰ The committee included Elias Hasket Derby, Jr, Jonathan Waldo, Jonathan Saunders, Jr., William Cleaveland, Joshua Ward. Salem Town Meeting Minutes, May 10, 1794, Salem City Clerk. The memorial was presented in the House of Representatives on May 19, 1794. *Journal of the House of Representatives of the United States*, 3rd. Cong., 1st. Sess., 167.

⁷¹ EHD to JAC, May 26, 1794, Derby Family Papers, PEM.

⁷² Edward Goold to EHD, February 1, 1794, Derby Family Papers, PEM.

momentarily reconsider his trading strategy. He wrote to William Ward, his relation in Salem, that “The report above mentioned made me hesitate about sending the money to India, but I have come to the conclusion to send it.”⁷³ As planned, his wife Fanny arranged for Ward to send the money on board William Gray’s *William and Henry*, and Goodhue arranged through Goold in New York to acquire insurance on his adventure to Calcutta or another port in India and then back to the United States.⁷⁴

In the 1790s, trade to the Indian Ocean had become Salem’s particular commercial specialty. As war required a recalculation of trading strategies in this region, direct trade with the British Indies, rather than circuitous voyages throughout the Indian Ocean, became for many the trade route that would maximize profits at the lowest risk. For those who could afford to sail direct for India with specie, avoiding intermediate stops altogether minimized the chances of seizure or delay. In September 1794, Derby had dispatched Nathaniel Silsbee, once again in the *Benjamin*, for Amsterdam, where Derby hoped Silsbee could sell his cargo, the same one that Silsbee had likely just acquired in the Indian Ocean, for dollars and then proceed to Calcutta.⁷⁵ William Gray had entered the India and China trade very soon after Derby in the 1780s, and for years Gray had managed his vessels on circuitous trade voyages through the Indian Ocean trading Atlantic goods for India goods at places like the Cape of Good Hope, Mauritius, and then India.⁷⁶ By 1794, Gray entered a lucrative new arrangement freighting shipments of specie for

⁷³ Benjamin Goodhue to William Ward, November 5, 1794, Thomas Wren Ward Papers, Massachusetts Historical Society [cited hereafter as MHS]. Jonathan E. Goodhue, *History and Genealogy of the Goodhue Family in England and America to the Year 1890* (Rochester, NY: E.R. Andrews, 1891).

⁷⁴ Stephen Goodhue to Benjamin Goodhue, December 3, 1794, Benjamin Goodhue to Stephen Goodhue, December 17, 1794, Goodhue Family Papers, PEM. Stephen Goodhue’s letter states that Fanny also made recommendations for Benjamin Goodhue about acquiring insurance on this adventure. Benjamin Goodhue’s letter states of the insurance procured by Goold: “1500 dollars done by good men to Calcutta or any or all the ports in India and back to her port of discharge in the United States against all risques @ 12%.”

⁷⁵ EHD to N & J Vanstaphorst & Hubbard, September 3, 1794, Derby Family Papers, PEM.

⁷⁶ For one example see Gray’s sailing orders to Captain William Ward, August 9, 1792, in Edward Gray, *William Gray, of Salem, Merchant: A Biographical Sketch* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1914), 13-16.

investors aboard his vessels to India. Goodhue partook in this opportunity alongside Fisher Ames, who remained a consistent investor in this trade through the 1790s. Ames's first investment aboard Gray's *William and Henry* in 1794 was 1500 Spanish Dollars, just like Goodhue's. Gray assured Ames that this voyage would be safe, quick, and direct. The vessel, he wrote to Ames, "is bound from [Salem] to Bengal in the East Indies and back to the U. States, is not to touch at the Isle of France either out or home."⁷⁷ For this venture and for the twelve that followed that would eventually grow to \$10,000 per voyage, Gray's captains invested Ames's specie in India goods or China teas. When Gray sold these goods, Ames regularly enjoyed a profit on his investments of twenty to thirty percent per annum. By 1798, Ames wrote Gray that "I see no better way of employing my capital than the India trade."⁷⁸

Derby and Gray reached this level of success and accumulated this much capital over more than a decade plying the Indian Ocean trades, gaining great expertise for themselves and for Salem ship captains in his employ. As he grew his trade to India and China, Derby had created a class of highly trained clerks, ship captains, and supercargoes with specialized experience in commerce to the Indian Ocean. Derby invested heavily in the training of his captains, starting them first on voyages down the coast of the United States or to the Caribbean, and eventually graduating them to captaincies of voyages to the Indian Ocean. For their expertise, particularly as they took charge of valuable cargos in distant markets, Derby's captains and supercargoes were well paid, and by the 1790s a number of Derby captains had made enough to venture out as shipowners and captains of their own voyages to the Indian Ocean and

⁷⁷ Quoted in Samuel Eliot Morison, "The India Ventures of Fisher Ames, 1794-1804," in *Proceedings of the American Antiquarian Society* Vol. 37 (1927), 15-16.

⁷⁸ Morison, "The India Ventures of Fisher Ames," 19. In 1799, Ames's return from his investment in a voyage to China fetched 130 percent profit per annum, even after deducting all fees and commissions paid to Gray. Morison, "The India Ventures of Fisher Ames," 21; Fichter, *So Great a Proffit*, 120.

beyond. Nathaniel Silsbee, for example, eventually became a federal representative and then Senator from Massachusetts, started as mate aboard a Derby voyage to Madeira in 1790, worked his way up to a master on a Derby voyage to the West Indies, and by 1793 was commanding Derby's ship *Benjamin* to the Isle of France with a \$10000 credit from Derby for Silsbee's private ventures. The sales from this voyage enabled Silsbee to engage in his own East India trade by the mid-1790s.⁷⁹ Many other Derby captains and supercargoes would achieve great commercial success on their own in Salem and in Massachusetts more broadly after making their start in Derby's counting house and aboard Derby vessels.⁸⁰

Some of the most prominent graduates of Derby's shipping trade were Jacob and Benjamin Crowninshield. These Crowninshield brothers started their careers as Derby captains and eventually went out on their own by 1795 with their father and three other brothers to form the house of George Crowninshield & Sons. Jacob and Benjamin had travelled to all corners of the Indian Ocean on Derby vessels. They had coordinated their ships with Elias Hasket Derby, Jr. during his stay at Mauritius, and they had learned the ways of trade in many parts of the Indian Ocean marketplace. When the Crowninshield family began their own shipping business, they used their expertise gathered though Derby's employ to focus on trade to the Indian Ocean.⁸¹ The family sent brother Richard to New York where he could keep abreast of shipping news and manage trade there for the family business.⁸² Brothers Jacob, Benjamin, George Jr., and John all sailed in family-owned ships to the Indian Ocean.

⁷⁹ "Memoir of Elias Hasket Derby, Merchant of Salem, Mass.," in *Hunt's Merchant's Magazine and Commercial Review* 36 (New York, 1857), 12.

⁸⁰ "Memoir of Elias Hasket Derby," 12. The list included Nathaniel Bowditch, John Prince, Joseph Ropes, James Magee, Benjamin Hodges, Thomas H Perkins, Stephen Phillips, and many others.

⁸¹ Jacob Crowninshield to Richard Cronwninshield, January 18, 1795, Crowninshield Family Papers, PEM.

⁸² Jacob Crowninshield to Richard Cronwninshield, January 18, 1795, Crowninshield Family Papers, PEM.

Experience trading in the Indian Ocean taught the Crowninshield brothers that trading in specie, particularly to India, was the most assured way to command strong sales as the lowest risk, but as rising merchants by 1795 they lacked the capital to ship specie direct from the United States. In early 1795, Jacob and Benjamin sailed together on their first voyage for George Crowninshield & Sons in the *America*, trading in the same circuitous patterns around the Indian Ocean that they had followed as Derby captains. After leaving the United States, the brothers made one of their first stops at Mauritius, where Jacob and Benjamin sold their cargo and then purchased another ship. They sought dollars for India, but finding dollars scarce at Mauritius they purchased goods as an alternative, and they left with a cargo of blackwood, French claret wine, Lisbon wine, loaf sugar, copper, nails, and gold venetians.⁸³

After a quick sail, the brothers arrived in Calcutta with the two ships, but they struggled to find freight work and to sell the products from Mauritius. After adding in the port charges that the brothers accumulated in Calcutta and the poor sales of many of his articles, Jacob calculated that they would lose about \$5000 on the Calcutta trip from Mauritius. After making a \$10,000 profit at Mauritius, this would leave the brothers with only a \$5000 profit over the invoice of the goods in New York.⁸⁴ For the return voyage, Jacob loaded his vessel with coarse sugar, ginger, cotton goods of different sorts, twine, wire, and hides.⁸⁵ Jacob expected to sell many of his India goods in New York, where the *America* would stop first. He purchased ginger and coarse sugar according to how he believed each would sell in Europe.⁸⁶ After the frustrations and losses from trading in India with goods rather than with specie, Jacob wrote to Richard in New York that the family would have to find another way to overcome their specie deficit as they pursued trade in

⁸³ JC to RC, November 15, 1795, Crowninshield Family Papers, PEM.

⁸⁴ JC to RC, November 15, 1795, Crowninshield Family Papers, PEM.

⁸⁵ JC to RC, November 15, 1795, Crowninshield Family Papers, PEM.

⁸⁶ JC to RC, December 2, 1795, Crowninshield Family Papers, PEM.

India: “Nothing should be ventured upon from America to Bengal but dollars. With them every dispatch can be made, & they are sure & nothing else is or can be.”⁸⁷

Not all participants could afford to traffic in specie as Derby and Gray could, and as merchants like the Crowninshields planned out their ventures in 1794 and 1795 to the Indian Ocean, they continued to rely on circuitous patterns of trade, often to non-Indian markets, to circumvent specie requirements. The free trade model for American neutral trade had real appeal to many rising merchants in Salem for whom trade throughout the broad Indian Ocean marketplace, not just British India, was the means by which they sold Atlantic cargoes and gradually acquired specie or a return cargo. Maintaining American access to all ports through free trade kept open the markets of information that propelled American circuitous trade, created commercial opportunities, and lowered risks of foreign commerce. Based on their experiences trading in the Indian Ocean on Derby ships, Salem merchants like the Crowninshields had confidence in demand for American shipping and in the ability of American captains and merchants to turn information gathered at places like Mauritius into commercial success. By the 1790s, Salem ships were sailing through the Indian Ocean, the Red Sea, Indonesia, and the South China Seas. As Salem sailors and captains traversed these expanding and diverse markets, residents at home experienced these global connections through the porcelain goods, spices, and exotic animals Salem ships imported from abroad.⁸⁸

⁸⁷ JC to RC, November 15, 1795, Crowninshield Family Papers, PEM.

⁸⁸ For Salem’s ventures to new markets see Robert E. Peabody, *Merchant Venturers of old Salem: A History of the Commercial Voyages of a New England Family to the Indies and Elsewhere in the XVIII Century* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1912), 53; Susan S. Bean, *Yankee India: American Commercial and Cultural Encounters with India in the Age of Sail, 1784-1860* (Salem, 2001), 16-17; Kenneth Scott Latourette, *The History of Early Relations between the United States and China, 1784-1844* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1917), 17; and Robert G. Albion et al, *New England the Sea* (Middleton, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1972), 60. For the reaction to new trade in Salem see Dane Anthony Morrison, “Salem as a Citizen of the World,” in *Salem: Place, Myth, and Memory*, ed. Dane Anthony Morrison and Nancy Lusignan Schultz (Boston, 2004). “Population of the 33 Urban Places: 1800,” U.S. Bureau of the Census. Accessed October 11, 2010.

The idea that Salem ships could sail and trade circuitously throughout the Indian Ocean or the globe had broad appeal in this port where that very strategy had been the means for the port's commercial growth since the 1780s. In 1791, Elias Derby had built the 564-ton *Grand Turk* for the India trade, and 9,000 people had come to watch and assist in its launching.⁸⁹ The *Grand Turk*, as one of the largest American vessels in the India trade, had mimicked British East Indiamen, used for the bulk importation of goods from India, to such an extent that Derby found it too big to manage by 1795.⁹⁰ When Derby sold the ship in New York in March 1795, Bentley recorded in his diary that the ship "was much too large for our port & the method of our Trade."⁹¹ Richard Cleveland, who started his mercantile career as a clerk for Elias Derby at age fourteen, wrote years later of the excitement for foreign commerce that he had gained while in Derby's employ. "[Derby] built several ships for the India trade immediately in the vicinity of the counting house which afforded me an opportunity of becoming acquainted with the building, sparring, and rigging of ships," Cleveland reminisced. "The conversations to which I listened relating to the countries then newly visited by Americans the excitement on the return of an adventure from them and the great profits which were made always manifest from my own little adventures tended to stimulate the desire in me of visiting those countries and of sharing more largely in the advantages they presented."⁹²

VI

<http://www.census.gov/population/www/documentation/twps0027/tab03.txt>. Morison, *The Maritime History of Massachusetts*, 109.

⁸⁹ Townspeople helped to dig a canal to launch the boat at the Enos Briggs shipyard. Bentley, *Diary*, 1:260-261; Hitchings, *Ship Registers*, 75. Bentley also mentioned large crowds in Salem for the launching of Derby's *Eliza*. Bentley, *Diary*, 2: 117.

⁹⁰ EHD to Edward Goold, January 19, 1795, Derby Family Papers, PEM.

⁹¹ Bentley, *Diary*, 2:132.

⁹² Richard Cleveland, *A Narrative of Voyages and Commercial Enterprises* (2 Vols., Cambridge, MA: John Owem, 1842), 1: 2.

News came in 1795 that Jay's negotiations had resulted in a Treaty of Amity and Commerce between the United States and Great Britain, and the terms of the treaty tore apart Salem's former political consensus. As hints of the treaty's contents began to circulate through Salem in February 1795, Stephen Goodhue shared with his brother Benjamin that he expected the Treaty would not have a great effect on the town since Salem trade operated outside of British markets to such a large extent.⁹³ By the summer of 1795, however, news of the treaty's ratification by the Senate and the terms of the Anglo-American relationship contained therein sparked heated responses and political division.

The terms of the new Anglo-American relationship contained in the treaty abandoned the free trade model of neutrality in favor of the limited but potentially lucrative model of legal trade. Article VII created a Board made up of two American commissioners, two British commissioners, and one commissioner selected by the Board to determine and reward damages to American merchants for their losses by British seizure or condemnation. While the commissions, many hoped, would provide American merchants with financial restitution, other stipulations in the treaty restricted the patterns of American commerce in both the West Indies and the Indian Ocean. Article XII allowed American ships to trade with British islands in the West Indies but put limitations on their tonnage and required them to carry only American products, prompting the Article's rejection in the U.S. Senate.

The terms of the treaty relevant to the East Indies similarly gave up free trades rights of neutrals in favor of securing better terms of trade for Americans in the markets of British India. Article XIII legalized and lowered the duties on American trade in British India but also required American vessels to return directly to the United States after stopping in these British ports like

⁹³ Stephen Goodhue to Benjamin Goodhue, February 4, 1795, Goodhue Family Papers, PEM.

Calcutta or Madras.⁹⁴ This meant no stops on the way home at Mauritius, no coasting trade through India, and no voyages direct from India to Europe. For merchants like the Crowninshields in Salem, the treaty had alarming ramifications for their general ability to compete under the treaty's model for neutrality and, more specifically, for their trade in the Indian Ocean.

Stephen Goodhue's observation that Salem traders did so much of their trade outside of British markets was a cause for heated opposition to the treaty in Salem, not indifference to its terms. John Crowninshield reported strong sales of India goods in Bordeaux, France where he had sailed direct after leaving the Indian Ocean, and brother Benjamin Crowninshield sailed from Mauritius to Bengal or Calcutta, yet these were the very channels of trade that the Crowninshields believed the United States had sacrificed with the new treaty.⁹⁵ Now ships engaging in circuitous trade were at risk of seizure due to concessions made by Jay and the United States. The Crowninshields believed that in gaining legal American access to British ports in India, the United States had conceded the larger patterns of trade that had sustained their commerce in the Indian Ocean.

The treaty was a boon for American trade in the British Indies, but it weakened America's ability to incorporate British Indian ports within their broader, transnational routes of trade through the Indian Ocean. In December 1796, Nathaniel Silsbee arrived in Calcutta in the *Betsy*, a 189-ton ship he owned with Salem merchant Daniel Pierce, and found the market "overrun with Americans."⁹⁶ He had found Americans throughout his travels in India: "We hear

⁹⁴ "The Jay Treaty; November 19, 1794," The Avalon Project. Accessed November 20, 2014. http://avalon.law.yale.edu/18th_century/jay.asp#art13.

⁹⁵ JC to RC, March 29, 1797, Crowninshield Family Papers, PEM.

⁹⁶ Nathaniel Silsbee to unknown, December 4, 1796, Silsbee Family Papers, PEM; Hitchings, *Ship Registers*, 19.

of them from every quarter, scarce a harbor in India that don't contain more or less of them.”⁹⁷

In the Indian Ocean, British officials were surprised at the new precedent that their government could dictate the terms of trade to a foreign country by their prohibition of American circuitous trade. Many officers of the British East India Company were lax in enforcing the terms of treaty since so many relied on American ships to carry their private ventures.⁹⁸ Nonetheless, the treaty's restrictions instilled circuitous patterns of trade with a new level of uncertainty. On the same 1796 voyage, Silsbee had stopped at Mauritius, Penang, and Madras, and he feared the treaty would interfere with his trade. He heard from a pilot upon his arrival in Calcutta that the treaty had taken effect there, “which I am sorry to hear,” he wrote to Pierce, “as I fear it will occasion difficulties in my landing my Beetle nut etc.”⁹⁹ Similarly, despite the Crowninshields' excitement at Benjamin's prospects for trade with India in 1797, Benjamin was stopped by British authorities in Calcutta in October 1797 for importing goods on a freighting contract from the Danish port of Tranquebar, contrary to the terms of the new treaty. Crowninshield claimed ignorance, and the British allowed him to land his cargo with the warning that they would enforce the treaty on any “future, similar occasions.”¹⁰⁰

In 1795, Samuel Bayard served as an American Commissioner of Claims in London tasked with advocating for American merchants who had lost property to British seizures, and his knowledge of the Jay Treaty's terms and his observations of British admiralty courts convinced Bayard that the treaty did not serve American interests.¹⁰¹ Bayard doubted that the

⁹⁷ Nathaniel Silsbee to Daniel Pierce, November 17, 1796, Silsbee Family Papers, PEM.

⁹⁸ Holden Furber, “The Beginnings of American Trade with India, 1784-1812,” in *The New England Quarterly* Vol. 11 (June, 1938); Fichter.

⁹⁹ Nathaniel Silsbee to Daniel Pierce, November 17, 1796, Silsbee Family Papers, PEM.

¹⁰⁰ “Extract of Public Letter from Fort St. George,” October 16, 1797, India Office Records: Home Miscellaneous Series (Microfilm).

¹⁰¹ For a description of Bayard's role as Commissioner and his observations of this period see David Sterling, “A Federalist Opposes the Jay Treaty: The Letters of Samuel Bayard,” in *The William and Mary Quarterly*, Vol. 18, No. 3 (Jul. 1961): 408-424.

Commissions established by the treaty would provide ample and expedient restitution to American merchants. He hoped to avoid war if at possible, but he worried that war was the only way to avoid “the establishment of the principle, that where so large a portion of our shipping...seized by order of the Government, must be recovered only through the medium of their complex, expensive, dilatory and political courts of admiralty.” The treaty was meant to eliminate conflicts like those created by the November 1793 Orders in Council, but since its signing Bayard continued to hear news of British seizures and detentions of American ships, and he believed Americans were still unfairly treated in British admiralty courts. “Full compensation is promised,” Bayard acknowledged, “but real injury done to our merchants individually whose vessels are thus taken, and the American trade in general deeply wounded.”¹⁰²

The stipulations in the treaty clarified the means through which the United States could participate in gaining financial restitution for its merchants, but Bayard believed these terms would fail many American traders who had not the time, capital, or insurance to wait out the long delays and likely small settlements:

The leading object of Jay’s mission was to obtain the restitution of the property illegally captured by British cruisers. It will naturally be asked how far he has effected this object, and when it is known that he has only secured the right of appeal and of eventual payment by the British government where a recovery fails as against the captors, and it is known what a length of time must probably elapse before the claimants can expect restitution, the expense that must be incurred, and at last the possibility of being robbed of the whole by the contest between the two countries, there will be a broad foundation for dissatisfaction and complaint.¹⁰³

Bayard rejoiced to hear that the U.S. Senate considered not ratifying the treaty and hoped the Senate would insist on provisions that would better secure American interests in the adjudication

¹⁰² Samuel Bayard to Elias Boudinot, July 1795, printed in Sterling, “A Federalist Opposes the Jay Treaty,” 416.

¹⁰³ Samuel Bayard to William Bradford, July 9, 1795, printed in Sterling, “A Federalist Opposes the Jay Treaty,” 417.

process.¹⁰⁴ He believed Great Britain was dictating the terms of American neutrality to the United States and wished the United States had persisted in its embargo against British shipping in order to win better Treaty terms. The benefits of neutrality, Bayard believed, lay in the “important principle that free ships shall make free goods (contraband articles excepted),” and Bayard regretted that Jay “agreed to abandon this principle to the degree in which he has.”¹⁰⁵

Nationally, the treaty spurred public outcry, particularly over the West Indies stipulations, and helped to galvanize nascent political divisions between Federalists and Jeffersonian Republicans. In New York City, a crowd shouted Alexander Hamilton off the stage at a political rally as they protested the treaty.¹⁰⁶ In ports like Salem where so many residents had a personal stake in how the federal government chose to define and protect neutral trade, the treaty’s ratification in the summer of 1795 sparked heated debate and dispute. In July 1795, Bentley observed a growing public resentment that the Treaty “increases no privileges we now hold, & takes away other privileges.”¹⁰⁷ The newspapers, Bentley observed, began to speak of “lost liberties” and the burning of John Jay in effigy in New York.¹⁰⁸ Meanwhile, Salemite Timothy Pickering wrote to Jay from his post as Secretary of War to tell Jay that President George Washington had decided to sign the treaty, hoping it might give Jay relief from “wanton abuse heaped upon you by the enemies of their country.”¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁴ Samuel Bayard to William Bradford, July 29, 1795, printed in Sterling, “A Federalist Opposes the Jay Treaty,” 419.

¹⁰⁵ Samuel Bayard to Elias Boudinot, December 12, 1795, printed in Sterling, “A Federalist Opposes the Jay Treaty,” 422.

¹⁰⁶ For a discussion of this New York incident see Joanne Freeman, *Affairs of Honor: National Politics in the New Republic* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001), xiii-xv; For the public reaction to the Jay Treaty and the partisan debates surrounding it see Todd Estes, *The Jay Treaty Debate*.

¹⁰⁷ Bentley, 2: 146.

¹⁰⁸ Bentley, 2: 146.

¹⁰⁹ Timothy Pickering to John Jay, August 14, 1785, printed in Henry P. Johnston, ed., *The Correspondence and Public Papers of John Jay* Vol. IV (New York: G.P. Putnam’s Sons, 1890-1893), 182.

Proponents of the treaty in Salem gathered in town meeting, where Federalists faced little opposition by 1795 and 1796. By that spring, opponents of the treaty in the House of Representatives had obstructed treaty appropriations, which threatened its implementation and put the restitution due American merchants under the treaty at risk. A letter to Salem from Philadelphia merchants calling for action against this obstruction prompted a Salem town meeting on April 22, 1796 to consider petitioning Congress. In a second vote, attendees decided to send a memorial to Congress calling on the federal government to make provisions to carry out the treaty. The treaty had given subscribers confidence that they would obtain redress for their property seized by Great Britain, the memorial read, and they were now alarmed that these expectations might be disappointed. If the treaty was not funded, they feared a loss of property, continued seizures of their vessels, and possible war with Great Britain. The committee to draft and acquire signatures for the memorial included Benjamin Pickman, Goodhue's business partner John Norris, and William Gray.¹¹⁰ The town sent the memorial to Benjamin Goodhue, who presented it to the House on April 29, 1796, where it joined with similar petitions from coastal communities throughout the northern United States.¹¹¹ Stephen Goodhue's observations of the memorial process prompted him to write to his brother, "I think you will be pleased to find how unanimous the people here are for supporting the constitution."¹¹² Meanwhile, with the passing of the bill to fund the treaty in May 1796, Derby's Philadelphia associates Joseph Anthony & Company praised the actions of the Salem town meeting in a letter to Derby: "the

¹¹⁰ Other committee members included Captain Joseph White, John Treadwell, and Captain Ephraim Emerton. Salem Town Meeting Minutes, April 22, 1796, Salem City Clerk; For text of the memorial, see *Salem Gazette*, April 26, 1796.

¹¹¹ Annals of Congress, 4th Cong., 1st Sess., 527.

¹¹² Stephen Goodhue to Benjamin Goodhue, May 4, 1796, Goodhue Family Papers, PEM.

gentlemen of your town have behaved well, their influence combined with other towns eastward and elsewhere has had the desired effects.”¹¹³

Town meeting was not yet the locus for political debate over federal policy that it later became, but in spite of the selectmen’s unanimity, the broader Salem community was hotly engaged in the treaty debate. By August 1795, Elias Derby and William Gray reported to Federalist party leader George Cabot that most of Salem, or at least the “respectable people,” seemed to favor the Treaty, but the two merchants cautioned that voicing their particular support might stir up the opposition and weaken the image of unanimous approval.¹¹⁴ The *Salem Gazette* reported a full attendance at the April 1796 meeting, though many of the town’s seaman and ships’ officers like Nathaniel Silsbee or Benjamin Crowninshield were at sea. The first question of whether or not to read the text of the treaty to the town was voted down. When committee member Joseph White visited Bentley to obtain his signature on the memorial, Bentley reported that White did not show him the text of the petition, only the signatures, and White’s claims that they would obtain 700 signatures prompted Bentley to sign.¹¹⁵ Four men had voiced their opposition to the town memorial to Congress: ship captain Thomas Webb; ship owner and captain Robert Stone who had suffered the seizure of his ship *St. John* by the British for trading in Nantz, captain William Cleaveland, and Colonel John Harthorne, a future contributor to Salem’s Democratic-Republican party.¹¹⁶ By the elections of April 1796, Bentley recorded the presence of an “Anti-Treaty party” in Salem’s elections for Massachusetts Governor.¹¹⁷ By May

¹¹³ Joseph Anthony & Company to EHD, May 5, 1796, Derby Family Papers, PEM.

¹¹⁴ George Cabot to Oliver Wolcott, Boston, August 13, 1795, and George Cabot to Rufus King, August 14, 1795, in Henry Cabot Lodge, ed., *Life and Letters of George Cabot* (Boston: Little, Brown, and Company, 1877), 84-5.

¹¹⁵ Bentley, *Diary*, 2: 181.

¹¹⁶ Hitchings, *Ship Registers*, 82; Register of Awards, FO 304/27, PRO; Margaret Moore, *The Salem World of Nathaniel Hawthorne* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2001), 178.

¹¹⁷ Bentley, 2: 176.

1796, division over the treaty reached the town militia training, where Bentley observed “Treaty” and “No Treaty” signs on the knapsacks of the some soldiers.¹¹⁸

Since the United States had made this exclusive agreement with Britain, the treaty’s opponents believed, nations like France had reasonable justification to question American neutrality. By the end of 1796, a French blockade at Mauritius caught five Salem vessels in port while news of other seizures of American ships began to reach Salem.¹¹⁹ Derby’s ship the *John* was seized by a French privateer as it was returning from Mauritius because the ship lacked a particular paper now required by French authorities for neutral vessels. If seizures did not happen in the Indian Ocean, Salem ships risked capture when they returned home through the Caribbean, as was the case with the seizure of Derby’s ship the *Ganges* off of Martinique on its way back from the Indian Ocean in 1797. By March of 1797, when Jacob learned of the seizure of a Salem ship bound to the Indian Ocean, the situation for foreign trade had become so risky that the family slowed preparations for the next India voyages. Jacob wrote to Richard, “If the ship was ready tomorrow, we should not send her to sea. I wrote you Capt. Hodges was taken outward bound to Batavia & China—you see how we stand. We are now so alarmed here (& you may depend we are not so much as our neighbours) that we expect nothing less than to lose one of the ships at least. There is no doubt of it hardly if they go on to Bengal, under these circumstances & our present feeling.”¹²⁰ In Jacob’s mind, there was one cause for all of this new alarm: the recent Jay Treaty between the United States and Britain and the hostile reaction it was

¹¹⁸ Bentley, *Diary*, 2: 182.

¹¹⁹ *Salem Gazette*, January 1, 1797; Nathaniel Silsbee to Captain Daniel Pierce, August 5, 1796, Silsbee Family Papers, PEM; JC to John Crowninshield and Benjamin Crowninshield, November 10, 1796, Crowninshield Family Papers, PEM.

¹²⁰ JC to RC, March 16, 1797, Crowninshield Family Papers, PEM.

stirring up in France towards American shipping. “We need not look beyond the dm^d British treaty for the cause of all these difficulties,” he wrote to Richard.¹²¹

Their regular circulation of Salem ships and letters through non-British markets gave Salem traders awareness of and, often, confidence in non-British perspectives on American neutrality. Reports from France made Jacob concerned that the United States was heading towards a war brought on by America’s abandonment of the free trade model for neutral trade. By April 1797, John Crowninshield’s engagement in trade between the French ports of Bordeaux and Mauritius gave the family direct access to John’s first-hand observations on French opinions towards American shipping, and they seemed to confirm Jacob’s ideas about American troubles at sea. The picture that John drew for his family, and for the broader merchant community once his remarks were published, was of a French government in strong support of neutrality as free trade for American shipping. Jacob was quick to send his brother’s report to the *Salem Gazette*, where it appeared the next day. John reported from Bordeaux that there was \$300,000 worth of Salem property currently in port. He wrote:

YOU appear at home to be under some apprehension of the not too favourable disposition of [the French] Government towards that of Ours. We have had for some time the same fears, but it is most certainly the intention of this Government to endeavour to treat all nations in the same manner as those nations appear disposed to conduct towards them. It is their wish that all neutrals should support and maintain their own neutrality, and they will endeavour to the utmost of their ability to protect and support them in it so far as it respects them and the Neutrals appear to act with sincerity towards the Republic. Do not even suppose, or be under any concern, that there will be a rupture between the two Countries, unless we bring on one by our own folly and misconduct.¹²²

¹²¹ JC to RC, March 20, 1797, Crowninshield Family Papers, PEM.

¹²² George Crowninshield, Sr. to RC, April 2, 1797 and JC to RC, April 4, 1797, Crowninshield Family Papers, PEM; *Salem Gazette*, April 4, 1797.

After reading John's report, Jacob remained steady in his belief that the French "do not want a war with us, & will be our fault if we engage in one with them."¹²³

As Derby and William Gray and other prominent Federalist merchants in Salem readied for retaliation against the French in response to French seizures, the Crowninshields distanced themselves from these efforts and placed the blame instead on the broader problem of the United States government abandoning the goal of free American neutral commerce across the globe. When Derby and Gray spearheaded efforts to build the United States frigate *Essex* in Salem to cruise the East Indies and protect American shipping against French seizures, the Crowninshields refused to subscribe to this endeavor. With the outbreak of the Quasi War in 1798, Salem residents began to increase their attendance at town meetings, where differing opinions on American trade contributed to growing political divisions. Bentley proclaimed that "the Salem opposition party is now begun."¹²⁴

By 1800 those Salem residents that had sided with President Adams for peace with France formalized their split from the Salem Federalists in the inaugural election for a new U.S. House seat in Essex County. That year they presented Jacob Crowninshield on a "Republican Federalist" ticket. Armed neutrality and negotiation were the right strategies for the American union, this party counseled, since war or exclusive treaties forced American commerce to grow within limited political boundaries rather than freeing American merchants to pursue the best prices across all international markets.¹²⁵ Crowninshield lost the 1800 election in the district by just over 200 votes, but he carried Salem 446 to 397.¹²⁶ His Adams Federalists soon refashioned

¹²³ JC to RC, April 4, 1797, Crowninshield Family Papers, PEM.

¹²⁴ Bentley, *Diary*, 3: 299.

¹²⁵ Bentley, *Diary*, 2: 264, 299. *Salem Impartial Register* (MA), August 21, 1800. James Duncan Phillips, "Salem's Part in the Naval War with France," *The New England Quarterly*, 16 (Dec., 1943), 551-2. Bentley, 2: 227. Goodman, 112-113. *Salem Gazette* (MA), May 1, 1798. *Salem Impartial Register* (MA), October 9, 1800.

¹²⁶ *Salem Gazette*, October 21, 1800.

themselves as the town Republicans, and in 1802 Salem voters elected Crowninshield to the U.S. House of Representatives over former Secretary of State Timothy Pickering. That year Salem also elected Republicans to town office and to the state legislature. In Washington, Crowninshield became a close ally of President Thomas Jefferson, a loyal supporter of Republican economic policies, and a key connection between the local economy and the federal government.

VII

By 1806, the United States and Great Britain began negotiations once more over Anglo-American relations as the Jay Treaty set to expire. When Secretary of State James Madison asked Jacob Crowninshield for a summary of American overseas trade to aid American treaty negotiators in London in 1806, Crowninshield's reply highlighted his continued insistence on the importance of protecting free neutral trade and a broad geography of markets open to neutrals. His remarks emphasized his belief that the Jay Treaty had abandoned these principles and constricted American commerce.¹²⁷ Crowninshield considered American trade to Mauritius "the most successful of all our commerce to the East Indies" because trade at this island and at neighboring Bourbon continued to be central to the circuitous patterns of American trade in the region and between the Atlantic and Indian Oceans. Mauritius exemplified the great commercial advantages to American merchants that came from linking markets of different nations, and the treaty threatened the foundation of this commercial strategy. Crowninshield wrote extensively

¹²⁷ At the time, James Monroe and William Pinkney were in London negotiating for a renewal of the Jay Treaty with Great Britain. Article XIII of the Jay Treaty had required American ships to sail directly back to the United States after trading in a British Indian Ocean port, and Crowninshield wanted to ensure that this measure would not be renewed. Under the terms of the Monroe-Pinkney Treaty that was never ratified by the United States government, American trade in the Indian Ocean was limited to an even greater extent with the requirement that American ships had to sail directly between the United States and British Indian Ocean ports on their voyages both there and back. Donald R. Hickey, "The Monroe-Pinkney Treaty of 1806: A Reappraisal," in *The William and Mary Quarterly* Vol. 44 No. 1 (Jan., 1987), 65-88.

on how Americans used Bourbon and Mauritius as stopover markets where they could trade “whenever the prices are such as to afford a profit although the destination might have been for other markets.”¹²⁸ As Crowninshield learned of American vessels again being seized for stopping at Mauritius, he argued to Madison that “the commerce of the Indian Ocean ought to be as free as that of Europe, and the power that violates the trade of neutrals in that quarter is equally accountable for it as if the violation was committed in the Atlantic.” Americans had become by the 1790s one of the main suppliers of rice to Mauritius, and Crowninshield noted that the Jay Treaty made this trade illegal. Jacob Crowninshield wrote, “The treaty bound our ships to bring direct to American all the goods put on board at any English port in India. The rice trade was thus cut off.”¹²⁹

From Crowninshield’s view, the United States had won the legalization of limited American trade to British ports in the Indian Ocean only by giving up the American right to trade at all other non-British ports in the region. This was a sacrifice that Crowninshield believed severely curtailed American trade and, Crowninshield believed, violated American sovereignty and claims to neutrality. “Under the idea of preventing our ships carrying on the *English* coasting trade we have not been allowed to land goods in a British port which have been purchased or procured in barter at a French, a Danish, or even a native free port. In short, we have been confined to our *original cargoes*, and a relanding of such goods has not even been permitted.” India Ocean goods like pepper, nuts, and other items, Crowninshield continued, “procured at native independent ports, have not been allowed to be discharged at a British port although much desired; unsaleable goods purchased at the Isle of France have been in the same

¹²⁸ Quoted in John H. Reinohl, “Some Remarks on the American Trade: Jacob Crowninshield to James Madison 1806,” in *The William and Mary Quarterly* Vol. 16 No. 1 (Jan., 1959), 108.

¹²⁹ Reinohl, “Some Remarks,” 107.

situation and yet this was clearly no part of the coasting trade of India. And what is singular enough while this trade was denied to us; all the European nations having connection with India were enjoying it without restraint...*Ours was alone in disgrace.*"¹³⁰ With the Jay Treaty, Crowninshield argued, merchants could no longer trade wherever market conditions directed them. He wrote, "Bengal piece goods too could not be disposed of at any port at which an American ship preferred to stop on the homeward passage and many of our Captains and supercargoes have been obliged to refuse the most tempting offers for their cargoes when better goods could be obtained in exchange."¹³¹

The direct voyage clause of the Treaty also outlawed American voyages from British India to Europe, which had become from many American merchants a critical market for India goods and, as a result, a significant source of specie from these sales and from the freighting contracts that Americans obtained from Europeans to bring India goods to Europe. "Before the prohibition in Jay's treaty," Crowninshield wrote to Madison:

profitable freights were made by *American ships* from Calcutta to Hamburgh, Ostend and other free ports on *English account*. The treaty cut off that limb of our carrying trade. We carried cheaper than the Danes and Swedes who afterwards enjoyed it, so that the English trader paid a dearer freight than formerly. The English residents in Bengal are desirous of getting their property to Europe. The [British East India Company's] ships are limited as to the private tonnage; hence necessity of procuring freight in foreign ships. The only question ought to be who will carry it cheapest. What we lost other neutrals gained, for the goods went to Europe as before and Great Britain even paid a higher freight, but the objection is not that our ships were excluded from carrying British goods on freight from a British settlement in India to Europe but that the Treaty denied us the right of transporting any goods whatever in American ships to any other country than America after having touched or taken in part a cargo at an English port in India. The route of our voyages was prescribed to us. We were directed to sail west when we preferred to sail east.¹³²

¹³⁰ Reinoehl, "Some Remarks," 111.

¹³¹ Reinoehl, "Some Remarks," 107.

¹³² Reinoehl, "Some Remarks," 113.

These new restrictions on trade from India to Europe under the Jay Treaty were further evidence that the United States had sacrificed its sovereign trading rights to British dictates and to commercial gains from limited routes of trade in British markets. In reference to the Jay Treaty restrictions, Crowninshield wrote to Madison, “We ought to be permitted to carry our cargoes where we please. In seeking our best markets by a direct trade we should enjoy nothing more than other nations possess in their intercourse with India. A Dane, a Swede or French ship loading in an English port is not compelled by the British to proceed to her own country direct. She pursues the route which her owner deems most advantageous to his own particular interest.”¹³³

The Jay Treaty debate revealed in Salem those merchants who still relied on entrepot markets and circuitous trading patterns and those that did not. By the mid-1790s, for example, Derby’s *Grand Turk* sailed with enough knowledge of Indian Ocean markets and, most importantly, enough dollars to allow it to sail directly to Calcutta and directly back to Salem. When seizures of American vessels increased, he had the means to comfortably decrease his shipping business as a temporary measure. But the basic strategies Derby had employed to expand his trade to the Indian Ocean in the 1780s and early 1790s continued on in the trading businesses of his former captains and of an enterprising group of Salem merchants who began their trade to Asia and Africa by 1790. Like Derby at his start, these captains and merchants sailed for Mauritius and similar markets where they could exchange their goods for cash and gather information; their ships traveled circuitous routes around the Indian Ocean as part of the region’s coasting trade; they sought freighting contracts, often from Europe and back; and they did all of this to eventually return with cargoes of Indian Ocean sugar, cotton, coffee, indigo, and

¹³³ Reinoehl, “Some Remarks,” 110.

spices that they hoped to sell around their Atlantic worlds. Crowninshield and his Salem Republican allies would maintain their call for protections of open American trade to all global markets even through drastic measures like the 1807-1809 embargo. As Salem merchants and residents disputed these ideas locally, they thought globally, and they sought a federal union that would protect their interests across America's broad maritime frontiers that spanned the globe.

Chapter 6

A Wise or Ruinous Measure? Party Politics of the Embargo Crisis, 1807-1809

The sun began its climb across Salem harbor on October 26, 1808, as the freeholders of this Massachusetts town made for the Tabernacle, where a public vote would decide a question that political caucuses and speeches had anticipated for nearly a year. Should the town petition Congress to repeal President Thomas Jefferson's embargo? By the summer of 1808, seventy-one Massachusetts towns had voted with their Federalist leaders to petition Congress for this repeal. Now Salem would vote, and as the second largest port in Massachusetts and New England, Salem's voice mattered. For the previous ten months the national embargo had outlawed all international trade in response to British and French restrictions on American neutral shipping. For ten months Salem ships had been idle in port. For ten months sailors, merchants, and mechanics had struggled for work. For ten months political debates in Salem had steadily advanced, building towards this encounter between the town's Republican and Federalist supporters.¹

William Gray, the town's wealthiest merchant and a recent defector from the Federalist party over his support for the embargo, stood and called for the petition's dismissal as hisses passed through the audience. "If we would unanimously resolve to support our independence and confide in our rulers" by observing the embargo, he proclaimed, "we may bid defiance to every usurping power under heaven!"² The Republicans answered with rousing applause before ceding the floor to Benjamin Pickman Jr., a leading Salem Federalist. Ships were rotting at the

¹ For preparations see *Essex Register*, October 29, 1808; Salem residents who aligned themselves with the Jefferson administration referred to themselves most commonly as Republicans during this period, although the Federalists occasionally referred to their opposition as Democrats. In this paper I refer to the party of Jefferson in Salem as the Republican party.

² *Salem Register*, November 2, 1808. For the text of William Gray's speech see *Essex Register*, October 29, 1808 and *Salem Gazette*, October 28, 1808.

wharves, he exclaimed, the poor were suffering, and the British blockades should no longer be considered equal to French seizures.³ Orations continued into the evening as the smell of madeira wafted through the crowd. The moderator called for a vote. Men drifted towards the exits to cast their ballots, while sides fought for any remaining undecided votes. “Our side, my boys – 25 dollars a day, huzza!” “Hard a weather the helm – the anchor’s a ship! – she’s away – the embargo is off.”⁴ As the sun set, the vote stood 490 in favor of the petition, 570 opposed. The Federalists had lost the moment.⁵

Salem’s dependence on foreign commerce made the debates of the embargo from 1807 to 1809 high stakes political battles with potentially devastating consequences for the losers. Town Federalists and Republicans engaged in hard-fought and bitter contests to mobilize voters during the embargo so that they might protect Salem’s prosperity as a commercial hub of neutral trade and avoid the disastrous effects for their union, their town, and their personal livelihoods if the other side should instead prove victorious. Both parties believed that their own vision of American political economy protected Salem’s economy and the broader commercial republic. Federalists accepted Britain’s wartime “practical” limits on American neutral trade if these regulations protected American trade in these select markets and allowed American commerce to escape inevitable destruction at the hands of the British navy by avoiding war between the two nations. The Republicans, alternatively, supported the embargo as a means to force Britain and France to remove their limits on American neutral trade. They eschewed the Federalists’ practical limits on trade and sought instead a global and expansive global geography of American neutral commerce. The parties were nearly equal in size in Salem and the margin

³ *Salem Gazette*, November 11, 1808.

⁴ *Essex Register*, October 29, 1808, and November 2, 1808,

⁵ *Essex Register*, October 29, 1808; *Salem Gazette*, October 28, 1808.

between them always small, but town Republicans proved more resilient in politics during this crisis and more adept at maintaining their slim majority within the voting base, even in the face of an unsuccessful policy promoted by one of their own from the White House.⁶ Salem's support of the embargo, surprising within a historiography which presumes northern opposition to Jefferson's policies, can only be understood in the context of the political economies envisioned by Salemites for the future of the American union.

The national debate over American political economy and the embargo invigorated local Salem politics in everything from town government, to town charities, to the election of the town's federal representatives. Salem mariners and merchants had first-hand experience within the contested spaces for American neutral trade at the center of the embargo controversy, and in each political outcome surrounding the embargo they had personal stakes for their way of life and their home port. Abstract conceptions of the role that Great Britain and France should have in American trade and politics and how to secure commercial prosperity for the United States had concrete meanings in Salem based on commercial experiences in the global marketplace. Salem Republicans found success in their strategies of political mobilization by appealing to the ideas of political economy that had made Salem distinctive relative to other American commercial centers and had been the source of Salem's commercial prosperity as far back as the colonial period. Many in Salem resisted the monopolizing interests of Great Britain or France to push American trade through those nations' approved channels, and many resisted the control of state politics by Boston; Salem considered itself to be subordinate to no such metropolis,

⁶ For the democratization of the political process in Massachusetts see Noble Cunningham, Jr., *The Jeffersonian Republicans in Power, Party Operations, 1801-1809* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1963); David Hackett Fischer, *The Revolution in American Conservatism, The Federalist Party in the Era of Jeffersonian Democracy* (New York: Harper & Row, 1965); James M. Banner, Jr., *To the Hartford Convention: The Federalists and the Origins of Party Politics in Massachusetts, 1789-1815* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1970); For the rise of Massachusetts Republicans see Paul Goodman, *The Democratic Republicans of Massachusetts* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1964).

commercial or political, and the port's trade practices encouraged this idea. Republicans claims that the embargo protected the broad geography of American neutral trade had strong appeal in Salem where ships regularly plied trade routes that crossed regions, oceans, and political borders.⁷ For Salem Republicans, the embargo made sense for town and nation.

As they debated the embargo, Salemites considered their place in the global marketplace, and both sides sought ways to return their ships to foreign commerce under manageable risk, not retreat from it. Salem offers a reminder that despite the embargo's lofty goals and drastic actions, the measure's goals made sense to a strong Jeffersonian contingent of maritime Americans.⁸ Not all New England merchants were Federalists, and divisions over the embargo were not a simple split between pro-British or pro-French sentiment. Imbued with a republican confidence that as Americans and as neutrals they could conduct commerce with anyone willing and worthy to trade, Salem merchants and seamen were people of the world.

Republican and Federalist claims about American political economy during the embargo did map on to a social split between an ordered deferential society and one of economic mobility. Historians James Banner and Ronald Formisano have also highlighted the conflicts between rising families and established families in Salem in their explanations of Massachusetts politics

⁷ In this study, political economy assumes John Nelson's definition for this concept: "a composite of commercial activity, government policy and individual psychology." See John R. Nelson, Jr., *Liberty and Property: Political Economy and Policymaking in the New Nation, 1789-1812* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1987), xi.

⁸ Gordon Wood's recent work referred to the embargo as a "strange act" and "self-contradictory." Gordon Wood, *Empire of Liberty: A History of the Early Republic, 1789-1815* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 650. For another account that ignores the context of Massachusetts foreign trade practices and argues that the state Republicans had no advantage in their argument in support of the embargo see Thorp Lanier Wolford, "Democratic-Republican Reaction in Massachusetts to the Embargo of 1807," *The New England Quarterly*, 15 (Mar, 1942): 35-61. Drew McCoy argues that support for a national economy based on agriculture, domestic industry, and a commerce in domestic products- decidedly not the carrying trade in foreign goods- was foundational to Republicanism in early America. Drew McCoy, *The Elusive Republic: Political Economy in Jeffersonian America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, 1980). Paul Goodman's study of Massachusetts Republicans in the early republic did incorporate this important trading context, but Goodman's primary focus was on political leaders, not how the party appealed to a broader base. Goodman, *The Democratic-Republicans of Massachusetts*.

of the early national period. Salem political enemies opposed one another because one group denied the other social recognition and entrance into the business elite of the town.⁹ This inward-looking, personal, and social framework added energy to political mobilization in Salem, but the fundamental framework through which Salemites mobilized for the embargo was over the place of their commerce and their union within the international system. As they debated the embargo, Salemites participated in national politics. The debate did have a local dimension, and in Salem trading experiences could influence ideas of political economy on a popular level beyond the small group of high-level political leaders like Jefferson, Gallatin, or Madison. Politics and economics invigorated one another in the early republic.¹⁰ As they mobilized for and against the embargo, Salemites sought to protect their trade in response to broad developments on a geopolitical level, but by putting a temporary halt to their foreign commerce and by electing trusted allies to federal office, they also sought to actively shape these broader conditions to the betterment of their trade and way of life.

II

By the turn of the century Salem was a dynamic center of increasing prosperity.¹¹ Still ranked the seventh largest urban place in the United States in 1800, over the next ten years Salem's population grew by 33%, matching rates in Boston (35%) and Philadelphia (30%),

⁹ Ronald P. Formisano, *The Transformation of Political Culture: Massachusetts Parties, 1790s-1940s* (New York, 1983), 163; Banner, Jr., *To the Hartford Convention*, 176. Further, while the embargo debate signaled the diminishing returns of deference politics in the early republic, it did not represent an emergence of class-based politics. For a class-based view of early American politics through the Jacksonian era see Sean Wilentz, *The Rise of American Democracy: Jefferson to Lincoln* (New York: Norton, 2005).

¹⁰ For studies of Jefferson's ideas on the embargo and political economy see Louis Martin Sears, *Jefferson and the Embargo* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1927); Burton Spivak, *Jefferson's English Crisis: Commerce, Embargo, and the Republican Revolution* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia, 1979); Merrill D. Peterson, *Thomas Jefferson and the New Nation* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1970); Dumas Malone, *Jefferson the President: Second Term, 1805-1809* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1974). For a study that examines the embargo in a national level and examines its effect on different regions, see Walter Wilson Jennings, *The American Embargo, 1807-1809* (Iowa City: University of Iowa, 1921).

¹¹ For a discussion of the social mobility in Salem during this period see Vickers, *Young Men and the Sea*.

though lagging behind Baltimore (75%) and New York (59%) in rate of population growth (Figure 6.1).¹² William Bentley observed a regular flow of new families into Salem from the surrounding county in 1799, many of which, he noted, “are commonly of young, enterprising tradesmen.”¹³ The steady supply of local labor made Salem a town without many of the typical seaport spaces and establishments dedicated to a transient sailor class.¹⁴ Further, the wage scale in Salem made transitions from crew member, to captain, to ship owner possible for some Salem men. Bolstered by the commercial opportunities from international war, Salem’s neutral shipping flourished, particularly its trade to the Indian Ocean.¹⁵ Salem ships dominated the pepper trade with the island of Sumatra to such an extent that American traders commonly referred to the region as the Salem East Indies.¹⁶ As Salem sailors and captains traversed these expanding and diverse markets, residents and consumers at home experienced these global connections through the porcelain goods, spices, and exotic animals Salem ships imported from abroad.¹⁷ On the eve of the embargo, duties collected from the Salem customs house accounted for five percent of the entire revenue of the United States federal government.¹⁸ The drive for maximum return on trade in a world of fluctuating prices and supply propelled Salem captains on

¹² “Population of the 33 Urban Places: 1800,” U.S. Bureau of the Census. Retrieved online <<http://www.census.gov/population/documentation/twps0027/tab03.txt> > 30 April 2008.

¹³ Bentley, *Diary*, 2: 293.

¹⁴ Vickers, *Young Men and the Sea*, 133. Vickers supports his claim with evidence from ship manifests showing the Salem residency of most sailors and from housing and business information that demonstrate the absence of a waterfront “sailortown.” This spacial characteristic of Salem does not fit Paul Gilje’s outline of seaports in the early Republic, although Salem is likely an exception that complicates but does not disprove Gilje’s overall argument. See Paul J. Gilje, *Liberty on the Waterfront: American Maritime Culture in the Age of Revolution*. (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2007).

¹⁵ Robert E. Peabody, *Merchant Venturers of Old Salem* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1912), 53; Susan S. Bean, *Yankee India: American Commercial and Cultural Encounters with India in the Age of Sail, 1784-1860* (Salem, MA: Peabody Essex Museum, 2001), 16-17; Kenneth Scott Latourette, *The History of Early Relations between the United States and China, 1784-1844* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1917), 17.

¹⁶ Robert G. Albion et al, *New England the Sea* (Middleton, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1972), 60.

¹⁷ Salem merchants were the first to introduce an elephant and giraffe to the U.S. See Dane Anthony Morrison, “Salem as a Citizen of the World,” in *Salem: Place, Myth, and Memory*, ed. Dane Anthony Morrison and Nancy Lusignan Schultz (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 2004).

¹⁸ Morrison, “Salem as a Citizen of the World,” 109.

circuitous and often improvised trade routes across the globe; individual merchants did not follow the flag of France or Britain exclusively.¹⁹ Salem's position as a leading commercial center brought a visibility and importance to the town that kept it in the forefront of this new political contest.

City	1800 Population	1810 Population
New York, NY	60515	96373
Philadelphia, PA	41220	53722
Baltimore, MD	26514	46555
Boston, MA	24937	33787
Charleston, SC	18824	24711
New Orleans		17242
Salem, MA	9457	12613
Providence, RI	7614	10071
Norfolk, VA	6926	9193
Washington, DC	3210	8208
Newburyport, MA	5946	7634
Portsmouth, NH	5339	6934
Pittsburgh, PA		4768

Figure 6.1: 1800 and 1810 population statistics. Source: U.S. Census Bureau.²⁰

In 1807, at the brink of the embargo, Salem merchants and traders held a significant stake in the global economy. The 41,083 tons of shipping that went through Salem in 1807 ranked

¹⁹ Paul Goodman argues that Republican merchants were more likely to carry out trade with French ports or new ports opened to U.S. traders after the Revolution, while Federalists more regularly followed the British flag for trade. While Salem Republicans did generally maintain sympathies for the French over the British, and the Federalists visa versa, their trade patterns did not divide so neatly between these two powers. As outlined below, new trading opportunities with the French and with new markets in China and the East Indies accrued significant wealth and formed the backbone of trade for Federalist and Republican merchants in Salem. See Goodman, *The Democratic-Republicans of Massachusetts*, 109-116. For evidence of the variety of trade locations visited by Salem merchants see Foreign Entrances and Clearances of Foreign and American Vessels, 1805-1809, Customs District of Salem and Beverly, NARA-Waltham.

²⁰ "Population of the 33 Urban Places: 1800," U.S. Census Bureau. Accessed October 11, 2010. <http://www.census.gov/population/www/documentation/twps0027/tab03.txt>; "Population of 46 Urban Places: 1810," U.S. Census Bureau. Accessed September 14, 2014. <https://www.census.gov/population/www/documentation/twps0027/tab04.txt>.

seventh among U.S. customs districts for that year after ports like Boston (119,511 tons), Philadelphia (105,333 tons), and New York (218,381 tons). The volume of Salem's foreign tonnage put it on a level with ports like neighboring Newburyport (34,630 tons), Portland in the district of Maine (41,241 tons), Norfolk, Virginia (40,388 tons), and Charleston, South Carolina (53,011 tons). Salem was a second-tier port but still a distribution center where surrounding ports sent their exports to be sold or sent to foreign markets, and where imported foreign goods were shipped out on coasting vessels to domestic markets. Salem's connections to Boston or to subsidiary markets operated by sea rather than by land. In 1807, 14% of Salem's tonnage was engaged in the domestic coasting trade and 9% was engaged in the fishery. This amount of tonnage engaged in the fishery was the lowest for any port in Essex County, Massachusetts.²¹ Three quarters of Salem's registered tonnage was engaged in commerce to foreign markets. Ports like Boston (83%), Baltimore (85%), or Philadelphia (89%) had higher percentages of tonnage in foreign trade, reflecting the larger volume of overseas commerce and often the larger ships that sailed out of these ports. New York, the nation's largest port by volume of tonnage that had become a regional entrepôt and hub for the coasting trade from ports in New Jersey, Connecticut, Rhode Island, and beyond, had only 67% of its tonnage engaged in foreign trade.²²

As Salem commerce flourished, Salem town politics remained hotly contested between Republicans and Federalists. Party divisions solidified into social divisions. Salem maintained separate banks, separate dance halls, and separate ceremonial militias according to political

²¹ Among other Essex County towns, Newburyport had 12% of its tonnage engaged in the fishery; Marblehead 38%; Gloucester 53%; Ipswich 70%.

²² In 1807, the U.S. Customs Service required ships engaged in foreign trade to carry a certificate of registration and vessels for the domestic coasting trade or fishery to carry licenses or enrollments. All tonnage figures from *American State Papers*, Commerce & Navigation, Volume XIV, 733-34. All tonnage figures rounded to nearest ton. For Providence becoming a commercial satellite of New York, see Bolster, "The Impact of Jefferson's Embargo," 115.

loyalties.²³ An important division also occurred in the press, where the Federalists had long monopolized an editorial voice in the *Salem Gazette*. As one of their early efforts to formalize the town opposition, the Crowninshields and their political allies invested in a newspaper of their own, the *Impartial Register*, to answer the *Gazette* with a Republican voice in print.²⁴ In 1802 the district centered around Salem elected Crowninshield over Timothy Pickering to serve as a Representative to the U.S. Congress, and Salem also elected a full slate of Republican candidates as town Selectmen and Republicans to the state legislature. Crowninshield remained in Congress until his death in 1808, and during his tenure as a Congressman, he became a close ally of Thomas Jefferson and James Madison.

Crowninshield consistently voiced the idea that the United States should push back aggressively against any foreign attempts to limit the geography of American neutral trade. “Commerce should be free & unshackled. It can not prosper in chains,” he wrote to President Jefferson in 1803. He considered American trade through both the maritime world and the western territories as he envisioned the immense benefits the union would gain from expansive commerce. “We shall be a great commercial nation almost against our inclination & our trade must increase to a boundless extent if Treaties & laws are not made to bring us back to the former dependent state.”²⁵ His own trading experiences as a ship captain and merchant in Salem had informed him that Americans could ship and freight goods at a cheaper rate than their

²³ Gordon Dean Ross, “The Crowninshield Family in Business and Politics, 1790-1830” (Ph.D. diss., Claremont Graduate School and University Center, 1965), 70-75.

²⁴ David Hackett Fischer notes that the *Gazette* became decidedly more partisan after the *Register* began publication in 1800. Fischer, *The Revolution in American Conservatism*, 415; Goodman, *The Democratic Republicans of Massachusetts*, 115. The *Impartial Register* was renamed the *Essex Register* and, later, the *Salem Register*.

²⁵ Jacob Crowninshield to Thomas Jefferson, December 30, 1803, with Extract from “Anonymous,” Dated December 29, 1803, The Thomas Jefferson Papers, Library of Congress, Accessed November 30, 2014, <http://hdl.loc.gov/loc.mss/mtj.mtjbib013040>.

European competitors if political boundaries did not limit their commerce.²⁶ He approved of the Louisiana Purchase because of the opportunities it created for an unrestricted commerce on the Mississippi River and to New Orleans while American commerce elsewhere faced severe prohibitions. He was unconcerned with allowing France and Spain commercial access to the Mississippi because he believed Americans would out-compete these foreign traders. “We actually build cheaper, and can navigate cheaper than any other nation on the globe,” he stated in a speech in the House, “and of course we run no risk in contending with other vessels in the open market; and I flatter myself we shall soon see all foreign vessels driven from those ports by an honorable competition with them.” Approving the purchase would secure “the greatest advantages in our commerce.”²⁷

In 1805, a British admiralty court’s ruling in the case of the Salem ship *Essex* outlawed the broken voyage strategy that undergirded commercial expansion in both Salem and the union at large.²⁸ Under the broken voyage concept, as long as American ships landed their goods from foreign markets in a U.S. port, they could then re-export those same goods to another foreign market. When the *Essex* decision prohibited this circuitous form of trade, Salem Republicans responded with a memorial of protest to the federal government that outlined how British restrictions interfered with established merchant practice and with the rights of free trade under

²⁶ For the commercial advantages Americans earned through their ability to freight goods cheaper than their competitors, see James Fichter, *So Great A Proffit: How the East Indies Trade Transformed Anglo-American Capitalism* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2010).

²⁷ *Annals of Congress*, 8th Congress, 1st session, 458-459.

²⁸ The *Essex* decision involved a ship from Salem. For summary of original voyage plan see letter from Samuel Williams to owners of the *Essex*, June 22, 1805, printed in *Salem Gazette*, September 10, 1805 and *Salem Register*, September 12, 1805. For departure and crew list see *Essex* (Ship) in Salem, Mass. Crew Lists Index: 1799-1879. Joseph Orne of Salem was the ship’s master on this voyage. William Orne of the Salem was the owner. See A. Frank Hitchings, *Ships Registers of the District of Salem and Beverly, Massachusetts 1789- 1900* (Salem: Essex Institute, 1906), p. 54.

the law of nations. Since the American Revolution, the petition began, the commerce of the union had prospered:

[We] beheld with pleasure our commerce, at first feeble and confined, gradually expanding with awkward enterprise, until it has reached the farthest shores, and embraced the most inhospitable climes. This commerce, prosecuted with increasing vigor, and fostered by new aids, has continually brought to our ports the wealth of all nations, and by opening a liberal intercourse, added fresh zeal to foreign industry and domestic labor.²⁹

Americans were willing to trade according to agreed upon international rules of commerce, but the petition argued that the new British ruling discarded the customary practices and replaced them with uncertain and arbitrary rules that would make trade impossible for neutrals.

According to the ruling, British officials would now determine neutrality according to the intention of the shipper, but this was inimical to merchant practice, as these intentions “may be formed and fixed from one moment, and abandoned from change of circumstances at another.”

Determining what was the “accustomed” trade during peace was similarly impossible, the petition argued, because markets were regularly opening and closing or changing their imports and exports as circumstances arose. “If the obstructions be enforced, and no new channels be permitted,” the petition warned, “they must lead to an extinction of all neutral commerce.”³⁰

²⁹ *Memorial of the Inhabitants of the Town of Salem, in the State of Massachusetts*, January 30, 1806 (City of Washington: A. & G. Way, 1806), 4.

³⁰ *Memorial of the Inhabitants of the Town of Salem*, 12. The town committee in charge of drafting the memorial sent the completed petition to Jacob Crowninshield in Congress, where he presented it to the House and sent it to both the Senate and the President. Jacob Crowninshield to John Hathorne, Joseph Sprague, Joseph Story, Joseph White Jr., Benjamin Crowninshield, and Jonathan Mason, January 31, 1806, Joseph Story Papers, Clements Library, University of Michigan. In addition to Salem, 1805 memorials arrived in Congress from merchants in Baltimore, Philadelphia, New York. The New Haven, CT memorial came from that port’s Chamber of Commerce. All of these memorials were reprinted together in 1808. In the aftermath of the 1805 *Essex* decision, merchant groups in many U.S. cities petitioned Congress and President Jefferson for remedy, but Salem’s petition came from the inhabitants of the town and was debated and drafted as part of town meetings. See *Memorials of Sundry Merchants, Relative to the Infringements of Neutral Trade; with the Resolutions of the Senate Predicated Thereon* (Washington City: R.C. Weightman, 1808).

Jacob Crowninshield wrote back to Salem of his complete agreement with the petition's sentiments.³¹ "Would you trade with such a nation," Crowninshield rhetorically asked Joseph Story, one of the petition's authors? Crowninshield told Story that he did not advocate going to war with Great Britain, but he did think the United States should make a bold stand against these recent British actions. Great Britain would observe the response of the American government and the American public to the Essex decision. "I think they'll give way when they see we are determined to resist," he wrote, and therefore "all our measures however should be bottomed on the idea of their being suspended as soon as the evils & injuries complained of are redressed."³²

In Congress Crowninshield joined other Republicans in his continued call for the federal government to disavow and fight back against British efforts to confine and control American neutral trade.³³ The commerce carried out by American ships with non-British markets was critical to the national interest, Crowninshield argued, not only for the profit it earned in its own, but also because remittances of this trade helped offset American debts to British merchants. Americans, particularly those engaged in the re-export trade, traded circuitously in patterns that were decidedly not centered on London, and if the federal government allowed Great Britain to monopolize American commerce it would mean just such a major realignment of American commerce. This would benefit Britain at the expense of American merchants and open the door for further restrictions. He advocated retaliation through economic coercion like non-importation.³⁴ American merchants were skilled at finding alternative markets for the goods they needed, Crowninshield argued, and he counseled the House that "the industry and enterprise of

³¹ *Memorial of the Inhabitants of the Town of Salem*, 14.

³² Jacob Crowninshield to Joseph Story, January 28, 1806, Joseph Story Papers, Clements Library, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, Michigan.

³³ For another voice in Congress that mirrored Crowninshield, see the speech of Samuel Smith of Maryland to the Senate in March of 1806. *Annals of Congress*, 9th Cong., 1st Sess., 167-181.

³⁴ *Annals of Congress*, 9th Congress, 1st session, 553-554, 572, 757-760.

our merchants would soon obtain from other markets, a sufficient supply of every article, woolen goods, perhaps excepted.”³⁵ He did not seek war nor think that the non-importation measure would bring on a war, but he did believe that if Great Britain would not accede to American demands, the U.S. should not withhold war as an option.³⁶

By 1807, the situation for American sailors and neutral traders had become so dangerous due to seizures and impressments that many Americans felt the status quo was unworkable and more drastic measures were required against France and Britain.³⁷ The November 1806 Berlin decree by Napoleonic France outlawed trade with the British isles and declared that British goods could not be sold on the continent, and this measure spurred many French privateers to the sea lanes leading to numerous seizures of American ships. In January 1807, Great Britain retaliated by outlawing neutrals from engaging in trade between enemy ports and subjecting those ships that disobeyed to capture and condemnation.³⁸ Americans placed faith in James Monroe and William Pinkney to negotiate a treaty of commerce with Great Britain. But when the signed treaty arrived in the U.S. in March of 1807, although it narrowed the definition of contraband and made some concessions to aid the re-export trade, it lacked explicit protections for American sailors against impressments, it relinquished America’s right to economic

³⁵ *Annals of Congress*, 9th, 1st session, p. 553.

³⁶ *Annals of Congress*, 9th, 1st session, p. 552.

³⁷ For the state of the economy see Douglass C. North and Robert Paul Thomas, eds. *The Growth of the American Economy to 1860* (Columbia, 1968); For the enduring sectionalism in American politics see James Roger Sharp, *American Politics in the Early Republic: The New Nation in Crisis* (New Haven, 1993). For the history of American commerce at the challenges to neutral trade during this period see Anna Clauder, “American Commerce as Affected by the Wars of the French Revolution and Napoleon, 1793-1812” (Ph.D. diss., University of Pennsylvania, 1932). For a diplomatic history of this period see Bradford Perkins, *Prologue to War: England and the United States, 1805-1812* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1961); and J.C.A. Stagg, *Mr. Madison’s War: Politics, Diplomacy, and Warfare in the Early American Republic, 1783-1830* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983).

³⁸ Anna Clauder, *American commerce as affected by the wars of the French revolution and Napoleon, 1793-1812* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania, 19320, 92-97, 114-115. January 1807 order printed in *British and Foreign State Papers 1820-1821* (London: J. Harrison & Son, 1830), 468-469.

retaliation, and it put limitations on America's East Indies trade that were even more restrictive than those in the Jay Treaty.³⁹

The Chesapeake affair erupted in the summer of 1807, and in November 1807 Great Britain issued Orders in Council with new restrictions on neutral trade.⁴⁰ Under these Orders, neutrals could trade directly with enemy colonial ports from the United States, but if they wanted to trade to enemy ports on the continent, they would have to go through Great Britain first to receive papers and permission. Further, if they carried a certificate of origin as required by the French, they were liable to seizure by the British. To increase the role of England as a commercial entrepôt, the Orders also allowed neutral vessels to import goods into England that had previously only been allowed to come in British ships.⁴¹

As news of the British Orders reached American papers along with news that the French would increase enforcement of the Berlin decree, neutral trade as it had previously operated seemed impossible.⁴² From Mauritius, Boston trader William Fitz Paine observed: "the vindictive spirit of the belligerents have forced all commercial nations in the Atlantic & European Seas to renounce the commerce of Neutrality."⁴³ Merchant and former Massachusetts Benjamin Goodhue wrote from Salem, "I have long seen that things were working up very fast to

³⁹ See James Madison's response upon receiving the treaty in James Madison to James Monroe and William Pinkney, May 20, 1807, Department of State Instructions. In his instructions to Monroe and Pinkney on treaty negotiations, Madison had included as an enclosure remarks on this trade by Jacob Crowninshield. James Madison to James Monroe and William Pinkney, February 3, 1807, Gallard Hunt, *The Writings of James Madison* Volume 7 (New York: G. P. Putnam and Sons, 1908). See also John H. Reinohl, "Some Remarks on the American Trade: Jacob Crowninshield to James Madison 1806," in *The William and Mary Quarterly*, Vol. 16, No. 1 (Jan., 1959), 83-118. Donald R. Hickey, "The Monroe-Pinkney Treaty of 1806: A Reappraisal," in *The William and Mary Quarterly*, Vol. 44, No. 1 (Jan., 1987), p. 65-88; Timothy Pickering to Timothy Williams, December 2, 1807, TPP, MHS. In Salem, the Treaty was the talk of the town. *Essex Register*, March 19, 1807.

⁴⁰ After the Chesapeake Affair, a Salem town meeting formed a bi-partisan committee to draft a set of Resolves condemning the actions of the HMS Leopard and promising their support to the union. The town sent the Resolves to President Jefferson. Salem Town Meeting Minutes, July 10, 1807, Salem City Clerk, Salem, MA.

⁴¹ Clauder, *American Commerce*, 116.

⁴² For the timeline of the run up to the embargo see Perkins, *Prologue to War*, 140-183. Napoleon issued the Milan Decree on the December 17, 1807. Clauder, *American Commerce*, 127.

⁴³ Memo 6, Paine Family Papers, AAS.

that point as would put an end to our Neutrality and it appears to me we have almost come to it.”⁴⁴ Goodhue believed the best way forward was unity with Great Britain, but Republicans believed a strong statement in defense of neutral trade was the better alternative. Jefferson and his Republican allies pushed the Embargo Act through Congress in a matter of days, and on December 22, 1807, the government outlawed all trade with foreign powers. Enforcing such a measure would be a tall order for a nascent union that lacked strong economic cohesion and maintained large regional rifts in party politics. To succeed, the embargo required universal domestic compliance.⁴⁵

III

News of the embargo first appeared in the vigorous Salem press, on January 1, 1808.⁴⁶ The *Federalist Gazette* reported that the act had trapped 117 vessels in port, and as the ramifications of this law took hold over the town, both papers soon began prolonged defenses of their respective party platforms. Both parties worked to translate their politics into the language of commerce and provide counsel for future action. The *Gazette* protested that a Virginian president had unnecessarily thwarted New England commerce. Its editors argued that the Constitution had secured the freedom of individual choice to accept risks abroad, especially for Massachusetts salts, and they implicitly condoned smuggling as a form of protest. “The question now to be resolved in the mind of every individual,” the paper stated, “is, whether the citizen of a

⁴⁴ Benjamin Goodhue to Timothy Pickering, January 19, 1808, TPP, MHS.

⁴⁵ For the state of the economy see Douglass C. North and Robert Paul Thomas, eds. *The Growth of the American Economy to 1860* (Columbia, S.C.: University of South Carolina Press, 1968) and Peter Temin, ed, *Engines of Enterprise: An Economic History of New England* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2000); For political economy in Jefferson’s era see Nelson, *Liberty and Property: Political Economy and Policymaking in the New Nation, 1789-1812*; for the development of relevant Jeffersonian policies see Doron S. Ben-Atar, *The Origins of Jeffersonian Commercial Policy and Diplomacy* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, Inc., 1993) and John E. Crowley, *The Privileges of Independence: Neomercantilism and the American Revolution* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993).

⁴⁶ Instructions regarding the embargo reached the Salem Customs office on December 28, 1808. *Salem Gazette*, January 1, 1808.

government *theoretically* free, is obliged to remain silent and passive, and see his country whelmed in ruin, himself impoverished and sold without a single effort to check the torrent of destitution.”⁴⁷

In Massachusetts the embargo met a largely sea-based economy and the influence of the Federalist party that maintained strong opposition to the measure. The Jeffersonian revolution of 1800 had been slower to take hold in this New England state than elsewhere in the U.S. Massachusetts electors had gone for John Adams in 1800, but by 1804 they voted unanimously for Jefferson. By the eve of the embargo, the Federalists held a slim majority in the state legislature, though a Republican sat as Governor. The Federalists, in short, remained a powerful political force. History instilled the party with a direct lineage to the Revolution and the former days of New England prominence in government before national expansion threatened to erode this authority. For years, leading Federalists had warned New Englanders of the threat of the southern slave power, and with the embargo their warnings took on new purchase.

The Republican *Register's* first report of the embargo in January 1808 strongly approved of the measure. Only “national wisdom” manifested in a measure like the embargo, its editors warned, would save the United States from the commercial embarrassments it would otherwise face from continued trade.⁴⁸ The *Register* actively supported the President in his claim that the blockades and the seizures of American ships were challenges to national trading rights and commercial reciprocity, not issues particular to New England merchants. They justified the stoppage of foreign trade by citing the effect this would have abroad, and they argued that universal compliance by Americans would more quickly win the desired concessions from France and Great Britain. Honest merchants, they claimed, would be willing to observe these

⁴⁷ *Salem Gazette*, August 8, 1808.

⁴⁸ *Essex Register*, January 9, 1808.

restrictions. “The friends of our country are prepared to submit to a less rather than a greater evil, and whenever it shall appear that our interest will require it, Commerce will have all its freedom.”⁴⁹

As news of the embargo first permeated the town press, both parties looked for political leverage in the public’s reaction to the measure. Republicans and Federalists maintained opposing interests in public protests over the unemployment that ricocheted through the state’s maritime economy. When only one week after the embargo sailors marched to Republican Governor James Sullivan’s house in Boston carrying a flag at half-mast to demand food and work, Bentley worried that these actions would spread. “We must expect much more,” he recorded in his diary.⁵⁰ And similar outcries did erupt throughout the United States. Sailors in Philadelphia marched to their mayor’s residence to present him with a comparable list of demands; distressed residents in Augusta, Maine protested the act by burning ships in the harbor and attempting the same with the courthouse; in Charleston, South Carolina, sailors made the streets so unsafe with protests and crime that the city passed an evening curfew for these mariners. That summer, sailors in Newburyport, a seaport just north of Salem, fired on customs officers as the officials tried to search a vessel suspected of smuggling, and by winter rioters from the same town attempted to seize the property of the port’s Collector of Customs to protest the continued embargo.⁵¹

Federalists welcomed public protest. They had, in fact, encouraged the January 1808 gathering of sailors to march through Boston and excite opposition to the embargo. Benjamin

⁴⁹ *Essex Register*, September 27, 1808.

⁵⁰ Jennings, *The American Embargo*, 95; Bentley, *Diary*, 3:338.

⁵¹ Jennings, *The American Embargo*, 95-96; John Lambert, *Travels Through Canada, and the United States of North America, in the Years 1806, 1807, & 1808*, Vol. II (London: Baldwin, Cradock, and Joy, 1816), 161-162, 101-102; Sears, *Jefferson and the Embargo*, 170; Bentley, *Diary*, 3: 413.

Goodhue wrote to Pickering that Federalists in Salem considered the embargo “ridiculous” and born of “folly,” but that he was one of many who believed political good would eventually come of it. The embargo would bring “upon its authors the general execration of the people for it will so fully affect every class of society that they must be so severely scourged by its operation soon if they have any feeling at all.” Goodhue wrote that it was only through suffering that people would gain wisdom, and he believed the embargo “was calculated to produce that effect.”⁵² Massachusetts Federalists indeed grew frustrated in the immediate aftermath of the law’s passage at a perceived reluctance in the people to agitate for repeal. When the state legislature failed to be more aggressive against the embargo in February 1808, party leader George Cabot informed Pickering that this apathy would change when the public clamor grew louder. “The truth is,” he assured Pickering, “a little more time is required to show effects and produce turbulence.”⁵³ A writer in the *Salem Gazette* reported similar sentiments: “I say the time has come when men, who dread ruin to themselves and their children, and abhor a miserable state of degradation and vassalage, must do more than murmur in concern, and condole with one another on the wretchedness to which we are hastening.”⁵⁴

Pickering responded before the next election in February 1808 with a public letter to Governor Sullivan that he hoped would incite just such a reaction and bring in Federalist votes. He warned Sullivan of the “the imminent dangers of an unnecessary and ruinous war” with Great Britain that the embargo was bound to provoke. The measure had been passed “without sufficient motive, without a legitimate object,” and he accused the administration of failing to consult the commercial interests. While Republicans argued that British prohibitions on

⁵² Benjamin Goodhue to Timothy Pickering, January 19, 1808, TPP, MHS.

⁵³ George Cabot to Timothy Pickering, February 10, 1808, in Lodge, *Life and Letters of George Cabot*, 377.

⁵⁴ *Salem Gazette*, August 8, 1808.

American trade were a permanent and enduring interest of that nation against its American economic competitors, Pickering argued in this letter that British violations against American trade were instead temporary and due to the exigencies of war. He believed that friendly negotiations with Great Britain would resolve the conflict. The alternative course of embargo, Pickering argued, revealed the dangers of permitting men from the union's interior to determine national action on commercial matters. "The merchants and seamen could most accurately estimate the dangers of continuing their commercial operations; of which dangers indeed, the actual premiums of insurance were a satisfactory gauge....the exertions everywhere made, on the first rumour [sic] of the Embargo to dispatch them; demonstrate the President's dangers to be *imaginary* – to have been assumed." Now New England farms and ports would suffer, and in the weeks before state elections he warned, "nothing but the sense of the commercial state, clearly and emphatically expressed, will save them from ruin."⁵⁵

Maritime Americans could decide for themselves whether or not and where to risk their property at sea, Pickering claimed, and he argued that American merchants had concluded that British markets offered just this opportunity for "practical" and profitable wartime commerce. He acknowledged that the French and British decrees and Orders in Council put limits on American trade, but he claimed that the markets still open to Americans were nonetheless "considerable" and likely more extensive than those that would be open to Americans in a time of peace. "Even under the restraints of the orders of the British Government, retaliating the French imperial decree, very large portions of the world remain open to the commerce of the United States," he argued. "We may yet pursue our trade with the British dominions, in every

⁵⁵ Timothy Pickering, *A Letter from the Honorable Timothy Pickering A Senator of the United States, From the State of Massachusetts, Exhibiting to his Constituents A View of the Imminent Danger of an Unnecessary and Ruinous War. Addressed to His Excellency Governor James Sullivan, Governor of the Said State*, February 16, 1808 (Boston: Greenough and Stabbins, 1808).

part of the globe; with Africa, with China, and with the colonies of France, Spain, and Holland.”⁵⁶ If Americans sought more markets, he argued, they were opportunistically exploiting war to expand the bounds of American trade beyond what would likely be the limits of this commerce during peacetime. War had created of an unnatural American commerce that had overgrown its proper bounds, and Pickering argued that the embargo returned the bounds of American commerce to what they would have been during peace. The commerce that went beyond these bounds was worth sacrificing, he claimed, in order to keep the peace with Great Britain and gain the British navy as a “shield” against the French.⁵⁷ If, alternatively, the United States entered into war with Great Britain, Americans would lose these important markets for their produce and their main supplies of manufactured goods.⁵⁸

Pickering explained away the impressments of sailors off of American ships as mistakes made by British officers in their otherwise justified actions to retrieve “the services of [Britain’s] own subjects.” Those Americans that were wrongly removed, Pickering wrote, “are delivered up on duly authenticated proof.” Besides, he continued, he had corresponded with the nation’s “first merchant”, which readers throughout Massachusetts recognized as Salem’s William Gray, and Gray had not heard news of any American sailors being impressed off a merchant vessel since the Chesapeake affair of 1807.⁵⁹ Britain, Pickering concluded, had the means to destroy American commerce, but “has really done it no essential injury.”⁶⁰ The cause of the embargo rested with the President and the Cabinet, not with a foreign nation.

⁵⁶ Pickering, *A Letter from the Honorable Timothy Pickering*, 9.

⁵⁷ Pickering, *A Letter from the Honorable Timothy Pickering*, for peace time trade, 9-10. For the British navy as a shield, 8.

⁵⁸ Pickering, *A Letter from the Honorable Timothy Pickering*, 8.

⁵⁹ Pickering, *A Letter from the Honorable Timothy Pickering*, 9. See original letter in which Gray makes this statement, William Gray to Timothy Pickering, January 8, 1808, TPP, MHS.

⁶⁰ Pickering, *A Letter from the Honorable Timothy Pickering*, 12.

In early March, Pickering's letter appeared in print to the public, and Cabot hoped that its wide publication and dissemination would awaken the people. Cabot particularly approved of Pickering's claim that American trade would be greater if the embargo was lifted than it would be in peacetime. Peace would endure at sea, he wrote to Pickering, "when every nation monopolizes its own [colonial trade] according to the ancient usage."⁶¹ Five thousand copies of Pickering's letter were distributed throughout New England in addition to its printing in the newspapers, and Cabot believed this pamphlet would "rouse us from our apathy."⁶² Pickering agreed. "Something seems necessary to rouse the people from the lethargy which appears to have seized the public mind."⁶³ The Federalist *Salem Gazette* printed Pickering's letter in its entirety on March 11. The Republican *Register* did not print the letter but noted that the pamphlet was circulating through town.⁶⁴ Leverett Saltonstall, a young Federalist lawyer in Salem, read the letter and captured in his diary an observation that Federalist leaders hoped the broader public would share: "When a man in Mr. P's situation finds it necessary to lift up his voice in such a tone we may well be alarmed."⁶⁵

Salem Republicans *were* alarmed that Pickering's claims about British impressments and the legality of British restrictions on American commerce were apologies for British actions against American liberties. On March 12, the Republican *Essex Register* argued that the embargo "did not originate in our Cabinet, but in the state of things in Europe," contrary to Pickering's assertion. The paper hit back against the idea that in times of war Great Britain had the right to deny to neutrals commerce which was not open during times of peace.⁶⁶ "Britain has

⁶¹ George Cabot to Timothy Pickering, March 3, 1808, and March 9, 1808, in Lodge, 378-380.

⁶² George Cabot to Timothy Pickering, March 9, 1808, in Lodge, 380.

⁶³ Timothy Pickering to George Cabot, March 11, 1808, in Lodge, 382.

⁶⁴ *Salem Gazette*, March 11, 1808. *Essex Register*, March 12, 1808.

⁶⁵ Leverett Saltonstall diary entry, March 10, 1808, in Robert E. Moody, Jr., *The Saltonstall Papers, 1607-1815*, (Boston: Massachusetts Historical Society, 1974), 2:431.

⁶⁶ Pickering, *A Letter from the Honorable Timothy Pickering*, 14. This was the Rule of 1756.

claimed what she has no right to claim, to regulate neutral commerce,” the paper stated, and yet Pickering defended Britain’s unjust British trade violations. To submit to the restrictions of a foreign nation like this would injure commerce and sailors and make the United States seem ridiculous, the *Register* argued:

are we to announce to the world that all the national indignation we have expressed, was from the madness of folly- that we were not injured in our own waters or on the high seas- that our impressed seamen gave no cause of complaint- that we are content in any neutral rights- that we are content to take such terms as Britain could impose, and would not deny a moment to see whether, in the convulsions[sic] of the world, we might not quietly wait for future events, or bravely answer the calls of our country to assert her rights and be great in her liberty. We will trust our own government, not her enemies.⁶⁷

Pickering’s general integrity was another important matter as the Salem public considered how trustworthy he was as a political writer and leader, and the *Register* did bring up accusations of his reluctance to march on the British in April of 1775 and his dismissal from President John Adams’s cabinet as evidence of his “true character.” Pickering’s honor as a leader was not the critical issue, but rather the implications that the qualities of his character had on the policy claims he made.⁶⁸ Knowledge of Pickering’s character, the *Register* wrote, would help the public to determine the “degree of candor, enquiry, and impartiality” Pickering could employ, and whether or not the arguments Pickering offered about British actions and the proper course for American commercial policy should be trusted.⁶⁹

As printed copies of Pickering’s letter circulated through the Salem streets, both parties looked for political advantage from the pamphlet as electioneering heightened for the annual March town meeting, the first election in town since the start of the embargo. Election days

⁶⁷ *Essex Register*, March 12, 1808.

⁶⁸ While Joanne Freeman has discussed honor as the language through which early American politicians communicated with one another, as politicians worked to mobilize voters and communicate with voters over the embargo, honor was a subsidiary matter to the fundamental issues of political economy. Freeman, *Affairs of Honor*.

⁶⁹ *Essex Register*, March 19, 1808.

were busy days in Salem in this age of increased voter participation and a general democratization of the political process. Parties exerted great efforts to bring their members to the polls. By 1807, the structures of the Federalist and Republican parties in Salem were near mirror images of one another, with a system of caucuses, ward committees, and connections to district and state authorities.⁷⁰ Nearly 150 men worked on committees for each party, which equaled almost 20% of the average Federalist or Republican voting base.⁷¹ While the town parties still communicated with the state's central and district committees, Salem's size and prominence within Massachusetts gave town party functions greater weight and autonomy within the state machine. Town elections turned out nearly as many voters as gubernatorial elections. Elections in which nearly 1700 voters participated often saw candidates lose by no more than ten or twenty votes. Not surprisingly, both parties often accused the other of voter fraud.⁷² Still, the issues of the day kept Salem voters coming to the polls. Leverett Saltonstall wrote in his diary at the time, "Politics now furnish the general subjects of conversation....Public opinion must eventually control."⁷³

As William Bentley observed the bustle of politics in early March, he noted in his diary that the division between the parties "is so nearly equal that any changes are severely felt by both parties." The election of town officers in March 1808 quickly became a referendum on the national political economy. "Change must be begun with our Town Officers," Salem Federalists announced in the *Gazette*, as they called all men who supported "the blessing of a Free Commerce to a distressing and ruinous EMBARGO" to attend the town's March meeting and the

⁷⁰ For examples see *Salem Gazette*, March 12, 1808, March 25, 1808, and May 13, 1808; *Essex Register* April 2, 1808.

⁷¹ Town meeting records show that each party generally mobilized between 700 and 800 voters per election.

⁷² For examples see Bentley, *Diary*, 3:359, 362; *Salem Gazette*, May 24, 1808; *Essex Register*, March 12, 1808.

⁷³ Moody, *The Saltonstall Papers, 1607-1815*, 2: 431.

election of town Selectmen.⁷⁴ One Federalist writer argued in the *Gazette* that the stakes of this election season included a possible war with Great Britain and an alliance with Napoleon, the French “despot,” in addition to the destruction a continued embargo would bring to commerce; “Are you willing that your navigation should be destroyed; that your seamen should be reduced to beggars; that your merchants, with all others who depend on commerce, should be ruined; that our beloved country should be scourged till the blood gushes from every pore?” The writer aimed to mobilize Federalist voters. “Let us show this season what vigorous efforts in support of correct principles are capable of effecting.”⁷⁵

Salem Republicans, for their part, called their members together at Washington Hall in order to agree on the candidates they would support in the upcoming elections for town offices. The theme of the night was strengthening party unity so that the Republican vote would be solidified at the town meeting: “It is a subject of great consequence that Republicans should agree on the candidates they intend to support for the most important offices at the approaching Town Meeting. As the enemies of our Government calculate on success only by the supineness or divisions of the Republicans, it is hoped that they will one and all attend on this occasion.”⁷⁶ Five men earned unanimous approval at the Republican meeting to be candidates for town Selectmen. Three of them were current Selectmen, and all did business in maritime trades. John Hathorne imported English goods which he sold for retail and wholesale. Moses Townsend had served as a captain on Derby voyages to the Indian Ocean, and by 1808 he was himself a ship owner and President of the Union Fire & Marine Insurance company in Salem. Joseph Ropes was a former ship captain and Benjamin Ropes owned ships in the Caribbean trade. George

⁷⁴ *Salem Gazette*, March 11, 1808.

⁷⁵ *Salem Gazette*, March 15, 1808.

⁷⁶ *Essex Register*, March 9, 1808.

Johonnot had been a member of the Baltimore merchant house Johnson, Johonnot & Company before coming north to Salem where he owned one third of the stock of the Beverly Cotton Factory.⁷⁷ The party dispatched thirty-seven men with responsibility to distribute votes and promote the election of these candidates.⁷⁸

Salem was a politicized community, and since the days of the Jay Treaty debate and the Quasi-War with France, attendance at town meetings had been high and elections close. Disagreements over national policy invigorated town politics. Town meetings under the direction of the town Selectmen not only managed local matters like road construction or town schools, but also served as the official voice of the town in communications with other government bodies like the U.S. Congress or other Massachusetts Selectmen. These official town communications did not mean the town thought of one mind on matters of commercial policy or national government. Instead, parties saw great political advantage in maintaining a majority among town officers and among those in attendance at town meeting. For example, Federalist Benjamin Goodhue and Samuel Putnam claimed in their letters to Pickering that the town's 1806 memorial to Congress had been the product of Republican control of town meeting.⁷⁹ The majority not only picked town officers, but controlled meeting agendas. In addition to electing the men who would represent the town in the Massachusetts legislature, the majority decided how many state representatives the town would elect and then send to Boston,

⁷⁷ See Rhoda Dorsey, "The Conduct of Business in Baltimore, 1783-1785: As seen in the Letterbook of Johnson, Johonnot, & Co.," *Maryland Historical Magazine* 55 (September 1960): 230-42. George also engaged in the shipping business on his own in Baltimore in the 1790s. See *Federal Intelligencer* (Baltimore, MD), November 17, 1795. In 1800 he started a lumberyard for the shipping of lumber in Baltimore under the firm Small & Johonnot. See *Federal Gazette & Baltimore Daily*, March 10, 1800. Robert Lovett, "The Beverly Cotton Manufactory: Or Some New Light on an Early Cotton Mill," *Bulletin of the Business Historical Society* 26, No. 4 (Dec., 1952), 234.

⁷⁸ *Essex Register*, March 12, 1808.

⁷⁹ Samuel Putnam to Timothy Pickering, January 29, 1806, Benjamin Goodhue to Timothy Pickering, February 12, 1806, TPP, MHS.

which was an important matter since each party wanted to build their own ranks in the Massachusetts General Court or decrease the ranks of the other party.

One of the most important characteristics of the town meetings, especially during events like the embargo, was that participation was open to all male inhabitants over the age of twenty one who paid a poll tax and an additional town tax.⁸⁰ Given Salem's economic prosperity in the decades since the American Revolution, most male inhabitants were qualified to vote in town affairs and in elections for state and national offices.⁸¹ Town meetings, therefore, gave speakers at these gatherings one of the few chances in town affairs for such a large and assorted audience to hear their ideas or grievances. 2266 male residents paid a poll tax in Salem in 1808, and on March 14, 1808, nearly 1300 voters crowded into the Salem courthouse to attend town meeting.⁸²

The courthouse had been designed by Salem's Samuel McIntire and was one of the state's most impressive public buildings with its grand court hall and large Venetian window overlooking the North River, but the stateliness of the building did not match the stormy temper of the town meeting on this day in March.⁸³ Attendees filled all of the seats in the courtroom and the standing room along the aisles. Sailors, stuck in port due to the embargo, helped to fill out the crowd. The Federalists, Bentley wrote, "conceived that by the sound of Embargo, war &

⁸⁰ For qualifications to vote in town affairs see J.R. Pole, "Suffrage and Representation in Massachusetts: A Statistical Note," *The William and Mary Quarterly* 14, No. 4 (Oct., 1957), 562-563. Qualifications to vote in town affairs was different from those needed to vote in state and federal elections. Those elections required a minimum annual income or estate value. *A CONSTITUTION OR FRAME OF GOVERNMENT, Agreed upon by the Delegates of the People of the STATE OF MASSACHUSETTS-BAY*, printed in Oscar Handlin and Mary Handlin, eds. *The Popular Sources of Political Authority: Documents on the Massachusetts Constitution of 1780* (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1966), 441-472. For the election of state representatives in May 1807, qualified voters in Salem were male inhabitants who had resided in Salem for one year, who had an annual income of at least three pounds or an estate valued at sixty pounds or more. Salem Town Meeting Minutes, May 14, 1807, Salem City Clerk.

⁸¹ Banner, *To the Hartford Convention*, 269-270.

⁸² The payment of a poll tax to the state did not mean that male resident was qualified to vote. Salem Tax Valuation Book for 1808, Salem City Hall.

⁸³ See description of the Salem court house from 1790 in *The Massachusetts Magazine*, March 1790.

trade, & by Pickering's letter carefully published immediately before the election they would do much" with the sailor vote and the other attendees. Nominations for Moderator, the first order of business, proved a difficult task in this crowded and highly partisan environment. The Federalists offered William Gray's name, and the Republicans proposed John Hathorne. But after numerous clamours of protest as the town officers attempted to count votes, the meeting adjourned to the larger space of the Salem Tabernacle across the street. There, Hathorne won election as the Moderator, and the full slate of Republican candidates won re-election as Selectmen.⁸⁴ "There were many challenges between the "Federal patriots" and the "Democratic dogs," one observer wrote, "but I don't remember of any duels being fought."⁸⁵ Bentley and the *Essex Register* both claimed that the sailor vote had gone to the Republicans. Leverett Saltonstall had been in the audience as well and watched in amazement as those put out of work by the embargo voted to re-elect its supporters. "The day was warmly disputed, but the Demos were successful as usual," he recorded in his diary. "All hopes in this town fail. The poor Devils who are starving vote for the very men who have caused their suffering."⁸⁶

Spring was election season in Massachusetts, but Pickering's letter failed to revive the Federalist majority in Salem even a month later in the election for state senators and governor. By that time John Quincy Adams had penned and published a pro-embargo rebuttal addressed to the speaker of the Massachusetts Senate, Harrison Gray Otis, which warned against the "interposition" of the commercial states and called the embargo "a compromise and conciliation of the interests of all – of the whole nation."⁸⁷ The Federalists continued to make their argument

⁸⁴ *Salem Gazette*, March 16, 1808. Salem Town Meeting Minutes, March 14, 1808, Salem City Clerk.

⁸⁵ Anonymous letter, March 11, 1808, Miscellaneous Bound Manuscripts, Volume 1801-1808, MHS.

⁸⁶ Moody, *The Saltonstall Papers*, 2: 431-432. *Essex Register* (MA), March 16, 1808. Bentley, *Diary*, 3: 349.

⁸⁷ John Quincy Adams, *A Letter to the Hon. Harrison Gray Otis, A Member of the Senate of Massachusetts, on the Present State of Our National Affairs; With Remarks upon Mr. Pickering's Letter to the Governor of the Commonwealth*, March 31, 1808 (Boston: Oliver and Munroe, 1808).

about the immediate distress caused by the embargo, not the future effects it would have on American trade, and they praised the Pickering letter as “proof of his firmness, intelligence, and patriotism.”⁸⁸ Two days later the Republicans swept Salem with a larger majority of votes than they had achieved the year before.⁸⁹ William Bentley observed: “Great [electioneering] efforts have not shifted the balance but put on more weight.”⁹⁰ Richard Crowninshield reported to his brothers in Washington that the Federalist electioneering efforts in Salem had failed. “They did not gull 20 seamen.”⁹¹ Saltonstall was dismayed at his party’s loss but took some solace in the election of additional Federalist senators elsewhere in the state.⁹² Still, the Federalists were disappointed with the minimal gains in the General Court and in the Governorship which had remained Republican. George Cabot kept Pickering abreast of the state’s political developments following the publication of his pamphlet and wrote, “We are all disappointed....Although our people now begin to suffer very much from the embargo, yet it appears that other feelings are stronger, and other passions govern them....When shall we understand fully the nature of democratic theories? When shall we be satisfied that a government *altogether popular* in form tends irresistibly to place in power the levelers of public authority, order, and law?” And despite the election’s outcome, he still believed, “The people will not permit their own passions, their own favorite objects to be made to give place to the general good.”⁹³ Salem’s Republican majority endured.

IV

⁸⁸ *Salem Federal Meeting*, March 25, 1808, Early American Imprints.

⁸⁹ Salem Town Meeting Minutes, April 1, 1808. The Federalist appeal to the public by highlighting the immediate distresses to trade under the embargo also appeared in a Federalist pamphlet addressed to merchants, mechanics, and sailors prior to the election for state representatives. *To the Merchants, Seamen, and Mechanicks, of all Parties*, 1808 (Early American imprints. Second series ; no. 16325).

⁹⁰ Bentley, *Diary*, 3: 353.

⁹¹ Richard Crowninshield to Jacob Crowninshield, April 6, 1808. Crowninshield Papers, PEM.

⁹² Moody, *The Saltonstall Papers*, 2:438; Bentley, *Diary*, 3: 358.

⁹³ George Cabot to Timothy Pickering, April 5, 1808 and April 9, 1808, in Lodge, *Life and Letters*, 391.

Politics continued in Salem beyond elections. Throughout the embargo Salem political parties put forward speeches and spectacles that politicized local events, but the messages of this political culture or politics of the street were never disconnected from the more policy-oriented disagreements over political economy that also consumed the town and informed debate.⁹⁴ Federalist celebrations of tradition, of elite town fathers, and of deferring to New England's deep commercial wisdom on government trade policy reinforced their stated policy goals of protecting the routes of American commerce through conciliation with Great Britain. But this ran counter to Republican ideas about securing neutral rights to the sea and the free expansion of future commerce, ideas that Republicans promoted with public pronouncements about the benefits that a national embargo would have to all Americans.

On May 24, 1808, the Salem Federalists welcomed Senator Timothy Pickering back to his home with a grand and very public parade through the towns of Essex County. An order of 120 horsemen led the procession as spectators gathered along the streets to see Pickering's carriage pass by. Salem resident Elizabeth Dabney, an eager observer of the day's events, wrote to a friend that Pickering's cavalcade "far exceeded" her expectations.⁹⁵ At the Salem harbor, the procession observed a ship's salute before turning into the estate of General Elias Hasket Derby, Jr., a Federalist. The *Gazette's* report of this encounter at the Derby mansion, as well as the evening's culminating feast at the Concert Hall, captured the pageantry of this "feast of reason" and "flow of federalism:"

The escort opened and faced inward, forming an extensive line, through which the carriage passed to the General's door, where the Colonel alighted, and was welcomed

⁹⁴ For the role of public oratory and celebration in early American politics see David Waldstreicher, *In the Midst of Perpetual Fetes: The Making of American Nationalism, 1776-1820* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1997); Simon Newman, *Parades and the Politics of the Street: Festive Culture in the Early American Republic* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania, 1999).

⁹⁵ Elizabeth G. Dabney to Charlotte Verstelle, May 30, 1808, Verstelle Family Papers, Manuscripts and Archives, Yale University Library, New Haven, Connecticut.

with a favorite air from an excellent band of music....and a large number of gentlemen assembled to receive him. After some time spent in mutual congratulations, in this delightful mansion, the company proceeded to Concert Hall, and here a most elegant and sumptuous dinner was prepared in a superior style, of which upwards of 150 people took part.⁹⁶

At the Concert Hall, a distinguished guest list of state Senators and Salem party leaders offered toasts – to the Constitution, to Massachusetts, to the memory of Washington, to the preeminence of commerce, and to themselves – calling for an end to the embargo.⁹⁷

The Fourth of July celebrations a few weeks later in Salem provided another opportunity for the parties to court the public. In the morning, residents processed through Salem with music and a military escort, which preceded an afternoon of cannon salutes, militia parades, and political speeches. The Federalist planners behind this municipal spectacle tapped Leverett Saltonstall to deliver the day's main oration, and the young lawyer pleased his fellow party members in the audience with a speech that eschewed political moderation for a bold and "very federal" focus. "An oration of doubtful politics would please nobody in Salem," Saltonstall wrote to his brother.⁹⁸ At the Federalist dinner that followed, the party acknowledged Saltonstall's spirit and patriotism. Republicans spread the rumor that the Federalists divided their dinner attendants into three classes according to their level of financial contribution. Bentley wrote that "it gave an opportunity to laugh at such men as felt small in the last class. The populace called it Nobles, gentry, and commons."⁹⁹ Through the evening the Federalist

⁹⁶ *Salem Gazette*, May 27, 1808. Reports in the *Salem Register* did not refute the *Gazette's* description of these events, but they added that an effigy of Pickering hung from a mast in Salem harbor as the escort processed by. *Salem Register*, May 25, 1808.

⁹⁷ *Salem Gazette*, May 27, 1808.

⁹⁸ For the day's events including party dinners see *Salem Gazette*, July 5, 1808, *Essex Register*, July 6, 1808; See also *Fourth of July Arrangements for the Federal Celebration* (Broadside), 1808; For speech description and reactions see L. Saltonstall to Nathaniel Saltonstall, July 9, 1808, and L. Saltonstall to Nathaniel Saltonstall, Jr., July 18, 1808, both in Moody, *The Saltonstall Papers*, 447-448.

⁹⁹ *Salem Gazette*, July 5, 1808; Bentley, *Diary*, 3: 373.

crowd engaged in toasts for the occasion, including a particular round to Massachusetts: “May New England *honesty* prove a match for Virginia *policy*.”¹⁰⁰

Republicans retired to their own dinner across town after the conclusion of public celebrations. There they read the Declaration of Independence and enjoyed a turtle feast with accompanying cannon salutes. The Republican toasts cast suspicion on the narrow political interests promoted by their Federalist counterparts across town. To the state’s Republican Governor and Lieutenant Governor they pledged, “We confide in their firmness and patriotism, and trust they will be a bulwark to guard the rights of the people.” To the state’s Federalist legislature, “May they protect, not usurp the privileges of their Constituents.” To Pickering and his allies, “May the people be aware they have internal enemies.”¹⁰¹

The public appetite for debate over the embargo indeed grew ferocious. In September, the federal district court for Massachusetts held its biannual session in Salem, and trials for embargo violations excited great interest throughout town. The Salem court began proceedings for *United States v. Brigantine William*, a suit from the nearby Marblehead Customs district. Salem residents thronged the courthouse to hear the case that would ultimately determine the constitutionality of the embargo as national policy, a “question in which the interests of the people of this town and country are materially involved,” wrote the *Salem Gazette*.¹⁰² Counsel for the claimant included preeminent Salem lawyer William Prescott with assistance from Federalist Christopher Gore, who would soon be elected as Governor of Massachusetts; for the U.S. government stood District Attorney George Blake and Salem native Joseph Story, a state

¹⁰⁰ Leverett Saltonstall to Nathaniel Saltonstall, July 9, 1808, and Leverett Saltonstall to Nathaniel Saltonstall, Jr., July 18, 1808, in Robert E. Moody, Jr., *The Saltonstall Papers*, 2: 447-448. Bentley, 3: 373. Italics in original. *Salem Gazette* (MA), July 5, 1808. *Essex Register* (MA), July 6, 1808.

¹⁰¹ *Salem Register* (MA), July 6, 1808; Bentley, *Diary*, 3: 370.

¹⁰² *Salem Gazette* (MA), September 16, 1808.

representative and future justice of the U.S. Supreme Court. As crowds filled the hall, lawyers for both sides directed their arguments towards this eager public audience. The trial lasted for four days, during which time newspapers across the United States took notice. After a week of deliberations, Judge John Davis upheld the constitutionality of the embargo on the grounds that the Congress had the sovereign authority to regulate American commerce with foreign nations. Salem printers soon offered for sale a pamphlet of the court's ruling and the government's case presented at trial. Republican papers took note that Davis was a known Federalist who now defended the legality of the embargo. Salem Federalists meanwhile gathered in Topsfield with their Essex County compatriots where the resulting *Essex Resolutions* sought redress from the Massachusetts state government, "whom the people have placed as sentinels to guard our rights and privileges," and stated that if the U.S. Constitution now sanctioned a measure like the embargo, the Constitution must be amended.¹⁰³

V

If the leading Salem Republicans asked their community to adhere to the embargo, their own business practices would have to follow suit. The ways in which Salem merchants handled themselves in business were open to public scrutiny in this maritime community, and business practice was political. Ship departures, arrivals, and general news filled the pages of the Salem papers, and the Customs books were open to the public. Salem residents could observe activity on the town's many wharfs, and they could see if ships left port. News travelled quickly in

¹⁰³ *Salem Gazette* (MA), October 14, 1808. Bentley, 3: 384-5. *Salem Gazette* (MA), September 23, 1808. Charles Warren, *The Supreme Court in United States History* (3 vols., Boston: Little, Brown, and Company, 1922), 1: 343-349. *Independent Chronicle* (MA), October 6, 1808. Lucius Manlius Sargent, *Reminiscences of Samuel Dexter* (Boston: Henry W. Dutton & Son, 1857), 59-61. Francis Blake, *An Examination of the Constitutionality of the Embargo Laws; Comprising a View of the Arguments on that Question Before the Honorable John Davis, Esquire, Judge of the District Court for Massachusetts, in the Case of the United States vs. Brigantine William Tried and Determined, at Salem (Mass.)* (Worcester, 1808). D. Kurt Graham shows how federal courts of this era were very much enmeshed in the localities they served. D. Kurt Graham, *To Bring Law Home: The Federal Judiciary in Early National Rhode Island* (DeKalb, IL: Northern Illinois University Press, 2010), 63.

Salem's interconnected commercial economy. Salem residents knew where vessels were headed and when they were absent.¹⁰⁴

Uncertainty about the risks and ramifications of war and seizure prior to the embargo had provided merchants with tough choices about the continuance of their trade. Ships arriving from foreign waters brought news of seizures and blockades abroad, although Bentley noted that captains arriving from the same foreign ports often told different tales depending on the political allegiance of the owner to whom they reported.¹⁰⁵ While the Federalists condemned the seizures of American vessels, they continued to proclaim the right of American merchants to choose the level of risk they would accept for the voyages they pursued. Accordingly, then, when Bentley reported that the merchants of Salem remained under a self-imposed embargo during the months before the law's official implementation, his observations did not apply as stringently to Salem ships owned by Federalist merchants. During the final two months before the onset of the embargo, only one out of the twenty-one ships cleared for the foreign trade from the Customs District of Salem and Beverly was owned by a Republican.¹⁰⁶

¹⁰⁴ For a detailed look at the workings of a contemporary trading community see Sheryllyne Haggerty's study of Philadelphia in *The British-Atlantic Trading Community, 1760-1810: Men, Women and the Distribution of Goods* (Boston: Brill, 2006).

¹⁰⁵ Bentley, *Diary*, 3: 320, 328.

¹⁰⁶ Jacob Crowninshield told Caesar Rodney that after the Chesapeake affair, Salem ships were under a voluntary embargo due because of the high risk of trade. Jacob Crowninshield to Caesar Rodney, August 3, 1807, Papers of Thomas Jefferson, Library of Congress. For a list of foreign clearances from Salem see Foreign Entrances and Clearances of Foreign and American Vessels, 1805-1809, RG 36, District of Salem and Beverly, Volume 32, NARA-Waltham. I determined vessel ownership for this period from a variety of sources. Salem newspapers contain significant information on ship movements and masters, but not always on their owners. James Duncan Phillips used the *Salem Gazette* to compile his ownership information in "Who Owned the Salem Vessels in 1810," *Essex Institute Historical Collections* Volume LXXXIII, no. 1 (Jan 1947), 1-13. Phillips's table, therefore, covers a later period than the embargo and also does not include the entire fleet. A. Frank Hitchings consulted the Customs records from Salem to compile *Ships Registers of the District of Salem and Beverly Massachusetts, 1789-1900* (Salem: The Essex Institute, 1906). While Hitchings's work is a rich and user-friendly source for ownership information, it is not complete and should be used in conjunction with additional sources to determine ownership at particular dates. Ship manifests in the Customs Records at NARA-Waltham also provide ownership information. Local newspapers from 1807-1809 provide information on the partisan loyalties of Salem residents through published lists of party committee members and meeting attendees.

When the embargo took hold over trade by December 1807, merchants and Customs officers hastened to find potential loopholes in the law in order to better evade or enforce the measure. Less than a week after the law's passage, Jacob Crowninshield received word at Washington that merchants were already switching their ships to domestic coasting licenses to exploit language in the original act that limited violation penalties to vessels registered for the foreign trade. He feared that coasting ships would slip from port and sail for foreign harbors free from penalty if caught, and he offered a supplement that would include these coasting vessels under the law's purview. At the same time he supported additional legal incentives to keep ships in port. To maintain a lucrative profit margin, many merchants relied on a drawback system through which they received a duty refund on goods imported to the U.S. and then re-exported within twelve months. Crowninshield pushed through a supplement that extended this time restriction so that merchants would not lose their drawbacks on the merchandise already imported if the embargo stretched past a year. The measures passed into law on January 2, 1808.¹⁰⁷

In Washington, Jacob Crowninshield's efforts to keep ships in port met challenges from other merchants eager to continue trade. On February 22, 1808, Salem's John and Samuel Derby petitioned the U.S. Congress for permission to send out a ship in ballast from Salem to retrieve their property in Sierra Leone.¹⁰⁸ Congress granted them this allowance, and in March Congress passed an embargo amendment that allowed merchants with similar claims to send ships in ballast to retrieve their property from foreign ports if they paid a heavy bond and obtained direct permission from the President.¹⁰⁹ The Salem Federalists were less eager than their Republican

¹⁰⁷ *Annals of Congress*, 10th Cong., 1st Sess., 1240-1244, 1271.

¹⁰⁸ *U.S. House Journal*, 1808. 10th Cong., 2nd Sess., February 22.

¹⁰⁹ Spears, 66, 74.

opponents to keep their ships in port once the Congress passed this March amendment. The trade stoppage created a scarcity of goods, and traders could earn top prices for any imports they could manage. Federalist leader George Cabot calculated that if a ship owner succeeded in returning only one out of three ships to port without capture abroad he would reap a hefty profit.¹¹⁰ Salem merchants received news from their foreign correspondents that the goods Americans shipped were fetching high prices abroad.¹¹¹ Further, many had argued that the risks were not as severe as the Republicans claimed. After the passage of the new amendment, twenty-two ships sailed with permission from the Customs district of Salem and Beverly, and only four of them were owned, wholly or in partnership, by Republicans. These departures were conspicuous. Bentley wrote that they created some “uneasiness” in town, since “no person believes” that the property these ships left to retrieve actually existed.¹¹² When a ship owned by town Selectmen Republican Benjamin Ropes tried to depart with a permission, he drew criticism in the press and received no support from the *Register*.¹¹³

To the Republicans in Salem, these allowances weakened the chances for the embargo’s success by providing merchants with opportunities to engage in extralegal trade while at sea. Taking advantage of loopholes, they believed, put cracks in the unity and resolve they thought necessary for the embargo to win concessions from France or Great Britain. At a town meeting merchant William Gray proclaimed:

I have permission to send a vessel to Russia for property I have left there, where the prospect is good for making a great voyage- but I dare not, while the decrees and orders of council exist, risk even the empty vessel....I sincerely believe that if we had submitted to the embargo with unanimity and cheerfulness and borne the inconvenience of it with patience, and had placed a just confidence in the government of our own choice, and not

¹¹⁰ Wolford, “Democratic-Republican Reaction in Massachusetts to the Embargo of 1807,” 46.

¹¹¹ For one example see Thomas & Adrian Cremer (Rotterdam) to John Derby, April 7, 1808, Derby Family Papers, PEM.

¹¹² Bentley, *Diary*, 3: 373.

¹¹³ *Salem Gazette*, September 16, 1808.

by our divisions encouraged the belligerents to believe that we were a divided people, that before this day the orders in council and decrees would have been removed, and we should have enjoyed a free commerce.¹¹⁴

Further, government clearances under these allowances gave implicit sanction to the terms of trade Republicans felt were unacceptable to an independent neutral nation. Gray stated, “under the conditions prevailing in Europe, an honest ship master could not carry on his business, and, therefore, the vessels of all honest men had better be tied up at the wharves.”¹¹⁵

Gray’s statement about the greater destruction American ships faced at sea than at home under the embargo was a common claim by Republicans, yet at the start of the embargo Gray had been a loyal Federalist. Born in Lynn, Gray had moved to Salem as a young boy in the early 1760s, when Gray was only twelve or thirteen, he served as an apprentice to Salem’s wealthiest merchant Samuel Gardner. After Gardner’s death, Gray became a clerk in Richard Derby’s counting house and shared a house with Derby’s son.¹¹⁶ At the age of twenty eight, never having gone to sea, Gray ventured out in his own mercantile business in Salem.¹¹⁷ During the American Revolution, he owned several vessels that captured British ships under letters of marque as they also spread Gray’s trade to new markets.¹¹⁸ Since 1783, Gray had served as a member of the Massachusetts State Convention where he voted in favor of the federal constitution, a town Selectmen, a Representative and Senator in the Massachusetts General Court, and as a regular chairman of Federalist party meetings in Salem and Essex County.¹¹⁹ Gray was the first president of the Essex Bank in Salem when it opened in 1792, and by that same year his

¹¹⁴ *Essex Register*, October 29, 1808.

¹¹⁵ Quote appears in Edward Channing, *The American Nation: A History, Volume 12, The Jeffersonian System, 1801-1811* (New York: Harper & Brothers Publishers, 1906), 214; also O.T. Howe, *The Autobiography of Capt. Zachary G. Lamson, 1797-1814* (Boston: W.B. Clarke & Company, 1908), 36.

¹¹⁶ Edward Gray, *William Gray of Salem, Massachusetts: A Biographical Sketch by Edward Gray with Portraits and other Illustrations* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1914), 5.

¹¹⁷ Gray, *William Gray of Salem*, 4.

¹¹⁸ Gray, *William Gray of Salem*, 7-8.

¹¹⁹ Gray, *William Gray of Salem*, 11-12.

merchant business was already engaged in trade to Europe, to the Indian Ocean, and to China.¹²⁰

In the early 1800s, Gray's vessels departed from Salem, Boston, and New York, and he owned a quarter of the Salem ships engaged in foreign commerce.¹²¹ Gray was a quiet man with a reputation for strict discipline and industriousness in his business. In 1807, his ships traded across the globe in Europe, Africa, and Asia.

Gray broke from the Salem Federalists and made a public declaration of his support for the embargo in a speech in the Massachusetts Senate in June 1808. His defection was newsworthy in Salem and throughout the union since at the time Gray was considered to own more ships than any other merchant in the United States.¹²² Federalists quickly went to work trying to weaken Gray's public image as a trusted source for advice on the nation's commercial policy. In August, a piece appeared in the Federalist *Gazette* under the headline "Why does Mr. Gray approve of the Embargo?" The author charged Gray with supporting the embargo out of selfish reasons while his fellow countrymen suffered. Gray had property in France, the piece stated, so "he is of course willing to see any temporary policy of the government in a favorable light if it will prevent a quarrel with the French Emperor." Even worse, the writer continued, was Gray's ability to profit off the embargo, particularly by warehousing his goods and then selling them to desperate consumers in need as prices rose. "Who that reflects on these things can wonder that Mr. Gray likes the Embargo."¹²³

Gray responded to the *Gazette* the next week claiming his stance on the embargo was patriotic while also in his best long-term business interest. Gray wrote that even though his

¹²⁰ Gray, *William Gray of Salem*, 12-13.

¹²¹ Gray, *William Gray of Salem*, 33, 38.

¹²² The *Gazette* letter about Gray's approval of the embargo was reprinted in newspapers throughout the United States. When Salem's Thomas Wren Ward went on a journey through New England in 1808 he found "Mr. William Gray's opinions are on everybody's tongues." Thomas Wren Ward to William Ward, September 12, 1808, Thomas Wren Ward Papers, MHS.

¹²³ *Salem Gazette*, August 5, 1808.

estate had suffered a ten percent loss over the first eight months of the embargo, he felt the measure necessary against French and British restrictions that made foreign waters too dangerous for American ships. Great Britain required neutrals wishing to trade to continental Europe to stop first in Britain for a license, and Gray asked “Is there an independent American who would submit to such imposition?” Meanwhile, the French decrees made capture almost certain for American ships, and in the markets that remained free of any restrictions there was not enough demand for American goods to pay the cost of the voyage. He stated emphatically that he was not sympathetic to France: “Had I perceived symptoms of submission to that, or any other foreign power,” he wrote, “sooner than advocate such measures, I would devote my whole prosperity for the support of the Independence of the United States.”¹²⁴

The *Register* was quick to embrace and support Gray, while Federal papers continued paint him as opportunistic and self-serving. Gray never identified himself with the Republicans in Salem during the course of the embargo, but his claims about the impossibility of safe neutral trade under the current foreign restrictions and the future benefits to Salem commerce that the embargo was intended to secure were ideas that Republicans regularly promoted. “Let us for a moment suppose that [the embargo] is removed,” *Register* editors mused in September 1808. “All hands are busy for sea; the harbor is soon cleared of the shipping; the sailors from home. We soon hear of them in foreign ports, condemned, stripped, destitute, and uncertain of a return to their native shores...No returns are made to many now flourishing merchants.” Submitting to the embargo was the lesser evil, they claimed, when the future freedom of trade was at stake.¹²⁵

The idea that the embargo was a necessary measure to safeguard American channels of neutral trade existed in Salem society beyond the editors of the *Register*, or Jacob Crowninshield,

¹²⁴ *Salem Gazette*, August 12, 1808; *Salem Register*, August 13, 1808.

¹²⁵ *Essex Register* (MA), January 9, 1808. *Essex Register* (MA), September 27, 1808.

or the eminent William Gray. In the fall of 1808, William Ward, a ship captain in Salem who had sailed throughout the Indian Ocean and to China, wrote to his brother-in-law, Ward Chipman, that “5/8 of all the persons engaged in commerce in this towns approve of the Embargo—a good criterion to judge from—they are all well acquainted with Commerce, & trade on as Clear a Capital—& are as well able to judge the true interests of this country as those of any place in the Union.” Ward said that in Salem while one party had focused on the evils of the embargo and not the evils that had brought on the embargo, as a trader he realized that under the existing French and British restrictions, “there is no safety for us.” Salem vessels that had been forced to return home with their original cargoes, and Ward wished for redress against these violations of neutral trade:

the British Ministers....think we shall consent to ask their permission where we shall trade, wither we shall sell a cwt of tobacco, a bag of wool, a cask of gin or a tub of fish to a French^m, a Dane, a Swede or Russian, but have permitted us to call into England & there pay duty for their permission on pain of confiscation. Is there an honest man in the world who has so contemptible on opinion of the people of the United States as to think they will acquiesce? No, the more unjust the powers are—the more thoroughly will our people be united. They may differ among themselves for local purposes, but they will be united whenever the Gover^m chuses to act on great national questions. This country will not speedily be a divided one, for this plain reason that Great Britain & France have both acted so wickedly & unjustly with regard to it that every honest man will more & more prize his own government, rather than to be a further in the power of Great Britain or France than we are.

He approved of the embargo: “It was high time for this Government to make a stand—she has made it.... The laws of Nations as understood by all the powers in Europe must govern for the future.”¹²⁶

¹²⁶ William Ward to Ward Chipman, 1808, Thomas Wren Ward Papers, MHS.

The fate of Salem voyages amid these French and British restrictions were also public knowledge, and the news was not good.¹²⁷ Of the eight Salem vessels that cleared for Europe in the month before the embargo, not one had returned in safety without being seized or charged immense trading fees by foreign powers.¹²⁸ In September, word reached Massachusetts that William Gray's ship *Vengeance* had been condemned under the Milan Decree and the Salem brig *Hipsia & Jane* had been similarly seized in Bordeaux and was awaiting trial.¹²⁹ Federalists still argued that some trade was better than no trade and pointed to those vessels which had sailed from Salem just prior to the embargo for the West Indies and South America, all of which had returned safely and without interruption. Outside of European markets, they claimed, Great Britain and France did not restrict Americans from trading "to the other three quarters of the globe."¹³⁰

Salem's merchant activity provoked notice in the halls of Congress. In November 1808, George Troup, a Republican Representative from Georgia, engaged Massachusetts Representative Josiah Quincy, a Federalist, in a debate on the response of American merchants to the embargo. Excerpts of Troup's speech printed in Salem papers included his indictment of Massachusetts merchants who had abandoned the national interest by violating the embargo. These merchants, he stated, stood in contrast to others who had made a "noble sacrifice of private interest to public weal." In praising these nationally-minded merchants, Troup made specific reference to the Crowninshields and the Grays of Salem. Merchants of this sort, the

¹²⁷ The shipping news in the Salem newspapers during this period often included lengthy brought back in returning ships of American vessels seized or turned away from ports by French or British ships. See for example *Salem Gazette*, March 15, 1808.

¹²⁸ *Salem Gazette*, August 12, 1808; *Essex Register*, August 27, 1808.

¹²⁹ *Boston Commercial Gazette*, September 5, 1808.

¹³⁰ *Salem Gazette*, September 2, 1808.

“bona fide” merchants, he claimed, would not trade when the American interest was under attack, even without the embargo.¹³¹

VI

Political leverage for Republicans relied on the embargo’s success, and the embargo’s success, in turn, relied on uniform compliance within American maritime communities. “Though [the embargo] may occasion some embarrassment and distress,” the Essex County Republicans argued in October 1808, “true patriotism requires us to maintain our national rights against all foreign aggressions, and not by murmurs and complaints for party purposes, to sacrifice our dearest privileges.”¹³² Americans mariners, however, were people accustomed to moving with ease across political boundaries and around the maritime world. Their adherence to the embargo was critical to the measure’s success, and they became an important focus of political mobilization. In the House, Jacob Crowninshield considered how the embargo should effect New England fishermen. Although unwilling to explicitly exempt them from the embargo with an amendment, Crowninshield argued that they should be allowed to continue their work and bring their catch back to the U.S. after submitting a heavy bond to the Collector of Customs. To do otherwise, he claimed, would oblige these citizens to starve on the streets and would encourage the public belief that Congress had acted unjustly. Nathaniel Macon, a Republican from North Carolina, followed: what was the difference between unemployed fishermen and

¹³¹ *Salem Gazette*, January 7, 1809. *Annals of Congress*, 10th Cong., 2nd sess., 606. Joseph Story also wrote about the notice Salem merchants received in Washington. See Joseph Story to Joseph White, Jr. in William Story, *Life and Letters of Joseph Story* (Boston: Charles C. Little and James Brown, 1851), 173.

¹³² Essex County Republican Convention Resolutions, published in *Essex Register*, October 12, 1808.

unemployed sailors? If the House allowed the fishing trade to continue and not the carrying trade, what would stop the sailors from seeking employment abroad?¹³³

Charity in Salem provided this opening for the town's leaders to mitigate reactions to the crisis or, if they wished, highlight the distress the measure was causing to the community. Here, the crisis of national political economy reached deep into the Salem society and daily life. "Charity was never more active in Salem," claimed Bentley during the embargo.¹³⁴ Some charity was bipartisan, such as aid provided by the Salem East India Marine Society, a group whose membership was limited to ship captains and officers who had sailed around the Cape of Good Hope or Cape Horn, and bylaws stated "politics shall not on any occasion be introduced."¹³⁵ In January 1809, the Society held a Grand Concert at its Museum Hall. Proceeds went to aid the town's young masters and mates.¹³⁶ But the masters and mates made up only a small percentage of Salem's mariners, and the larger initiatives involved aid to Salem's broader community of unemployed residents. People in Salem did suffer economic hardship during the embargo, especially into the winter period. In the New England town tradition especially, residents believed it a chief duty of the town as a corporate body to care for those residents in need. At the same time, charity offered a chance to make a statement about the effects of the embargo on the American people; charity could either be a sign that Americans would help each other willingly endure until trade concessions were won, or it could be a sign of the embargo's devastation to the most vulnerable Americans.

To Salem Republicans, signs of charity were evidence that Americans were safer at home during the embargo than they would be at sea. The *Register* routinely published stories of

¹³³ *Annals of Congress*, 10th Cong., 1st Sess., 1245, 1249.

¹³⁴ Bentley, *Diary*, 3: 413.

¹³⁵ *Bye-Laws and Regulations of the Salem East-India Marine Society* (Salem: Pool & Palfray, 1808), 15.

¹³⁶ *Salem Gazette*, January 20, 1809; *Essex Register*, January 21, 1809.

charitable action in other parts of the union as a positive sign that hardship was shared across the nation, but that those in need were receiving the help they needed to endure the embargo as long as necessary.¹³⁷ One townsman wrote to the *Register* that while it was true sailors had been put out of work by the embargo, they would not starve and would not suffer as they would if sailing under risk of seizure. “For if they are not able to support themselves,” the author argued, “we know their respective towns must support them. Therefore they cannot even think of the inconvenience of this, when contrasted with the pains, remorse, and torture of being exposed and subjected on the high seas to the caprice and tyranny of a few petty British officers.”¹³⁸

Salem Republicans served as town Selectmen and as Overseers of the Poor, and from these offices they managed the distribution of town support to those in need. By the close of 1808, the town’s Republican Selectmen had doubled funds to support the poor, the only significant increase in the municipal budget that year and a move that made this expense almost half of the town’s total expenditures. This money funded food distribution in the town as well as the Salem Charity House, a public house that provided shelter and medical care to needy Salem residents or itinerants.¹³⁹ William Gray instructed the Overseers to draw on him as they needed to help purchase food for the needy in town, and he further donated two weekly barrels of flour “and promises one a day to the poor if necessity so require.” Republicans Joseph White and George Crowninshield made an annual donation of wood to the town and contributed 100 bushels of corn, rice, and other articles to the community.¹⁴⁰ Bentley observed in September that

¹³⁷ For one example see *Essex Register*, February 18, 1809.

¹³⁸ *Essex Register*, February 16, 1808.

¹³⁹ *Expences of the Town of Salem for the year ending March 8, 1808* (Salem: s.n., 1808); *Expences of the Town of Salem for the year ending March 10, 1809* (Salem: s.n., 1809); Bentley, *Diary*, 2: 118, 128, 217; 3: 67, 201, 314. *Salem Gazette*, March 29, 1809.

¹⁴⁰ *Essex Register*, October 29, 1808; Bentley, *Diary*, 3: 409-410.

“In Salem, we have hitherto preserved a consistency in our measures & Mr. Gray has been a great help to us.”¹⁴¹

To the Federalists, the need for charity in town was further evidence of the embargo’s injustice. In January 1809, as weather worsened and the embargo continued, a committee of town Federalists called for subscriptions to fund a new soup house for “the relief of the Poor at this uncommon time of suffering.”¹⁴² Once the Committee gathered enough subscribers, they purchased ladles and boilers and set up the Soup House on Front Street.¹⁴³ They announced in the Salem papers that the Committee would give out soup to people with tickets. Those who wished to get a ticket were to appear in the chamber above the Soup House and make their application in person to the Committee. Soup would be served at a set time at the Soup House on Monday, Tuesday, Thursday, and Friday. On Wednesday, the meal was peas, and on Saturday, beans and bread.¹⁴⁴

The *Gazette* was quick to report the large crowd that had shown up for tickets to the Soup House. “The Embargo tells!” Seven hundred people had applied for tickets, despite the short notice and the fact that “the hand of private charity has been most liberally extended,” a *Gazette* writer reported. “And for what is all this suffering, this sacrifice?” he mused.¹⁴⁵ By the first week of February, news in the *Gazette* was that 1,200 Salem residents depended on the Soup House for their “daily subsistence.” The Soup House activity was a sign of the terrible hardship imposed by this Republican measure: “If we add to this number those who live upon *other charities*, it will be found that probably ONE FIFTH of the inhabitants of the industrious,

¹⁴¹ Bentley, *Diary*, 3: 383.

¹⁴² *Essex Register*, January 25, 1809; *Salem Gazette*, January 24, 1809.

¹⁴³ See notice of the sale of these goods after the Soup House closed in March 1809. *Salem Gazette*, November 28, 1809.

¹⁴⁴ *Salem Gazette*, January 27, 1809; *Essex Register*, January 28, 1809.

¹⁴⁵ *Salem Gazette*, January 31, 1809.

enterprising, and prudent town of Salem are supported by alms!” Further, this statistic had dire implications for the broader state of the union: “If the sufferings produced by this horrible Embargo are equally felt through the U.S. (and the friends of the measure assure us it is so) behold more than ONE MILLION and an HALF of people reduced to actual, literal BEGGARY.” Anonymous writer Ax Bona asked, “Will the people always bear to be told, when inquiring the necessity of their sufferings, that they must.”¹⁴⁶

Charity in Salem was enmeshed in politicking and political competition. Reports emerged that Gray had donated counterfeit bills and sour flour. The Federalist papers claimed Gray was patronizing the poor, while the *Register* defended his generosity and sacrifice.¹⁴⁷ The *Register* reported that a Federal minister had hinted to his parishioners “to encourage no poor people except such as are federalists.”¹⁴⁸ Bentley wrote in his diary, “The soup house & other charities are in operation & they open a new scene in Salem....One will not take an outside loaf & another will not take a cold one. One had rather have turkey & another insists they ought to find a tin kettle for the poor to carry the soup home in...the poor are fed to surfeiting & would be glad of an eternal embargo on their labour if they could be better fed for nothing.” Yet, he concluded, while riots against the Collectors of Customs erupted in neighboring towns, “no serious opposition has yet been made in Salem.”¹⁴⁹

VII

As Salem Republicans worked to organize the party back home, Jacob Crowninshield buoyed the party’s interest in Congress. But on January 15, Crowninshield suffered an aneurism after delivering a vehement speech to the House. With his brothers at his bedside after making

¹⁴⁶ All quotations from *Salem Gazette*, February 7, 1809. Italics and capitalization from original.

¹⁴⁷ *Newburyport Herald*, August 12, 1808; *Essex Register*, February 11, 1809; *Salem Gazette*, February 10, 1809.

¹⁴⁸ *Essex Register*, April 27, 1808.

¹⁴⁹ Bentley, *Diary*, 3: 413-414.

the trip from Salem, Crowninshield carried on his duties as best he could as he passed through recovery and relapse. He died on April 15 in Washington. As the Crowninshield brothers traveled home after Jacob's death, they found in this family tragedy no reason to suspend politics. A fellow traveler in their coach to Boston observed that the brothers immediately announced themselves as vehement anti-Federalists and engaged fellow passengers on the issues of the day with a "political violence" that necessitated constant diversions to lighter topics by Stephen Bradley, a Senator from Vermont, who was travelling on the same coach.¹⁵⁰ Once the family returned to Salem, Bentley officiated over the funeral proceedings, and he reported that a Federalist placed himself in the middle of the congregation and called out insults during the ceremony.¹⁵¹

The election to replace Crowninshield in the House of Representatives provided an opportunity for Federalist gains at a time when the efficacy of the embargo policy seemed increasingly in doubt. The town's decision not to petition the federal government to repeal the embargo in October had been a boon for Salem Republicans, but the November federal election dealt them their first election loss of the embargo. In a special election in May, Salem and the rest of the Essex County District voted to send Joseph Story to the House as Crowninshield's temporary replacement.¹⁵² But many Republicans were suspicious of Story. He had been a close correspondent of Jacob Crowninshield, but in 1807 while serving in the Massachusetts legislature, Story had sided with the Federalists on a judiciary bill, and he had grown friendly with a number of Boston Federalists. Bentley believed Story "would answer as well for [the Federalists] as any man they could chuse [sic] on their own," although Salem Federalists did not

¹⁵⁰ John Lambert, *Travels Through Canada, and the United States of North America, in the Years 1806, 1807, & 1808* (3 vols., London, 1816), 3: 80-82.

¹⁵¹ *Salem Gazette*, January 22, 1808; *Essex Register*, April 23, 1808; Bentley, *Diary*, 3: 356.

¹⁵² Salem Town Meeting Minutes, May 23, 1808, Salem City Clerk.

approve of Story either.¹⁵³ For the regularly scheduled election in November, Republicans split over their support for Story and finally decided to nominate Daniel Kilham in his place, against the protests of Story and his supporters.¹⁵⁴ Story was still an active campaigner for Kilham, however. In the run-up to the election he travelled throughout Essex County with Jacob's brother, Benjamin Crowninshield, and the two men warned voters that Federalists were ready to worship the throne of Great Britain.¹⁵⁵

When the embargo appeared to have failed in its goal of winning concessions from France and Great Britain and, therefore, when the future seemed to be the embargo, Salem Republicans lost voters to the Federalists. Kilham was still little-known, and his lack of a commercial background was a vulnerability. His address to the electors of Essex South District before the election offered no new arguments in support of the embargo except for continued calls to stay the course, yet there was no strong evidence that the embargo was having the desired effect abroad.¹⁵⁶ The pamphlet of Kilham's Federalist opponent, Benjamin Pickman, meanwhile, offered a detailed rebuttal of Story and Crowninshield's campaign claims with language that spoke to expansive neutral commerce rather than its practical wartime limits. He referred to the embargo as eternal and ruinous. Pickman appealed to the energy of American enterprise as the best defense against the British and said that in this district, the "most commercial district in the nation," elections were the only way to end the embargo.¹⁵⁷ In the days before the election, the *Gazette* published a statement that during the governorship of John Hancock, Kilham had stated that commerce and the fishery were of no advantage to the nation.

¹⁵³ Bentley, *Diary*, 3: 361; Samuel Putnam to Timothy Pickering, November 9, 1808, TPP, MHS.

¹⁵⁴ Bentley, *Diary*, 3: 380.

¹⁵⁵ Samuel Putnam to Timothy Pickering, November 9, 1808, TPP, MHS.

¹⁵⁶ *Republican Convention* (s.l.: s.n., 1808).

¹⁵⁷ *To the Electors of the Essex South District* (U.S.: s.n., 1808).

The claim was confirmed in the paper by Federalists Benjamin Goodhue and Richard Manning.¹⁵⁸ Bentley was furious at this mischaracterization of Kilham's past. Kilham worked quickly to write a response to Goodhue and Manning for the *Register* but was too late for the election. The popular vote in Salem soon afterwards fell 901 for Pickman the Federalist candidate, 900 for Kilham, and one vote for Story, a Federalist victory by the slimmest of margins.¹⁵⁹

In the early winter of 1809, political opposition to the embargo from many sides, along with its impotence abroad, brought about its repeal. Jefferson believed throughout that unified support and observance of the act would have made it a successful foreign policy, and when he finally revoked the embargo expired at the very end of his second term in March 1809, he blamed Salem's Representative Joseph Story for breaking the will of Congress and forcing the embargo's premature end. Story, still in the House until the session ended on March 3, had indeed begun to question whether the embargo could produce the intended concessions from foreign powers, and he argued to the House in December 1808 that it was time to consider vindicating American sovereignty through "honorable and open warfare." Continuing the embargo could enflame secessionist talk in New England and ruin the Republican party, Story worried, especially as he and his Republican colleagues received reports of increasing disaffection with the party and the embargo from constituents. Story's eventual advocacy for an alternative to embargo displeased Jefferson, but to Story and a majority of Republican representatives it was a compromise that would save the union, maintain party unity in federal government, fend off the growing threats to Republicans in state and local elections, and offer a

¹⁵⁸ Samuel Putnam to Timothy Pickering, November 9, 1808, TPP, MHS; Bentley, *Diary*, 3: 397.

¹⁵⁹ Salem Town Meeting Minutes, November 7, 1808, Salem City Clerk.

new strategy to protect the same concerns for American commercial geography that had once motivated their support for the embargo.¹⁶⁰

Massachusetts voters had sustained enough tolerance of the measure for a year—beyond the expectations of many—to avert a massive implosion of the Republican party. By January 1808, John Adams had already written to his son about his own belief that the embargo would be impossible to enforce for even six months, especially after watching Boston sailors protest the measure at the Governor's house: "You may as well drive hoops of wood or iron on a Barrell of Gunpowder, to prevent its Explosion when a red hot heater is in the Center of it."¹⁶¹ Smuggling during the embargo had been rampant, especially in border regions such as Passamaquoddy, Maine along the border with Canada, in upper Vermont and New York, and at Amelia Island off East Florida. The Jefferson administration took strong action to cut down on this illegal trade, but smuggling had also predominated in these regions even before the embargo.¹⁶²

On the surface, the embargo seemed to provide the Massachusetts Federalists with the necessary fodder to take back the state and revive the party's political dominance. The act was initiated by a Virginia president, and it halted maritime commerce, the traditional economic lifeblood of eastern Massachusetts. Meanwhile, competition between parties had widened the

¹⁶⁰ *Annals of Congress*, 10th Cong. 2nd Sess., 942. Thomas Jefferson to Henry Dearborn, July 6, 1810 in Paul Leicester Ford, ed., *Writings of Thomas Jefferson* (19 vols., New York, 1898), 9:277. Joseph Story to Joseph White, Jr., January 4, 1809 in Story, *Life and Letters of Joseph Story*, 174. Joseph Story to Stephen Fay, January 9, 1809, *ibid.*, 178-182. Joseph Story, "Autobiography," *ibid.*, 185. Perkins, *Prologue to War*, 180.

¹⁶¹ John Adams to John Quincy Adams, January 8, 1808, Adams Papers, MHS.

¹⁶² For work on smuggling during the embargo see Andrew McMichael, *Atlantic Loyalties: Americans in Spanish West Florida, 1785-1810* (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 2008); John D. Morris, *Sword of the Border: Major General Jacob Jennings Brown, 1775-1828* (Kent, OH: The Kent State University Press, 2000); Christopher Ward, "The Commerce of East Florida During the Embargo, 1806-1812: The Role of Amelia Island," in *The Florida Historical Quarterly* 68 (Oct., 1989): 160-179; Richard P. Casey, "North Country Nemesis: The Potash Rebellion and the Embargo of 1807-1809," in *The New-York Historical Society Quarterly* 64 (Jan., 1980): 31-49; Joshua Smith, *Borderland Smuggling: Patriots, Loyalists, and Illicit Trade in the Northeast, 1783-1820* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2006). Leonard Levy argued Jefferson's plans for economic coercion against Great Britain and France ultimately relied on widespread coercion of the American public by force. Leonard Levy, *Jefferson & Civil Liberties: The Darker Side* (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University, 1963).

base of rank-and-file voters intent on making their voices heard in Boston and Washington. But Federalist political tactics promoted conciliations to Great Britain and acceptance of a limited definition of neutral trading rights, and these solutions to the problem of America's maritime commerce did not fit the actual practices of trade that had made Salem prosperous. These ideas became less appealing to the mass of voters when they dovetailed with themes of privilege and social deference that did not fit with the democratization of American politics and seemed to purposely neglect the fact the many people in Salem had personal stakes in America's neutral trade that would not be protected under the Federalist plan.

Salem Republicans presented a different definition of neutral rights and an argument for the embargo that both tapped into Salem's own trading practices and framed this national measure around ensuring equal protection to all Americans. Any seizure of an American vessel or sailor, as well as any trading restriction imposed by a foreign power, was an attack on individual Americans as well as the sovereignty of the United States. If one American ship was not free seek new markets abroad, then all Americans were at risk. To submit to these restrictions at any level would belie the independence of 1776, the principle of commercial reciprocity among nations, and the right to free enterprise for American neutral traders. National aims had local significance to Salem citizens. Without the leverage of the new union to guarantee a greater freedom of economic pursuit for all, privilege would reign only for the favored, those with the capital to weather foreign seizures and those with established commercial connections that did not rely as heavily on transnational commerce. In this time of change and upheaval, the undertones against privilege in the Republican message on the embargo captured the attention of an expanded voting population increasingly concerned not only with economic mobility, but with political, religious, and social advancement within the early Republic. The

results Jefferson hoped to achieve with the embargo may have been lofty and improbable, but the ability of the Republican party to maintain support for the measure in Salem, where commerce was life, demonstrates how deeply and strongly politics could penetrate into society in the early republic.

At the March town meeting in 1809, the Federalists did win two seats as town selectmen, yet this would prove to be the high-water mark of their political advances in Salem for the rest of the decade.¹⁶³ In April 1809, as the town enjoyed the return to trade, Salem voted for Republican Levi Lincoln as governor and a straight Republican ticket of state senators to Beacon Hill.¹⁶⁴ Republican success continued, and the party held a slim but consistent majority in town and state offices until the War of 1812. Similarly, across the state, although Lincoln and the Republicans lost the governorship in 1809 by two percent of the vote, the party retook the position in 1810 and held it until 1812. In 1810, the Massachusetts legislature also returned to Republican control.¹⁶⁵ With the end of the embargo, in the span of a week during the early spring of 1809, Salem had closed the soup houses, ships had returned to the sea, and the Republicans, Bentley noted, had “succeeded beyond their own expectations.”¹⁶⁶

¹⁶³ Salem Town Meeting Minutes, March 13, 1809.

¹⁶⁴ Salem Town Meeting Minutes, April 3, 1809, Salem City Clerk.

¹⁶⁵ Goodman, *The Democratic Republicans of Massachusetts*, 196; Banner, *To the Hartford Convention*, 361-362.

¹⁶⁶ Bentley, *Diary*, 3: 426.

Chapter 7

The Rise of the American System and the Fall of Commercial Salem

On July 4, 1812, Representative Daniel Webster proclaimed to the Washington Benevolent Society of Portsmouth, New Hampshire that “the Federal Constitution was adopted for no single reason so much as for the protection of Commerce.” Before the Constitution, competition among the “thirteen separate and independent Governments” had thwarted the real potential of American commerce to rival that of foreign nations, Webster claimed, and “we disgraced ourselves, in the eyes of Europe by endeavoring to form commercial treaties without the means of carrying them into effect.” Commerce was not “a transient or incidental interest” to the national project, Webster continued, but “the essence of the National Compact.” The imperatives of maritime defense and commercial regulation, which necessitated a national revenue, had been the very cause of the federal union's existence.¹

Webster's speech on the centrality of commerce to the federal project went through multiple printings in Salem in 1812, but war, peace, and Henry Clay's American System required Americans to reconsider National Republican initiatives.² The lifting of the embargo in 1809 spurred Salem ships to return to their broad, circuitous, and often transnational routes of trade, only to face continued British and French challenges to American neutral commerce and then war with Great Britain by 1812. Peacetime brought new restrictions on America's participation in foreign commerce as European states renewed their efforts to reserve the carrying trade from their colonies for their own ships at the expense of shipping from other nations. The concept of neutrality that had been so valuable in creating commercial opportunities and spurring commercial expansion for Salem and for maritime communities

¹ Printed in *Salem Gazette*, July, 31, 1812.

² *Salem Gazette*, July 21, 1812.

throughout the United States was now meaningless as a commercial principle. At home, though, concerns over keeping a neutral United States disentangled from future international war spurred new conceptions of political economy that increasingly looked west with a heightened focus on domestic manufacturing, commercial agriculture, and inland transportation improvements as the central sources of American national wealth.³

As Salem's moment of commercial prominence from the 1780s to the early 1800s revealed the broader story of early American commercial expansion in the global marketplace, Salem's decline as a shipping center after the War of 1812 was similarly the product of broader trends in the national and international economies. The peace of 1815 ushered in a new sense of American independence and nationalism. Upon learning of the peace in early 1815, Supreme Court Justice Joseph Story of Salem believed this was the moment for new national initiatives that would put Republicans permanently in power. He wrote:

Let us extend the national authority over the whole extent of power given by the Constitution. Let us have great military and naval schools; an adequate regular army; the broad foundations laid of a permanent navy; a national bank; a national system of bankruptcy; a great navigation act; a general survey of our ports, and appointments of port-wardens and pilots; Judicial Courts which shall embrace the whole constitutional powers, for the commercial and national concerns of the United States.⁴

But as Story and his friends and family in Salem would come to discover, by protecting domestic manufactures, inland transportation, and overseas commerce in large scale staple goods, the new nationalism weakened the ability of Salem to compete as a commercial center against its larger rivals that were better equipped to adapt to the new national economy.

³ For American protectionist sentiment and its connection to expectations of future international war in this period, see Nicholas Onuf and Peter Onuf, *Nations, Markets, and War: Modern History and the American Civil War* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2006), 239-277.

⁴ Joseph Story to Nathaniel Williams, February 22, 1815, printed in William Story, ed., *Life and Letters of Joseph Story*, Vol. 1 (Boston: Charles C. Little and James Brown, 1851), 254.

The post-war tariffs from 1816 through 1820s revealed to the Salem maritime community that its foreign commerce built around exploiting opportunities in distant markets was no longer the “very essence” of the union’s mission and source of geopolitical strength. By 1816, the tariffs taxed the importation of cloth goods that had funded Salem’s direct trade from India, and by the 1820s the tariffs put higher and higher taxes on the goods that Salem ships generally returned with from their circuitous voyages through foreign markets. As maritime Americans in Salem confronted this changing world and their changing nation, former Republican and Federalist rivals in Salem came together by 1820 in joint opposition to the tariffs and in support of the commercial geography of their town and nation. For these maritime Americans, the United States had forged its own independence in large part by extending its foreign trade across the globe, and they had always thought of their commerce as contributing to a coherent national system and, particularly for Republicans, strengthening the union against foes like Great Britain. This former system, centered on the protection of foreign trade as a means to generate federal revenue and protect American sovereignty, had allowed Salem and other commercial communities to flourish and prosper.

In its place by the 1820s emerged what came to be known as the American System, a new political economy built on federal encouragement for domestic manufacturing, the incorporation of western lands into the national economy, and foreign commerce to trade the products of America’s large-scale commercial agriculture around the globe.⁵ Internal improvements, including canals and turnpikes, would extend avenues of commerce inland and connect western

⁵ For an overview of the American System, see Maurice Baxter, *Henry Clay and the American System* (Lexington, KY: University Press of Kentucky, 1996). For the American transportation and communications revolution after 1815, see Daniel Walker Howe, *What Hath God Wrought: The Transformation of America, 1815-1848* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007).

farms and markets to large shipping centers like Boston, New York, and Baltimore.⁶ Salem's expansive oceanic hinterland was now a liability that hindered the port's full incorporation into the new American economic system. Protecting the home market and promoting the bulk exportation of America's agricultural staples became the new declaration of American independence and neutrality.

I

With the lifting of the embargo in 1809, Salem ships returned to sea to trade across oceans and often across national borders and to generate wealth and strength not only for themselves but for their nation. To these traders, Salem's extensive routes of neutral trade represented American political economy operating as it should, and they believed that Salem ships therefore helped secure the new nation's place in the world. In the 1760s, Salem had been an Atlantic port, but by 1809 its ships operated within a truly global marketplace. Within three months of the embargo's end, eleven Salem ships had cleared for Sumatra; four departed for Canton; thirty left for the Baltic; twenty-eight departed for the Iberian Peninsula, the Mediterranean, and the wine islands like Madeira; nineteen cleared for South America; and forty-seven cleared for the West Indies. Within six months, two hundred Salem vessels had cleared the port for foreign destinations, taking with them approximately 2,000 sailors.⁷ The Salem maritime community retained its specialty in trade to the Indian Ocean after the lifting of the embargo, and in 1809 twenty-one Salem vessels departed for the East Indies. Many others likely travelled there by way of other American ports or by way of Europe. In 1810, over four million of the five and a half million pounds of pepper imported into the United States from the

⁶ On internal improvements see John Lauritz Larson, *Internal Improvement: National Public Works and the Promise of Popular Government in the Early United States* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2001).

⁷ Phillips, *Salem and the East Indies*, 308-309. Phillips calculated these numbers from a review of the *Salem Gazette*.

East Indies came aboard Salem ships.⁸ Salem traders re-exported these cargoes of Indian Ocean products throughout their trading networks. They sold Indian nankeens in the markets of South America. They sold pepper and tea in the Mediterranean. They sold Mocha coffee in Turkey. As Salem traders crossed oceans and often national borders in their trade, they experienced first-hand the constricting routes of safe neutral commerce in a within a world increasingly polarized between pro-British and pro-French alliances.

In January 1810, Salem captain Joseph Ropes anchored in the harbor of Constantinople, ready to trade his cargo of Indian Ocean goods. Ropes was master of the Crowninshield vessel *America*, and in this post-embargo period his ship was one of many American vessels that sailed for the Mediterranean carrying grain and other foodstuffs from the United States or re-exports from foreign markets around the globe. With the embargo's end, American trade to Turkey increased, mainly through the port of Smyrna. American ships sailed direct from the United States, arrived via circuitous voyages through other Mediterranean markets like Malta, Messina, or Cevita Vecchia, or by way of England.⁹ Ropes in the *America* had made previous stops at both Messina and Malta. He carried tea, gum, spices, indigo, myrrh, and frankincense from the East Indies, likely purchased on prior Crowninshield voyages to the Arabian Peninsula.¹⁰ American ships arriving back in the United States from Turkey brought wines, dried fruits, silks from both Russia and Turkey, gums, naval stores, and large volumes of opium.¹¹

⁸ Calculated by comparing ship arrivals with pepper as listed in Putnam, *Salem Vessels and their Voyages* to American State Papers, Commerce and Navigation, Volume 1, Imports for year ending September 1810.

⁹ Samuel Morison, "Forcing the Dardanelles in 1810: With Some Account of the Early Levant Trade of Massachusetts," in *The New England Quarterly* Vol. 1 NO. 2 (April, 1928), 215.

¹⁰ Morison, "Forcing the Dardanelles," 216. At this time, the *America* was owned by Benjamin Crowninshield, George Crowninshield, and George Crowninshield, Jr. A. Frank Hitchings, *Ships Registers of the District of Salem and Beverly Massachusetts, 1789-1900* (Salem: The Essex Institute, 1906), 8.

¹¹ See advertisement for goods for sale by Baltimore merchant Thomas Tenant from his ship *Manlius* (Captain Robert McConnell) recently arrived from Smyrna, *Federal Republican* (Baltimore, MD), February 23, 1810.

With the large presence of the British Levant Company in Turkey, American captains made risk and reward calculations about where to trade and to what extent they should trade under the protection of the British. The Levant Company held a monopoly over British trade to Turkey, and for a fee of consulage the Company allowed Americans to trade at the Turkish port of Smyrna as British ships.¹² Trading without British cover meant dealing directly with Turkish authorities. While many American vessels, including Salem's *Resolution* owned by Joseph Peabody, continued to trade as British ships in Smyrna during this period, by 1809 several Americans sailed north to try their luck outside of the Levant in Constantinople.¹³ John Crowninshield's *Telemachus* under the command of Captain Penn Townsend was the first American merchant vessel to anchor in Constantinople in September 1809, and Joseph Ropes arrived in 1810 in the *America* as the third, in company with the *Calumet* from Boston.¹⁴ Robert Adair, the British Minister at Constantinople, sought to manage this American presence and without solicitation from the Americans arranged trading rights for them with Turkish authorities

¹² Without this protection, foreign vessels would expect to pay a duty subject to the determination of Turkish authorities of the Ottoman empire. By 1803, the United States appointed Robert Wilkinson as consular agent at Smyrna. Wilkinson was British and simultaneously served as Levant Company Treasurer and Danish consul-general. Wilkinson supplied American ships with certificates stating that they had landed cargo at Smyrna. Samuel Morison, "Forcing the Dardanelles", 211, 212 n9. In 1809, just over twenty American vessels arrived at Smyrna and traded under this arrangement with the Levant. *Salem Gazette*, November 17, 1809, November 24, 1809, April 20, 1810; *Essex Register*, February 28, 1810.

¹³ By early 1811, in response to Americans sailing to Constantinople and trading outside of British cover there, the Levant Company expressly forbade its officers to allow American ships to trade in Smyrna under the British flag. In practice, however, most American vessels could still procure cover for their vessels and cargoes from British merchant houses. Captain Stephen Rea of Peabody's *Resolution*, along with the other American ships in port with him, chose to fly the British flag at Smyrna and consign his cargo to a British merchant house rather than the American consul. Wilkinson wrote to the Secretary of State: "All the American vessels that arrive hoist English colours, and no questions are asked about them by the Turks, and they are not subject to the high Dutys." Qtd. in Morison, "Forcing the Dardanelles," 221.

¹⁴ The *Telemachus* was joined shortly by the *Eleanor* from Baltimore, both of which traded under British cover. On this voyage Townsend carried a cargo of Indian Ocean products, including spices, coffee, and India cloth, and by November 1809 he had departed for Havana and then for New York with a cargo of rope, sail cloth, and opium. The *Eleanor* carried Mocha coffee. Morison, "Forcing the Dardanelles," 215-216. *Salem Gazette*, November 17, 1809, November 24, 1809, April 20, 1810; *Essex Register*, February 28, 1810. Penn Townsend came from a maritime family and served as a ship captain in foreign trade, he was a prisoner of the British during the American Revolution, and he was a member of the Salem Republicans. Henry Waters, *Notes on the Townsend Family* (Salem: The Essex Institute, 1883), 22-23, 25, 28.

under which the Americans would pay double what they paid for British cover. With confidence in their ability to achieve more advantageous terms of trade through direct negotiations with Turkish authorities, Ropes and Charles W. Greene, supercargo of the *Calumet*, saw Adair's intervention as a British restriction on their neutral commerce.¹⁵ They reported years later that while in Constantinople they had enjoyed frequent meetings with the local Turkish political leader, the Capudan Pacha, along with the head of Customs, who spoke of their desire for a commercial treaty between Turkey and the United States. Ropes and Greene supported appointing an American ambassador to Turkey as a means to "protect them against the intrigues of the representatives of Great Britain, who were unwilling that their commercial rivals should participate in the lucrative trade of the Euxine and Turkey."¹⁶

In 1809, Spanish ports in South America had become a significant market for American ships carrying American agricultural products or re-exported goods.¹⁷ As American exports to the French and British West Indies declined from 1800 to 1810 as a percentage of total American trade to South America and the West Indies, exports to Spanish America increased.¹⁸ In 1809,

¹⁵ Ropes had passed the Straights of the Dardanelles painted like a British man-of-war but flying American colors. Adair, wrote home to London of the extreme outrage this war-like entrance had caused among Turkish authorities, and indeed the *Eleanor* observed on her way back down the Straights that the Baltimore ship *Resource* carrying presents for Constantinople from the Dey of Algiers had been detained in the Straights for twenty days because she was armed. In his 1819 book on commerce in the Black Sea, author Henry A. S. Dearborn interviewed Captain Ropes and supercargo Greene about this incident, and they reported that Adair, not the Turkish authorities, had instigated detaining American vessels in the Straights. Henry A. S. Dearborn, *A Memoir on the Commerce and Navigation of the Black Sea and the Maritime Geography of Turkey and Egypt*, Vol. 1 (Boston: Wells and Lilly, 1819), xxi.

¹⁶ Dearborn, *Black Sea*, xxv. See also *Essex Register*, January 19, 1811 which claimed the duties on American ships were likely imposed "at the instigation of some foreign power." Greene heard that the Turkish government needed neutral ships to carry grain back from the Black Sea and arranged with the Swedish consul in Constantinople to obtain a pass for the *Calumet* to sail north for the Russian port of Odessa. She found an embargo in place there, but the *Calumet* was reportedly the first vessel to fly the American flag in the Black Sea. Morison; *Essex Register*, April 24, 1811. In October 1810, the two ships departed together from Constantinople, the *Calumet* for Boston by way of Algeziras, the *America* for New York.

¹⁷ John H. Coatsworth, "American Trade with European Colonies in the Caribbean and South America, 1790-1812," in *The William and Mary Quarterly* Vol. 24 No. 2 (April 1967), 258.

¹⁸ See table of American exports to South America and the Caribbean in Coatsworth, "American Trade," Table A-2, 263.

more Salem ships cleared for ports in South America than had cleared for that region in any previous year. Two cleared for the Dutch colony at Surinam, and the remaining twenty-nine cleared for ports that by 1809 fell under the Anglo-Spanish Alliance, including Cayenne, La Guayra, and Brazil.¹⁹ More Salem ships made their way to South America after initial stops in the West Indies or in the southern or mid-Atlantic United States. In August 1810, supercargo Nathan Cook of the Salem ship *Venus* was the first to return to the United States with news of the revolution at Buenos Aires in which a new provisional government proclaimed its loyalty to Spain only if Ferdinand VII was restored to the throne. Cook's account in the *Essex Register* was soon reprinted in newspapers across the eastern seaboard. "Thus, while the ambition of Bonaparte is overturning the old establishments, and shutting up the usual channels of commerce in Europe," Cook's account read, "new states are arising, and new paths to commerce opening, in the western world."²⁰

Trade to South America was critically linked to trade in other regions of the globe. South American settlements relied on maritime trade for provisions, including dry goods, many foodstuffs, and clothing that were necessary for subsistence, and by 1809, American and British carriers were the primary suppliers of these goods.²¹ Salem ships carried domestic products like flour, lumber, tobacco to these markets, along with re-exports like wine, gin, salt, and brandy.²² By 1811, many Salem ships to this region carried nankins imported from India, often by way of Boston.²³ In June 1809, the 284-ton *Recovery*, which had sailed to the Arabian Peninsula on

¹⁹ Phillips, *Salem and the East Indies*, 316.

²⁰ *Essex Register*, August 25, 1810. Charles Lyon Chandler, "United States Shipping in the La Plata Region, 1809-1810," in *The Hispanic American Historical Review* Vol. 3 No. 2 (May 1920), 163-166.

²¹ Chandler, "United States Shipping in the La Plata Region, 160.

²² See cargoes of Salem ships the cleared for South America in 1806 and 1807, V32 Outward Foreign Voyages, Customs District of Salem and Beverly, NARA-Waltham.

²³ V590A Goods Exported from Salem that were Imported into Other Districts, Customs District of Salem and Beverly, NARA-Waltham.

voyages for Elias Derby and was now owned by Salem merchants John and Richard Gardner, sailed from Salem for Rio de Janeiro. Captain John Carlton commanded the *Recovery*.²⁴ In August the *Recovery* was in Pernambuco testing out the market, and finding it poor, proceeded to St. Salvadore in the Brazilian province of Bahia.²⁵ South America was a source of specie, and Salem vessels often stopped there en route to the East Indies. She stopped at the Cape of Good Hope, and at Calcutta, and by February 1811 she returned to Salem from Sumatra with a cargo of pepper.²⁶ In November 1810, the Salem ship *Success* under Captain Tobias Lear Porter, departed for the Spanish Main, stopped at Havana, and then sailed for New Orleans and the Mississippi River.²⁷ The *Success* then sailed for the Baltic, where she was seized by Danish privateers and taken to Gottenburg with her cargo of logwood, likely from Havana, and cotton, likely from the Mississippi.²⁸ After her release, the *Success* sailed to St. Petersburg where she traded her cargo for a return load of hemp, iron, and sail cloth and departed for Salem.²⁹

The Baltic became a crucial arena for American traders after 1809, and one in which the increasingly polarized global marketplace between British and French interests shaped the risks and opportunities of neutrality. Elias Hasket Derby had been one of the first Americans to trade in the Baltic after the American Revolution, and since that time Salem had maintained a steady trade with the region, particularly with the Swedish port of Gothenburg. Salem ships brought sugar, coffee, cotton, indigo, and other products of the southern American states and the West and East Indies, or they came with bills of exchange on London. They returned with iron, hemp,

²⁴ Hitchings, *Ship Registers*, 155; Phillips, *Salem and the East Indies*, 317.

²⁵ *Boston Patriot*, September 30, 1809.

²⁶ *Essex Register*, August 22, 1810, October 6, 1810; *Salem Gazette*, February 19, 1811.

²⁷ Phillips, *Salem and the East Indies*, 322; *Essex Register*, February 20, 1811, March 6, 1811.

²⁸ Phillips, *Salem and the East Indies*, 322; *Salem Gazette*, August 27, 1811; "Essex County Vessels Captured by Foreign Powers," 31.

²⁹ After crossing the Atlantic, the *Success* wrecked off of Marshfield Beach in southern Massachusetts with six lives lost, including the captain's. *Essex Register*, November 23, 1811.

canvas sailcloth, and other naval stores.³⁰ After the embargo, the trade to the Baltic flourished as Americans sought ways to circumvent British and French restrictions on neutral trade in northern Europe. The prohibition of British goods in these continental European ports provided American shippers with lucrative opportunities to cover British cargoes as their own for high freight rates.³¹ But the opportunities of supplying northern Europe and the Baltic using goods and capital from Great Britain consequently made these neutral American ships a greater threat to France's European blockade under the Continental System. French restrictions barred Americans from a growing number of European ports, first in Hamburg and Amsterdam, and then in Denmark and Norway by 1809 and 1810 to cut off American trade as it moved north in search of open ports.³² As additional restrictions clamped down on the transshipment of goods from Denmark to Hamburg, the commercial benefits of Danish ports to Americans diminished.³³ By the summer of 1810, the ports of Prussia and Sweden were similarly closed to American ships in accordance with France's Continental System.³⁴

By 1809, Danish privateers began to seize American ships under suspicion of trading with the British or of accepting British convoy.³⁵ As Danish seizures of American vessels

³⁰ See William Gray's invoice of good requested from St. Petersburg in 1811, including iron, hemp, Russian sailcloth, and Russian sheeting. Printed in Edward Gray, *William Gray of Salem, Merchant* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1914), 56-57. James Duncan Phillips, "Salem Opens American Trade with the Russia," in *The New England Quarterly* Vol. 14, No. 4 (Dec., 1941): 685-689; see Morison, *The Maritime History of Massachusetts*, 154-155.

³¹ Anna Clauder, *American commerce as affected by the wars of the French revolution and Napoleon, 1793-1812* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania, 1932), 142, 162-166; Morison, *Maritime History of Massachusetts*, 194.

³² American consul to Hamburg, John Forbes, called the trade to the Danish port of Tonningen in 1809 the "distorted trade of Hamburg." In 1804, Americans imported 288,000 pounds of cotton into Denmark and Norway. By 1809, Americans imported 2,000,000 pounds, and by 1810 they imported 14,000,000 pounds. Clauder, *American Commerce*, 159.

³³ Clauder, *American Commerce*, 163-164.

³⁴ Clauder, *American Commerce*, 194. France required American ships carrying American cargo to have certificates of origin. A tariff system imposed high duties on these American products. Products grown in French colonies like sugar or cocoa could only landed under a permit. American ships were required to take away French silks, French manufactured goods, and French wines as their return cargoes. Clauder, *American Commerce*, 205.

³⁵ Clauder, *American Commerce*, 165-167.

increased, a group of American ship captains awaiting trial in Norway for such seizures, including a number from Salem, wrote a memorial to President James Madison decrying Danish violations of their free and neutral trade granted to them by the American government. In the prosecution of their voyages, “undertaken with the sanction of our Government” in conformity with American laws and American treaties and with the possession of the proper legal documents, these American captains informed Madison that they had been unjustly seized by Danish privateers in violation of the rights “due to neutrals in general, but most especially to us, whose Government uniformly has respected with the most sacred fidelity the rights of others.” They warned Madison that with northern Europe under blockade from Bayonne, France, to Weser, Germany, more American ships would seek alternative markets in the Baltic and become prey for the Danish privateers, “adding alarmingly to our unfortunate number.”³⁶

As blockades and restrictions on neutral shipping by 1810 and 1811 heightened the risks of trade to northern Europe for American shippers, Americans did seek out ports farther north in the Baltic and in Russia to land goods destined ultimately for France, Holland, or Germany, and acquire valuable return cargoes.³⁷ In Russia, American vessels could trade with relatively little interference. In 1810, for example, the Salem ship *Catherine* was captured on its journey from Salem and taken into Copenhagen. Upon the ship’s release, she sailed for the Russian port of Riga, where she sold her cargo of sugar, coffee, and logwood without problem.³⁸ In 1809, the United States and Russia had a mutual interest in maintaining free neutral commerce. American consul Levett Harris and later Ambassador John Quincy Adams successfully negotiated with the

³⁶ *Memorial from Sundry Americans at Christiansand*, July 19, 1809, *American State Papers, Volume III, Foreign Relations* (Washington: Gales and Seaton, 1832), 330.

³⁷ Clauder, *American Commerce*, 188-190, 217; Morison, *Maritime History of Massachusetts*, 193.

³⁸ The Russian agreement with France did not require Russia to prohibit the entry of American ships into Russian ports. Clauder, *American Commerce*, 192, 221.

Russian government, securing admission for American vessels into Russian ports.³⁹ As the Danes continued to seize American ships in the North Sea, many American ships, including those from Salem, began to sail north around the North Cape for the Russian port of Archangel. American voyages to Russian ports increased significantly in 1811. Roughly half of the two hundred American ships trading to Russia in this period hailed from Massachusetts.⁴⁰ Likewise in Salem, nearly all of the Salem vessels that sailed to the Baltic that year cleared for St. Petersburg or the Russian port of Archangel.⁴¹ Ten of the sixty American ships at Archangel in 1810 came from Salem.⁴²

Throughout the global marketplace, British Orders in Council and the French Continental System outlawed the operation of the American carrying trade along its typical circuitous routes and thus set the stage for a declaration of war by 1812. The 1807 British Orders in Council remained in place, outlawing American neutral trade with the ports of France and her allies unless ships sailed directly to and from the United States or stopped in a British port for permission, and subjecting to seizure neutral American ships that violated these orders or carried French certificates of origin.⁴³ Meanwhile, the French continued their blockade of Europe under the Continental System, subjecting to seizure American vessels that had made previous stops in

³⁹ David M. McFadden, "John Quincy Adams, American Commercial Diplomacy, and Russia, 1809-1825," in *The New England Quarterly*, Vol. 66, No. 4 (Dec., 1993), 618-620.

⁴⁰ Morison, *Maritime History of Massachusetts*, 193. 150 American ships visited Cronstadt in 1811.

⁴¹ Nineteen Salem ships cleared for Russian ports, and for cleared for Swedish ports. For Salem clearances, see V26 Clearances from the Customs District of Salem and Beverly, NARA-Waltham. Customs records in this period do not include a complete listing of all the clearances from Salem in one year from 1810 to 1820. The V26 list of clearances do not include ships that departed for the West Indies or to domestic American ports, and many of these ships likely departed for Europe after making these intermediary stops for cargo. James Phillips recognized these holes in the customs records and conducted an alternative search of ship clearances reported in the Salem newspapers. In 1811, Phillips found 46 vessels that cleared Salem for Europe. Phillips, *Salem and the East Indies*, 320.

⁴² Robert Albion, *Sea Lanes in Wartime: The American Experience, 1774-1942* (New York: W. W. Norton Company, 1942), 107-108.

⁴³ November 1807 orders printed in *British and Foreign State Papers 1820-1821* (London: J. Harrison & Son, 1830), 469-482; Caulder, 116.

British ports and requiring American ships to carry licenses and certificates of origin in order to trade in French-allied ports.⁴⁴ The circuitous nature of American commerce and the role of Americans as international carriers put American trade directly in opposition to British and French edicts that limited neutral trade. Trading with one alliance could be lucrative, but it meant risking seizure by the other, and finding markets free from direct British and French control grew harder and harder. By 1811, American ships sailing for Russia, for example, often sailed under protection from British convoys, and many arrived in St. Petersburg in ballast with lucrative contracts to freight naval stores back to England.⁴⁵ The influx of goods that arrived on American ships in Russia encouraged Napoleon to seek the exclusion of American ships from Russian ports, which Czar Alexander refused. Russian tariffs by 1810 even worked to exclude certain French goods and “to accord a certain facility to American commerce” in order “to export her products, too extensive to be exported by land.”⁴⁶ By 1811, merchants in Salem and throughout the republic contemplated these commercial conditions abroad and made risk and reward calculations about the best way to protect American trade as they formed their opinions on possible war. The added insults of British impressments of American sailors and threats of British-instigated Native American attacks in the western territories pushed the United States to declare war on Great Britain on June 18, 1812.⁴⁷ In Salem, political divisions over the decision for war split along the same lines and much of the same reasoning as the embargo.

II

⁴⁴ Perkins, *Prologue to War*, 293-294.

⁴⁵ Clauder, *American Commerce*, 224. A. N. Ryan, “The Defense of British Trade with the Baltic, 1808-1813,” in *The English Historical Review* Vol. 74, No. 292 (July 1959): 443-466.

⁴⁶ Qtd. in Clauder, *American Commerce*, 222.

⁴⁷ For the Anglo-American conflict leading to war in 1812, see Bradford Perkins, *Prologue to War: England and the United States, 1805-1812* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1970); J. C. A. Stagg, *The War of 1812: Conflict for a Continent* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012); Alan Taylor, *The Civil War of 1812: American Citizens, British Subjects, Irish Rebels, & Indian Allies* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2010).

On July 4, 1812, with news of the war only a few days old, Salem Federalists and Republicans each gathered in their own Independence Day celebrations where they heard speeches proclaiming the lessons of the American Revolution and the risks and rewards that war would bring for the commerce of their town and union.⁴⁸ A committee that included former Crowninshield ship captain Henry Elkins arranged for Salem lawyer John Pitman, Jr. to give the Republican address. In his extended reflection on the American revolutionary moment, Pitman asked his audience if they would preserve or abandon the liberties that their forefathers had achieved in the Revolution. War was a “serious calamity,” he admitted, but submitting to Great Britain was certain to bring a worse outcome.⁴⁹ Pitman claimed that the farmer and the merchant were naturally united against British depredations of American commerce since New England merchants were the carriers of southern and western crops to foreign markets.⁵⁰ Britain’s Orders in Council would remain in place, Pitman warned, until Britain had monopolized European trade, and “until the products of Great-Britain are admitted to a free market on the continent.” War was the unfortunate but only option at this point to save American trade: “it became impossible, without an abandonment of our independence, to parley with a pretension so monstrous, and we are exhorted, by all we value as a nation, to resist by force.”⁵¹

Meanwhile Salem Federalists, the self-proclaimed “friends of peace and commerce,” gathered at the North Meetinghouse to hear Benjamin Peirce, Salem’s state senator and formerly part of the merchant firm Waite & Peirce, speak about the end of American independence if the

⁴⁸ For the importance of celebrations like these fourth of July festivities to early American politics and the development of American nationalism see David Waldstreicher, *In the Midst of Perpetual Fetes: The Making of American Nationalism, 1776-1820* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1997).

⁴⁹ “Though the fate of war be dubious, the fate of submission is certain. War may terminate in national prosperity and glory; submission is the sure road to the miseries and degradation of servitude.” John Pitman, *An Oration Pronounced July 4, 1812, at the Request of the Republicans of the Town of Salem in Commemoration of the Anniversary of American Independence* (Salem: Warwick Palfray, Jr., 1812), 7-8.

⁵⁰ Pitman, *An Oration Pronounced July 4, 1812*, 19-20.

⁵¹ Pitman, *An Oration Pronounced July 4, 1812*, 9-11

nation engaged Great Britain in a war. France had already driven Americans from ports in the Mediterranean and the Baltic, and “by the war, which she is now carrying on with Russia, she aims a death blow at our remaining commerce to the continent of Europe.”⁵² War with Great Britain would create a Franco-American alliance that was sure to enslave the United States, Peirce warned. Alternatively, Americans could expect rich rewards from cultivating good relations with Great Britain given the shared language, heritage, and a mutual dependence between the two nations. War with Britain would likely destroy the United States. “We are wholly unprepared for war with that power,” Peirce stated, “when our treasury is exhausted; when the mercy and magnanimity of the enemy are the only security for our seacoast; when millions of our property, and thousands of our seamen, are abroad with nothing to protect them against the cruisers of the mistress of the ocean, but a force, brave indeed, yet too inconsiderable to deserve the name of a navy.”⁵³

Salem’s position on the vulnerable American coastline where British vessels now threatened Salem’s harbor and ships made the war real to the Salem people and shut down peacetime avenues of trade, heightening awareness of the importance of maritime commerce to the port’s survival. By July 1, 1812, Salem wharves were busy outfitting privateers, and the town’s Republican paper applauded this zeal. The British monopoly over shipping meant that British ships filled with rich cargoes of the West Indies passed close to Massachusetts shores with little protection. “What a field there is here for American enterprise!” the newspaper proclaimed.⁵⁴ During the war, Salem outfitted 41 privateers to Boston’s 31, Baltimore’s 58, and

⁵² Peirce argued that a war with Great Britain would ensure an alliance between the United States and France, an arrangement which he believed would enslave the United States. Peirce, *An Oration*, 18.

⁵³ Benjamin Peirce, *An Oration, Delivered at Salem, on the Fourth of July, 1812* (Salem: Thomas C. Cushing, 1812), 18-19.

⁵⁴ *Essex Register*, July 1, 1812.

New York's 45.⁵⁵ Although Salem merchants continued to lose property abroad to foreign seizures, Salem privateers enjoyed success at sea during the first year of the war, and by the end of 1812 they had captured eighty seven vessels and sent half a million dollars in prize cargoes into Salem.⁵⁶

The Crowninshields invested in numerous privateering ventures during the war, including outfitting their ship *America* as a privateer. The *America* carried a crew of 150 men and generally sailed from the English Channel down to the Canary Islands in search of English merchant vessels. During four cruises she captured twenty-seven prizes worth in total over one million dollars.⁵⁷ Meanwhile, the harbors of British-occupied coastal Maine offered lucrative opportunities for American merchants to engage in illicit trade with the British.

With the new federal embargo on foreign trade in 1813 and the British blockade first of New England and then of the American coast, many ships remained idle in Massachusetts harbors. Federalist newspapers ridiculed the inland transportation by wagon that blossomed to replace the defunct coasting trade by water.⁵⁸ By June of 1814, British warships lay off the Massachusetts coast, and a British vessel burnt an American ship off the town of Beverly, Salem's neighbor across the harbor. South of Boston, boats from the British warship *Nymph* captured or destroyed all but one of the ships in Scituate harbor, amounting to 800 tons of lost

⁵⁵ Just as with the Revolutionary period, privateering encouraged innovation in ship construction, and during the war Massachusetts shipbuilders constructed longer and sleeker vessels that would eventually form the core of the new merchant marine after the war. Morison, *Maritime History of Massachusetts*, 199, 202.

⁵⁶ Morison, *Maritime History of Massachusetts*, 200.

⁵⁷ B. B. Crowninshield, "An Account of the Private Armed Ship 'America' of Salem," in *Essex Institute Historical Collections*, Vol XXXVII (Jan., 1901), 6, 9-11. In June 1815, Bentley wrote in his journal about the sale of goods from a British prize taken by the *America*. The prize cargo included books and stationary "of great elegance" and many fine paintings. Bentley noted that many of the purchasers came from outside Salem. Bentley, *Diary*, 4: 334.

⁵⁸ Morison, *Maritime History of Massachusetts*, 206.

shipping.⁵⁹ In July 1814, an officer aboard the *Nymphe* observed Salem's commercial plight due to the British blockade and seizures: "Salem suffers severely from the war, as formerly there was no less than twenty East Indiamen sailed out of this port, now hardly a coaster of fifteen tons escapes being captured."⁶⁰ That same month, when the British captured Eastport in the district of Maine, William Bentley remarked in his diary that "we may now consider our State invaded."⁶¹

At the close of 1814, America's fate in the war with Britain looked bleak, and New Englanders shared in their fear of British attack. With the British advancing across eastern Maine, the Salem militia began constructing additional fortifications across the Salem harbor from the federal troops at Fort Pickering.⁶² August brought news of the burning of Washington, DC and rumors that the British were planning an expedition to burn Salem and Marblehead. In scenes reminiscent of the revolutionary period, Salem residents began to depart for the safety of inland towns. George Crowninshield, Jr. placed a brig in Salem harbor to deter British boats in their search for provisions.⁶³ On September 8, Salem held a special town meeting to "consider the defenseless state of the town, at this alarming crisis, & to devise suitable means for its protection."⁶⁴ Amid the fear of attack and news of the British assault on Belfast, Maine, Massachusetts established a Board of Commissioners for Sea Coast Defense and then the Massachusetts Board of War with Timothy Pickering serving as chairman.⁶⁵

⁵⁹ The single boat not destroyed in the British attack on Scituate belonged to a "traitor," as described by British Naval Officer Edward Napier, whose vessel was saved "for his good services to the boats." Edward Muir Whitehall, ed., *New England Blockaded in 1814; The Journal of Henry Edward Napier, Lieutenant in H. M. S. Nymphe* (Salem: Peabody Museum, 1939), 24.

⁶⁰ Whitehall, *New England Blockaded in 1814*, 36.

⁶¹ Bentley, *Diary*, 4: 267.

⁶² Phillips, *Salem and the East Indies*, 415; Whitehall, *New England Blockaded*, 36.

⁶³ Phillips, *Salem and the East Indies*, 418. From Bentley, 4: 291.

⁶⁴ The meeting authorized the Selectmen to make all necessary defensive measures and to seek the assistance of the Governor's office as needed. Salem Town Meeting Minutes, September 8, 1814, Salem City Clerk.

⁶⁵ Phillips, *Salem and the East Indies*, 417.

While some saw British attacks as proof of Britain's rejection of American free neutral trade and the *casus belli*, to others like Timothy Pickering they were evidence of the federal union's provocation of a stronger British adversary and the union's abandonment of the friendly Anglo-American relations that would have made New Englanders safe and prosperous. At the end of 1814, fearing New England's vulnerability to military attack, Pickering and his Federalist allies believed the federal government had broken its compact with the states. In the spirit of European statecraft, Pickering believed that the role of the American national government under the terms of the 1789 Constitution was to raise a revenue and maintain a military in order to protect the American states that could not sustain themselves independently.⁶⁶ As the federal government raised troops for the invasion of Canada but left the coast defenseless, Pickering believed this fiscal-military state had failed to act on behalf of its constituent states, particularly those on the eastern seaboard, leaving the states to act for themselves. As a consequence, Pickering argued, Massachusetts should assert command over its own militia and take back the tax revenue the state sent to the federal government to fund the national military.⁶⁷ Pickering applauded the work of his Salem townsman Samuel Putnam in the Massachusetts Senate in speaking out against the war and corresponded with Putnam about the unlikelihood of relief from the federal government: "As abandoned by the general government, except for taxing us, we must defend ourselves, so we ought to seize and hold fast the revenues indispensable to maintain

⁶⁶ On these sentiments at the time of the Constitutional Convention see Max Edling, *A Revolution in Favor of Government: Origins of the U.S. Constitution and the Making of the American State* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003). For a discussion of the Hartford Convention as a Federalist attempt to negotiate on behalf of New England's commercial and political interests within the context of transatlantic geopolitics see Alison L. LaCroix, "A Singular and Awkward War: The Transatlantic Context of the Hartford Convention," in *American Nineteenth Century History* Vol. 6 No. 1 (March 2005): 3-32.

⁶⁷ Timothy Pickering to Gouverneur Morris, October 29, 1814, printed in Henry Cabot Lodge, ed., *Life and Letters of George Cabot* (Boston: Little, Brown, and Company, 1877), 535-537; Gouverneur Morris to Timothy Pickering, November 1, 1814, printed in Lodge, *Life and Letters*, 537-538. For a discussion of the Hartford Convention as a means to provide for the military defense of New England see Donald R. Hickey, "New England's Defense Problem and the Genesis of the Hartford Convention," in *The New England Quarterly* Vol. 50 No. 4 (Dec., 1977): 587-604.

the force necessary for our protection against the foreign enemy, and the still greater evil in prospect, domestic tyranny.”⁶⁸

In November 1814, Pickering looked to the upcoming Hartford Convention to “recover and confirm the Union of the States on more equal, solid, and durable bases.”⁶⁹ In addition to ending the war with Great Britain, Pickering hoped to secure amendments to the Constitution that returned the union, he believed, to the confederative principles under which it had been first constructed. He corresponded with Boston Federalist John Lowell about proposed amendments that would “secure for the original states, most especially the eastern commercial states, a strong voice in the federal government.”⁷⁰ As Pickering sought to secure New England’s commercial and political interests within the international community, he hoped to do this with the union intact, at least as it had been in 1787. Pickering argued that the commerce and navigation of the eastern states gave it a position of strength in negotiations with the other regions of the country that would encourage continued union under the new constitutional amendments, should New England threaten secession.⁷¹

III

⁶⁸ Timothy Pickering to Samuel Putnam, October 1814, printed in Cabot, *Life and Letters*, 535. See also Timothy Pickering to Samuel Putnam, February 4, 1814, printed in Cabot, *Life and Letters*, 530.

⁶⁹ Timothy Pickering to John Lowell, November 7, 1814, printed in Lodge, *Life and Letters*, 540. For additional scholarship on the politics behind the Hartford Convention see James Banner, *To the Hartford Convention: Federalists and the Origins of Party Politics in Massachusetts, 1789-1815* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1970); James Buel, Jr., *America on the Brink: How the Political Struggle Over the War of 1812 Almost Destroyed the Young Republic* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2005).

⁷⁰ Pickering sought term limits and other restrictions on the office of the presidency, the abolition of the three-fifths clause, restrictions on naturalization and on the election of those not born in the United States, limits to the total number of congressional representatives, and the possibility of creating a western confederacy as territories west of the Mississippi grew in population to keep the Atlantic States from becoming “insignificant.” Timothy Pickering to John Lowell, November 28, 1814, printed in Lodge, *Life and Letters*, 542-543.

⁷¹ Timothy Pickering to John Lowell, November 28, 1814, printed in Lodge, *Life and Letters*, 543. On the temporary divisions among states see also Timothy Pickering to Gouverneur Morris, October 29, 1814, printed in Lodge, *Life and Letters*, 535.

News of the peace under the Treaty of Ghent arrived in Salem in mid-February 1815 bringing relief to those wearied by war and increasing national disdain and skepticism towards New England Federalists after their recent Hartford Convention. Salem townspeople gathered for a day of celebration. The town militias marched through the streets in organized parade and fired guns on the common to salute the peace. Church bells rang all day. At the Essex Coffee House, the former home of William Gray, crowds surrounded the building to cheer an eighteen-gun salute from a model ship that hung from the doorway. Lights illuminated the whole structure, while the names of American military heroes and two figures of Peace and Plenty added to the display. Fireworks and illuminated town buildings kept people meandering through the streets in celebration through the evening. George Crowninshield, Jr. organized the illumination of the East Meeting House, where a number of ship captains carried out a simple service. Lamps hung from the Meeting House's tower, and over the front porch hung a "transparency, with the Arms of the States emblazoned, and below in gold capitals MADISON AND PEACE."⁷²

Salem Republicans interpreted the peace as a triumphal moment for their free trade model of American neutrality. The editor of the Republican town newspaper, the *Essex Register*, reflected on the way forward for the United States after establishing a peace with Great Britain, and as he awaited the outcome of the Congress of Vienna with little confidence that it would secure a lasting peace in Europe, he was hopeful for the future of the neutral United States, particularly American neutral commerce. "Safe in our laws, free in our constitution, united in our Republic," the editor wrote, "we may hope for a commerce with the world, and the consummation of national glory."⁷³ There was new confidence in the idea that through the war

⁷² *Essex Register*, February 25, 1815.

⁷³ *Essex Register*, February 15, 1815.

the United States had established itself beyond dispute as a sovereign and important power with subsequent benefits to its citizens, particularly those in commerce. “That the War has given the United States a proud and commanding situation among the Nations of the earth, is indisputable,” claimed a writer reprinted in the *Essex Register*. “‘I am an American Citizen’ will hereafter be not only a passport of safety, but a pledge of valor.”⁷⁴

After hearing news of the peace, Nathaniel Silsbee reported to Benjamin Crowninshield, now serving as Secretary of the Navy in Washington, that considerable “bustle” had returned to the town wharfs. The Derbys had ships in the Mediterranean trading coffee and pepper that they had acquired in the Indian Ocean. Two or three ships were preparing to sail for Sumatra, and the same number were preparing for China and Bengal. Five more ships would soon be headed on voyages beyond the Cape of Good Hope. Joseph Peabody, who ran the largest shipping business in Salem at the time, was outfitting his whole fleet and had even purchased additional ships. Peace had arrived to the seas, and Silsbee believed “we are to begin almost entirely anew in our commercial pursuits.”⁷⁵

In late 1815, news of a proposed federal tariff that would encourage domestic manufacturing by taxing competing foreign imports dampened this optimism, particularly for those in Salem engaged in trade to India for manufactured cloth. That winter, the India ships leaving Salem had particular allure for a young Joseph Cabot. He reported to his grandfather that twenty or thirty ships had recently departed from Salem, many for India, as Salem returned to this commercial specialty. “There is more India trade done here than in almost any town,” Cabot wrote. Meanwhile, an unprecedented number of shops selling English goods were starting up in Salem. Real estate was still low, though Cabot hoped it would soon rise. “I am afraid it

⁷⁴ *Essex Register*, February 22, 1815.

⁷⁵ Nathaniel Silsbee to Benjamin Crowninshield, March 8, 1815, Crowninshield Family Papers, PEM.

will be long ere we recover out former prosperity,” Cabot lamented.⁷⁶ Nonetheless, Cabot dreamed of leaving his job in the law office of Leverett Saltonstall to pursue a life in commerce. Instead of studying law, Cabot hoped to study bookkeeping and French, skills that would best suit him for work in a counting house or aboard a merchant vessel. His decision would have puzzled many, since the pay for any lawyer in Essex County was steady and dependable at \$150 a year, while a livelihood in commerce was much more uncertain, particularly with news of the proposed tariff. In March, Cabot travelled to Boston for an interview with a Boston importing firm, only to be told that due to the new proposed duties on India goods, the firm expected to lose its Bengal trade and could not hire him.⁷⁷

After the peace of 1815, debates in Congress over a new post-war tariff marked a new era of American political economy.⁷⁸ Domestic manufacturing and a home market earned new government protections as the sources of national wealth and independence and commerce would continue to extend across the globe, but now as the carriers of bulk American products like cotton and wheat. In December 1815, James Madison’s presidential address outlined this new political economy that placed commerce in a supportive role to America’s commercial agriculture. The president discussed new plans for internal improvements and a national tariff, stating that domestic production might lead to external commerce, but that trade carried out by the “sagacity and interest of individuals” was now in opposition to the national interest.⁷⁹

In January 1816, Thomas Jefferson reflected on how international geopolitics had changed over the past thirty years and how his thoughts on domestic manufacturing and the

⁷⁶ John Cabot to Dr. William Paine, December 25, 1815, Paine Family Papers, American Antiquarian Society, Worcester, Massachusetts. [Cited hereafter as AAS]

⁷⁷ Joseph Cabot to William Paine, March 18, 1816, Paine Family Papers, AAS.

⁷⁸ For an overview of the 1816 tariff debates in Congress, see Baxter, *Henry Clay and the American System*, 19-21.

⁷⁹ James Madison, *Seventh Annual Message*, December 5, 1815, The American Presidency Project, University of California Santa Barbara, <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=29457>; Howe, *What Hath God Wrought*, 81.

national economic interest had changed along with it. In a letter to Republican merchant Benjamin Austin that was later “freely circulated” through Massachusetts, Jefferson wrote that in 1785, “Our independent place among nations was acknowledged,” and that it was in foreign commerce that the United States solidified this position in the international arena. Farming the vast stretches of American land produced raw materials sought after by nations around the globe. “It was expected that those especially to whom manufacturing industry was important, would cherish the friendship of such [American] customers by every favor, by every inducement, and particularly cultivate their peace by every act of justice and friendship,” Jefferson wrote to Austin. While producing agricultural goods for foreign markets would contribute to national wealth, trading these farm goods abroad affirmed America’s place as a sovereign nation: “what a field did it promise for the occupations of the ocean; what a nursery for that class of citizens who were to exercise and maintain our equal rights on that element?” In this period, Jefferson continued, the ocean was open to all nations, “and their common right in it acknowledged and exercised under regulations sanctioned by the assent and usage of all.”⁸⁰

Jefferson believed that international war would persist, causing both Britain and France to defy the natural order between nations and “exclude us from the field of interchange with other nations.”⁸¹ The lesson, Jefferson stated to Austin, was “that manufactures are now as necessary to our independence as to our comfort,” and with that sentiment Jefferson now supported the new tariff legislation. “For in so complicated a science as political economy,” Jefferson concluded, “no one axiom can be laid down as wise and expedient for all times and circumstances, and for their contraries.” By 1816, commerce was no longer the peaceful

⁸⁰ Thomas Jefferson to Benjamin Austin, January 9, 1816. *Writings of Thomas Jefferson*, Vol. 11. For the circulation of this letter by March 1816 see Bentley, *Diary*, 4: 378.

⁸¹ For a discussion of Jefferson’s letter to Austin in the context of his expectation of future war, see Onuf and Onuf, *Markets, Nations, and War*, 239-246.

declaration of American independence, but a concession of American dependence on foreign nations and a road to dangerous entanglement in future wars.⁸² The home market would now be where the United States strengthened its national wealth, sovereignty, and neutrality.

In Congress by December 1815, Timothy Pickering, who served as Salem's Representative in the House, observed petitions pouring in with various requests regarding protective duties, both to abolish them and to increase them, particularly those on cotton goods from the Indian Ocean. Representative William Lowndes from South Carolina, Chairman of the House Committee on Ways and Means, approached Pickering for advice on how a new tariff might affect American navigation, and Pickering posed the question in a letter to his good friend and fellow Salem native George Cabot.⁸³ "To sell dear and buy cheap is obviously our interest: the widest market and freest competition secure these in the best manner," Cabot responded. Pointing to American trade in the Pacific and the Indian Oceans, Cabot told Pickering that one hundred American ships had passed beyond each Cape since the signing of the Treaty of Ghent, twenty six from Salem alone. Some American ships left the United States with specie, Cabot acknowledged, while others on their way to the Indian Ocean carried diverse cargoes or made preliminary stops in Madeira to pick up wine or in Lisbon and Cadiz to pick up dollars. From his observations of Salem's shipping activity, Cabot told Pickering of the many pepper ships that had sailed from that port the previous spring and how many were already selling their pepper in the Mediterranean, often for dollars in order to repeat the trading cycle once again. "Thus you see how circuitously our commerce winds about, supplying every want and taking away every

⁸² Thomas Jefferson to Benjamin Austin, January 9, 1816. *Writings of Thomas Jefferson*, Vol. 11.

⁸³ Lowndes had been skeptical of the tariff, especially since he understood that Americans carried other articles besides specie to the Indian Ocean to eventually exchange for cotton and thus worried that a prohibition on Indian cotton would in turn deter navigation rather than encourage it. Timothy Pickering to George Cabot, December 14, 1815, printed in Cabot, *Life and Letters*, 565.

surplus our eagle-eyed merchants can discover on the globe.” He concluded, “I pray that Congress may leave it as free as possible.”⁸⁴

In February 1816, Secretary of the Treasury Alexander Dallas submitted a report to Congress outlining a new tariff to reform policies that had been largely unchanged since the first session of the federal government. The new period of peace required new tariff strategies, Dallas argued in his statement of tariff principles, particularly after years of economic and demographic growth within the United States: “The peace of Europe will give a new course and character to the commerce of the world.” Dallas called on Congress to abolish select internal duties and taxes and raise public revenue primarily through new and higher duties on imports.⁸⁵ Specifically, he asked for an increase in import duties of forty-two percent above the wartime duties that were already twice the previous peacetime levels.⁸⁶ Dallas justified these policies under the social compact, “formed on the basis of a surrender of a part of the natural rights of individuals, for the security and benefit of the whole society,” and the federal compact, “formed on the basis of a surrender of a part of the political rights of each State, for the benefit and security of the whole confederation.”

Dallas intended the tariff not only as a revenue-building strategy for the federal government, but also as a fundamental reorientation of American political economy toward a thriving and interconnected domestic market.⁸⁷ Dallas worked to reconcile the interests of manufacturing with commerce under his proposed tariff, but he argued that the United States, like most governments of the time, should consider the establishment of domestic manufactures a

⁸⁴ George Cabot to Timothy Pickering, December 20, 1815, printed in Cabot, *Life and Letters*, 567-568.

⁸⁵ *Letter from the Secretary of the Treasury Transmitting a Report on the General Tariff of Duties Proper to be Imposed on Imported Goods, Wares, and Merchandise* (Washington: William A. Davis, 1816; Reprinted by Collins Printing House, 1887), 16.

⁸⁶ *Report on the General Tariff*, 17.

⁸⁷ On this point see Brian Schoen, *The Fragile Fabric of Union: The Cotton South, Federal Politics, and the Global Origins of the Civil War, 1783-1861* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2009), 108-109.

policy priority. Dallas identified coarse cotton and woolen goods in particular as ideal items on which to impose a tax in order to “enable the manufacturer to meet the importer, in the American market, upon equal terms of profit and loss.”⁸⁸ Duties on woolen and cotton goods would increase by 124% and 166.6%, respectively, under the new tariff.⁸⁹ A tariff that gave preference to a domestic market over a foreign market, he argued, ensured that the American people were “as independent in the resources of their subsistence as in the operations of their government.”⁹⁰

Many of Pickering’s Federalist merchant friends in Massachusetts were interested in the India trade, and as Pickering sent Dallas’s tariff report to these associates they implored Pickering to speak out against the measure, particularly the high duties in cotton goods, lest they destroy this commerce. By 1813, the Boston Manufacturing Company had already established a mill in Waltham, Massachusetts to spin cotton into cloth, bringing the evidence of domestic competitors, the benefactors of the tariff measures, nearby. Dudley Pickman in Salem wrote that “the attempt to impose such a high duty on coarse cottons seems to have engrossed public attention entirely.”⁹¹ He recognized the divergent economic interests at play in New England: “I understand the So. & Western people consider it a great boon granted to the Eastern States, in submitting to this duty. The Merchants & all connected with commerce, should be excused from

⁸⁸ *Report on the General Tariff*, 22-23, 25. Of this list, Dallas identified coarse cottons and woollens as the class of manufactures in need of high enough duties to encourage their domestic production. The other items he identified a class of manufactures for duties should only be applied in order to raise revenue, not encourage a domestic production.

⁸⁹ *Report on the General Tariff*, 46.

⁹⁰ *Report on the General Tariff*, 19, 26-27. Dallas recommended that naval stores like hemp, iron cables, anchors, and other items be taxed minimally when imported for use in the construction or outfitting of ships. He recommended that Congress investigate strategies to tax foreign ships trading in the United States and in implementing retaliatory commercial measures on the trade of foreign nations that confined the shipment of their good to their own ships. Dallas recognized that agriculture needed a market for its staples and that commerce flourished when it could supply goods from foreign markets. “It is necessary to recollect,” he wrote, “that the common object of the nation will not invariably correspond with the separate objects of individuals, or of their professions, not with the local objects of the respective States, or of the industry of their inhabitants.” *Report on the General Tariff*, 18.

⁹¹ Pickman told Pickering that he had read Bowditch’s letter. Dudley Pickman to Timothy Pickering, March 21, 1816, TPP, MHS.

any share of the obligations imposed. It is extremely unreasonable that the whole community should be taxed, & one class of citizens, in an important branch of their business, ruined to promote the views of any other class.”⁹² William Reed of Marblehead wrote: “It may be thought practicable to collect the enormous duty proposed in the Tariff but it would be a new & I believe unheard of height of patience & moral virtue for a man to submit to this ruin of himself & family from measures unexampled in the history of commerce.”⁹³ Nathaniel Bowditch, a former ship captain, author of *The American Practical Navigator*, and president of the Essex Fire and Marine Insurance Company in 1815, wrote that many Salem traders did not believe Congress would actually approve such measures, since the new duties were so antithetical to the commercial republic that they had participated in and contributed to for decades. “If the least suspicion was entertained that this part of the report would be adopted,” Bowditch told Pickering, “there would be the strongest remonstrance from all classes of our citizens.”⁹⁴

Previous tariffs crafted under Treasury Secretary Alexander Hamilton had taxed trade to generate federal revenue, and with this framework in mind, Salem opponents of the tariff argued that the new measure sought to ruin a commerce with British India that had made some of the most dependable and substantial contributions to the federal treasury and, in turn, the national interest.⁹⁵ They repeated claims made during debates over the Jay Treaty or the War of 1812 that protecting American trade with British markets, particularly in British India, offered Americans and the American union some of the richest and most certain rewards on their investments.⁹⁶

⁹² Dudley Pickman to Timothy Pickering, March 21, 1816, TPP, MHS.

⁹³ William Reed to Timothy Pickering, March 26, 1815, TPP, MHS.

⁹⁴ Nathaniel Bowditch to Timothy Pickering, February 29, 1816, TPP, MHS.

⁹⁵ For the Hamiltonian revenue system see John Nelson, *Liberty and Property: Political Economy and Policymaking in the New Nation* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1987).

⁹⁶ Increased confidence in the India trade by 1815 came from the Anglo-American *Convention to Regulate Commerce* that had re-codified the terms of the Jay Treaty by allowing Americans to trade in the principle ports of British India as long as they returned directly to the United States. Article III of the Convention allowed Americans to trade in Calcutta, Madras, Bombay, and the Prince of Wales Island and stipulated that Americans would pay

When the new tariff threatened to make this commerce prohibitively expensive, Pickering's Federalist correspondents defended this trade with references to its vast employment of men and ships and the revenue it generated for the union. Reed reminded Pickering that in 1810 fifteen percent of all merchandise subject to duty in the United States came from British markets in the East Indies, and that one third of American tonnage in foreign trade and two-fifths of American seaman engaged in foreign trade were employed in commerce to the East Indies. In communities like Salem and Marblehead whose commercial specialties had been trade beyond the Cape of Good Hope, the potential unemployment of ships and seaman as a result of the new tariff seemed particularly alarming. Bowditch reviewed the Salem customs books for Salem ships that had departed for Calcutta in 1816, and he wrote to Pickering that under the current rates, these ten ships would likely pay \$320,000 in duties, about \$250,000 of which was on cotton goods alone. "From this you can form an idea of this branch of commerce as a source of revenue," Bowditch wrote to Pickering, "when the town of Salem alone in the present year will pay nearly a quarter of a million of dollars."⁹⁷ There was certainty in this trade that was worth continuing, these men claimed.

But the aims of the federal tariff had changed since the 1790s, and now the goal was protectionism for domestic manufacturers and the home market.⁹⁸ At the heart of Salem's opposition to the tariff were the methods of taxation that made these cloth imports prohibitively expensive not just because the duty was so high, but because the tariff standardized the tax on all cotton goods. In contrast to the broad variety of cottons for sale in Indian ports, the proposed

duties no higher than those paid by the most favored European nations. For the text of the Convention see: "Convention of 1815 Between the United States and Great Britain and Associated Documents," Accessed November 30, 2014, http://avalon.law.yale.edu/19th_century/conv1816.asp; Vernon G. Setser, *The Commercial Reciprocity Policy of the United States, 1774-1829* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1937), 186-189.

⁹⁷ Nathaniel Bowditch to Timothy Pickering, December 24, 1816, TPP, MHS.

⁹⁸ Howe, *What Hath God Wrought*, 83-85.

tariff taxed all imported coarse cottons on a set valuation of their purchase price in India at twenty-five cents per yard in order to simplify the tax collection process on such various cotton goods. Gone was the commercial advantage Salem traders had gained through their specialized knowledge of Indian goods and consumer preferences and their interpersonal networks of trading partners. Salem merchants competed in trade, particularly against their rivals in larger ports like Boston and New York, by using these variations to their advantage, and they argued that the twenty-five cent valuation diminished the advantage of their informed and strategic decisions. In putting together his letter to Pickering, Bowditch worked with Republican merchant Nathaniel Silsbee to outline how Salem merchants could and often did purchase coarse cotton goods in Calcutta at far below the twenty-five cent valuation, usually at no more than ten cents per yard. In March 1816, Dudley Pickman forwarded Pickering a memorial drafted and signed by a group of Salem merchants protesting the tariff, and specifically the uniform valuation. “The signers are opposed to the whole business of the valuation and would not for a moment have it believed they could acquiesce in that proposed.”⁹⁹

The new protectionist aims of the proposed tariff favored the home market and narrowed the forms of commerce now considered beneficial to the national interest. At stake was Salem’s position, as an early American seaport, on the vanguard of efforts to secure American

⁹⁹ Dudley Pickman to Timothy Pickering, March 23, 1816, TPP, MHS. Opponents found similar issue with the new methods of enforcement. Dallas’s proposed tariff law required American consuls to endorse the cargo lists of ships departing from their district based on their determination of whether or not the price of the listed goods was the accurate market price of those items. In Pickman’s opinion, this measure falsely assumed that consuls had as much specialized knowledge about markets as merchants who lived, traded, and competed within currents of commercial information: “Goods are always better or worse purchased by different men, the qualities vary, the colors of goods, the demand at the particular moment. All these no consul can know.” Further, by requiring shippers to immediately declare the destination of their goods, either for re-export or for domestic consumption, upon their arrival back in the United States, Salem traders argued that the measure prohibited merchants from using information about market conditions to make strategic, and lucrative, decisions about where to sell his imports. Rigorous examinations of goods would cause delay, and the process of opening all containers would likely injure the goods or make it more difficult to reship them to other markets. “To have every package of goods opened & examined, one would think, could never have entered the mind of a man living in a commercial country.” Dudley Pickman to Timothy Pickering, March 21, 1816, TPP, MHS.

independence by growing America's circuitous and opportunistic carrying trade through foreign markets. In 1815, the produce of American commercial agriculture and manufactures and the American shipping to carry these bulk goods to foreign markets became the new means to put the nation in a position of power within the international system of sovereign states. The United States would no longer be subject to the whims of European commercial policies if it carried fewer foreign goods, tariff proponents argued. Boston's Republican newspaper printed opinions that the new tariff would stabilize foreign relations, increase national wealth, "and place our national independence on the eternal rock of ages."¹⁰⁰ Another writer argued: "It is time we study our permanent interests, and cultivate our domestic resources; cut canals, make roads, foster manufactures, and do every thing we can in favor of real independence...manufacture more, import less."¹⁰¹

Bowditch warned Pickering that choking off the India trade would decrease the importation of India cloth as desired, but also put Salem's broader commercial geography at real risk. For many opponents of the tariff in Salem, British India was a central but not exclusive part of their foreign commerce, and they desired the certainty of this market in order to bring confidence to their more extensive patterns of trade. Calcutta frequently served as "port of refuge" where American ships trading in the Indian Ocean could be relatively sure of obtaining a cargo for home when other markets failed, Bowditch informed Pickering. "Vessels have been very frequently sent to Batavia, Sumatra, the Red Sea, the Persian Gulph, etc. and if cargoes could not be procured there, they were ordered to go to Calcutta, where they are always sure of getting something," Bowditch wrote. "Any embarrassment therein in the way of the Calcutta

¹⁰⁰ *Independent Chronicle* (Boston, MA), July 8, 1816.

¹⁰¹ *Independent Chronicle* (Boston, MA), July 1, 1816.

trade, would have a tendency to decrease generally the trade to all places beyond the Cape of Good Hope.”¹⁰²

America’s widespread participation in global commerce bolstered rather than drained the national economy, Bowditch argued, and deserved continued federal support. Bowditch pointed to the “circuitous measures” that American ships often pursued to procure dollars, not from American sources, but from foreign, to argue that the India trade did not drain domestic specie.¹⁰³ He reflected on own experiences in trade beyond the Cape of Good Hope since the 1790s, outlining for Pickering the practices of global commerce that supported Salem’s India trade. “To show how circuitous these voyages frequently are, I will give you the course pursued in all of the five voyages I have been to sea, our object being always to go beyond the Cape of Good Hope,” he wrote. He told of sailing to the Isle of France in 1796 with a cargo of wine, brandy, beef, cheese, flour, and other goods. In 1797 he had sailed for Lisbon to obtain dollars and then to Madeira for wine before departing for Manilla. In 1798 he sailed for Europe with a cargo of merchandise. By his fourth and fifth voyages, he sailed direct from the United States for Batavia and then Sumatra with a cargo of dollars.¹⁰⁴

The immediate need to generate post-war revenue for the national government and the tariff’s severe but limited targeting of imported manufactured goods dampened a broad and unified commercial protest against the measure. For those not engaged directly in trade in India

¹⁰² Nathaniel Bowditch to Timothy Pickering, December 24, 1815, TPP, MHS.

¹⁰³ Ships could obtain bills of exchange on London or elsewhere, Bowditch wrote, and then sail for Europe to exchange them for dollars; they could take on wine in Madeira and sell it in the East Indies; they could procure bills of exchange on Calcutta by stopping in England. The most common circuitous measure, Bowditch informed Pickering, was to sail for Europe or South America or the Isle of France with a cargo of goods and sell the goods for specie. Bowditch pointed to the Salem ship *Friendship* that had recently sailed for Lisbon with beef, naval stores, and bills of exchange and to the Salem ship *Nautilus* which had recently sailed for Brazil with a diverse cargo, both of which hoped to sell their cargoes for dollars in these foreign markets and then proceed to India. Specie allowed for direct voyages, Bowditch acknowledged, but broad access to foreign markets offered merchants a method to circumvent specie shortages.

¹⁰⁴ Nathaniel Bowditch to Timothy Pickering, December 24, 1815, TPP, MHS.

cloth, Dallas's claims that commercial inconveniences would be temporary and modest seemed reasonable. Maryland Republican Representative and Baltimore merchant Samuel Smith served on the Committee of Ways and Means and shepherded the bill through the House as one of its main defenders. Smith was an advocate for Maryland manufacturers, but as a merchant engaged in the carrying trade he also believed that the duties on commerce were modest enough to avoid harming the American shipping interest.¹⁰⁵ Meanwhile, federal action in other areas gave encouragement to traders not dependent in their commerce on the importation of manufactured goods. As James Madison's Secretary of the Navy by 1815, Benjamin Crowninshield oversaw the Second Barbary War with Algiers to protect America's uninterrupted commerce with the Mediterranean, a lucrative market for foodstuffs and re-exports. This U.S. naval action also freed ten enslaved Americans, many of whom were captured crewmen from Nathaniel Silsbee's ship *Edwin* out of Salem.¹⁰⁶ In March 1817, American shippers gained federal encouragement for their foreign commerce under the new American Navigation Act that drew on precedents from British navigation laws and limited the importation of foreign goods to American ships. The Act gave Americans a particular advantage against British shippers and encouraged American ships to trade directly with those foreign markets that would otherwise send their goods to London as an entrepot for broader re-exportation.¹⁰⁷ Although the American carrying trade faced competition from increased foreign tonnage in peacetime, for now these more circuitous trades gained federal encouragement, and they remained mostly unhindered by the

¹⁰⁵ Frank Casell, *Merchant Congressman in the Young Republic* (Madison, WI: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1971), 216-217.

¹⁰⁶ Crowninshield took over the office of Secretary of the Navy on January 16, 1815. For the story of the *Edwin* and Crowninshield's appointment, see Frederick Leiner, *The End of Barbary Terror: America's 1815 War Against the Pirates of the North* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006); Howe, *What Hath God Wrought*, 77-79.

¹⁰⁷ The Navigation Act of 1817 limited the importation of foreign goods to American ships or to ships from the nation that produced the good. It operated against nations with similar laws against American shipping, which included Great Britain, Norway, and Sweden. Setser, *Commercial Reciprocity*, 187-188.

tariff. Thus, while the 1816 tariff did threaten certain mechanics of trade that had allowed middling ports and their merchants to compete and prosper in foreign trade, the tariff's focus on the direct, Anglo-American trade that had driven Federalist policy throughout early American debates over political economy limited negative commercial ramifications and, in turn, political displeasure in entrepreneurial maritime centers like Salem.

In Salem, the Republican *Register* referenced the tariff debate as a question of “the balance due to commerce & to manufacturers and to the arts,” but the paper made no protest against the measure.¹⁰⁸ The Federalist *Gazette*, alternatively, urged its readers to take a greater interest in the tariff debate and decried the proposed protections granted to manufacturers.¹⁰⁹ As election season neared, local politics grew fierce once again. After the March elections for town offices, Joseph Cabot wrote to his grandfather with disappointment that Salem was once again “a good republican town.”¹¹⁰ Republicans won again in the April elections for Governor, but in May, Salem Federalists successfully elected their full ticket of representatives to the state legislature. When the *Register* claimed that the Republicans had lost because the recent death of party leader Joseph White had forced other party members to take on double duties of electioneering, the *Gazette* lampooned the claim in tariff terms: “If the burthen of *Double Duties* is too heavy, they ought to adopt a *New Tariff*- their fellow citizens have long suffered the impositions of trebled Taxes and multiplied Imposts.”¹¹¹

In Congress, Timothy Pickering worked to amend the proposed tariff bill to aid his Massachusetts constituents in the India trade.¹¹² Pickering got help in the House from Daniel

¹⁰⁸ *Essex Register*, April 3, 1816.

¹⁰⁹ *Salem Gazette*, April 2 and April 4, 1816.

¹¹⁰ Joseph Cabot to William Paine, March 18, 1816, Paine Family Papers, AAS.

¹¹¹ Italics from original, *Salem Gazette*, May 14, 1816; *Essex Register*, May 11, 1816.

¹¹² He succeeded in delaying the implementation of the tariff taxes until the fleet of American East India ships had returned home from their current voyages. *Annals of Congress*, House, 14th Cong. 1st Sess., April 3, 1816, 1315.

Webster and from John Randolph, who questioned the need to support manufacturers over maritime rights and who questioned the sentiments behind the tariff, which he characterized as “down with flag, up with the spinning jenny.”¹¹³ In late April, Congress approved the new tariff, and Pickering and Randolph were unsuccessful in removing the set price valuation on imported cotton goods. In late April Congress approved the new tariff and the bill with Madison’s signature appeared in full in the *Salem Gazette* on May 17, 1816.¹¹⁴

IV

The tariff helped to usher in a new nation grounded on domestic industry and internal improvements, and Salem with its dependence on foreign commerce was ill-equipped to adapt to this new context. In the 1820s, even as tonnage in the port dropped fifteen percent from its 1807 levels, visitors to Salem still remarked about how they “had never met with merchants more intelligent on commercial subjects than at Salem, or in more close connection with the most foreign markets.”¹¹⁵ Settling western lands and incorporating western communities into the national market failed to attract the lasting attention of the Salem community that still looked to the sea for its survival. In 1816, William Bentley wrote in his diary that George Crowninshield had recently returned from his excursion through the western territories after finding “little to love in the wilds.” He had left Salem with an immense fortune from his family’s merchant business, and he had vowed never to return. Dreams of exploring and growing richer off “22 hundred miles of inland navigation” had driven him west. But after visiting Pittsburgh, Cincinnati, and New Orleans, Crowninshield found nothing to convince him to stay, and he

¹¹³ *Salem Gazette*, April 23, 1816.

¹¹⁴ *Salem Gazette*, May 17, 1816.

¹¹⁵ Felt, *Annals of Salem*, Vol. II, 75. In 1807, aggregate tonnage in Salem was 41,083, and in 1822 aggregate tonnage was 34,836. American State Papers, Commerce & Navigation, Volume VII, 733-34, and Volume VIII, 752.

found passage back to Massachusetts after being gone only a few months. “So ends the Western Tour,” Bentley wrote, “of which enthusiasm has nothing to record.”¹¹⁶

Salem’s moment as a leading center for American foreign commerce declined with the onset the new transportation and communications revolution that extended American settlement, politics, and commerce westward and favored large shipping centers with the infrastructure and transportation connections capable of carrying the products of American commercial agriculture.¹¹⁷ Internal improvements, so critical to Henry Clay’s American System and so important for incorporating inland and western communities into the national economy, nonetheless lowered the costs of inland transportation relative to travel by sea and diverted trade from small coastal ports to larger shipping centers. Already by 1815, Bentley noticed during the sale of wartime prize goods in Salem that “the transportation in wagons for the [prize] dry goods has been preferred to the passage coastwise. This was a thing unknown unless in the wars, till we had a turnpike. A large wagon covered till lately rare.”¹¹⁸ That same month, Bentley noted how the Middlesex Canal, which connected Boston to the Merrimack Valley in southern New Hampshire, was already proving “its value to Boston” with stores “opened at each end of it.” While the canal increased trade to Boston and helped Lowell, Massachusetts expand as an industrial center, coastal Essex County began to suffer from this diverted commerce.¹¹⁹

Gloucester remained a leading American fishing port, but Newburyport declined along with

¹¹⁶ Bentley, IV: 382.

¹¹⁷ For these transformations in transportation and communication, see Daniel Walker Howe, *What Hath God Wrought*.

¹¹⁸ Bentley, *Diary*, 4: 334.

¹¹⁹ The town of Newburyport in particular lost commerce due to the canal’s construction, since Newburyport had been a destination for goods travelling down the Merrimack River that now went to Boston by way of the canal. See Bentley’s notes on Newburyport’s displeasure at the canal in 1818. Bentley, *Diary*, 4: 537.

Salem, where registered tonnage decreased rapidly through the nineteenth century.¹²⁰ From 1810 to 1820, Salem's population essentially stagnated, growing by only 118 people (Figure 7.1).

City	1810 Population	1820 Population
New York, NY	96373	123706
Philadelphia, PA	53722	63802
Baltimore, MD	46555	62738
Boston, MA	33787	43298
New Orleans	17242	27176
Charleston, SC	24711	24780
Washington, DC	8208	13247
Salem, MA	12613	12731
Providence, RI	10071	11767
Norfolk, VA	9193	8478
Portsmouth, NH	6934	7327
Newport, RI	7907	7319
Pittsburgh, PA	4768	7248
Newburyport, MA	7634	6852

Figure 7.1: 1810 and 1820 population statistics. Source: U.S. Census Bureau.¹²¹

For a port of middling size that shuttled most of its trade through sea lanes and had limited inland commercial connections and a shallow harbor, Salem could not compete under the new economic conditions against larger shipping centers like Boston or New York. With peace, foreign nations enacted their own tariffs and navigation acts giving preference to their own ships and manufacturers. The availability of foreign tonnage increased with the peace, and these changes in the global marketplace all contributed to greater competition and restriction for American freighters in the circuitous global carrying and re-export trades.¹²² Expanding trade to

¹²⁰ Robert Greenlaugh Albion, "From Sails to Spindles: Essex County in Transition," in *Essex Institute Historical Collections* XCV (April 1959), 115-117.

¹²¹ "Population of 46 Urban Places: 1810," U.S. Census Bureau. Accessed September 14, 2014. <https://www.census.gov/population/www/documentation/twps0027/tab04.txt>; "Population of 61 Urban Places: 1810," U.S. Census Bureau. Accessed December 1, 2014. <https://www.census.gov/population/www/documentation/twps0027/tab05.txt>.

¹²² North, *The Economic Growth of the United States*, 61-67.

new markets through these trades had been Salem's means to compete, but by 1815 Salem's strategies for commercial advantage no longer aligned with the driving forces of American economic expansion, which by the 1810s were domestic manufacturing and the exportation of cotton.¹²³ The growth of these industries encouraged the importation of bulk raw materials for manufacturing like dyes, hides, and saltpeter. The importation and movement of these materials favored large shipping centers that could distribute goods and provide marine services like insurance, lending, and marketing more competitively than smaller ports like Salem, particularly with the construction of new canals.¹²⁴ While Baltimore continued to grow due to the city's connection to areas of wheat and flour production and the accompanying demand for these foodstuffs in the international market, Boston absorbed commerce from Salem and surrounding New England ports, and New York similarly absorbed trade from throughout the eastern seaboard, along with a large portion of the nation's cotton exportation.¹²⁵

This process had started before the War of 1812, and it accelerated with the peace and the resulting changes in the American economy. In 1811, for example, Crowninshield vessels returning from the Baltic often proceeded directly for Boston and New York to sell their iron and hemp.¹²⁶ As early as 1807, Salem merchant William Gray had considered moving his East India shipping business to Boston due to the shallow depths of the Salem harbor.¹²⁷ The biggest ships

¹²³ North, 61.

¹²⁴ Bean, *Yankee India*, 175-176; Vickers, *Young Men and the Sea*, 173; Morison, *Maritime History of Massachusetts*, 213-224.

¹²⁵ North, 61-63, 193-194.

¹²⁶ In September 1810, John Crowninshield's ship *Diomedé* (283 tons) returned to Salem from St. Petersburg with hemp and proceeded directly to Boston, and in September 1811, his ship *America* was captured by Danish privateers on a passage from St. Petersburg to New York. *Essex Register*, September 19, 1810; "Essex County Vessels Captured by Foreign Powers, 1793-1813," in *Essex Institute Historical Collections* 58 (1922), 280. In August 1810, Richard Crowninshield's ship *Ann* returned from Gottenburg to New York with iron and hemp. *Essex Register*, August 22, 1810.

¹²⁷ John Melish, *Travels through the United States of America, in the Years 1806 & 1807, and 1809, 1810, & 1811* (London: George Cowie & Co., 1818), 81.

in this pre-war period already had to anchor off the wharves and shuttle their cargoes in to the Salem wharves. As raw materials in bulk became common cargoes for Salem traders, the ships required for this trade grew larger, and their landing in the shallow Salem harbor became even more difficult, which encouraged more and more Salem merchants to run their trade through Boston or New York.¹²⁸ In 1816, Bentley observed how the rise of New York as a center for foreign commerce and as a transshipment port for goods to the American interior had increased trade between Salem and New York. “A Voyage to New York was seldom known & almost always a detached thing,” Bentley wrote of the pre-war period, “but now it is common to have it included in the voyage, to make it a port of sales & to have part of the respective firms resident in that flourishing & fast rising city.”¹²⁹

While Salem traders regretted the new federal policies for the demise they signified for their port, others in support of the tariff and the new federal focus on domestic production viewed these initiatives as efforts to return the union to “ordinary circumstances” now possible in a time of peace. Reflecting back on the 1790s and the early years of the nineteenth century, Pennsylvania Representative Adam Seybert wrote in 1818 that international war had provided immense opportunities for American traders in the foreign carrying trade, but that American merchants had confused these “temporary circumstances” for “permanent advantages” while the American people and government had neglected domestic manufacturing, the true “wealth and power of this nation.” Seybert argued that the very strategies of trade through which Salem and other American seaports had thrived since the 1790s ran counter to the natural order of commerce. “No one was limited to any one branch of trade; the same individual was concerned

¹²⁸ Vickers, *Young Men and the Sea*, 174.

¹²⁹ Bentley, 4: 382. On the rise of New York City as the nation’s premier commercial metropolis in the 1820s, especially after competing for trade with Boston, Philadelphia, Baltimore, and Charleston, South Carolina, see Robert Albion, *The Rise of New York Port, 1815-1860* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1939).

in voyages to Asia, South America, the West Indies and Europe. Our tonnage increased in ratio, with the extended catalogue of the exports; we seemed to have arrived at the maximum of human prosperity.” Wealth had made American merchants blind to the true “principles of commerce” that must return with the return of peace, Seybert argued: “they did not contemplate a period of general peace, when each nation will carry its own productions, when discriminations will be made in favour of domestic tonnage, when foreign commerce will be limited to enumerated articles, and when much circumspection will be necessary in all our commercial transactions.” Foreign trade as American merchants had pursued it during the war would only lead to national embarrassments through an imbalance of exports and imports, Seybert argued. He concluded: “instead of vesting our hopes on fallacious intercourse with foreign nations, we should cherish the means of extending the home market.”¹³⁰

Lasting anxiety about foreign trade in the wake of the Panic of 1819 and the increasing number of congressional representatives from the Mid-Atlantic and Ohio Valley gave protectionist and pro-tariff sentiment added strength in national politics.¹³¹ As Congress began discussions to turn the post-war tariff of 1816 into a more permanent policy, former Salem political rivals united in opposition to this federal measure. The tariff bill of 1816 had aimed in particular to diminish if not destroy the importation of India cloth goods, and new tariff proposals in 1820 continued this goal while also calling for the removal of the drawback and credit systems that had undergirded the American carrying and re-export trades. By striking at both the direct importation of goods from India and at the broader and more circuitous routes of

¹³⁰ Adam Seybert, *Statistical annals: embracing views of the population, commerce, navigation, fisheries, public lands, post-office establishment, revenues, mint, military and naval establishments, expenditures, public debt and sinking fund, of the United States of America: founded on official documents: commencing on the fourth of March seventeen hundred and eighty-nine and ending on the twentieth of April eighteen hundred and eighteen* (Philadelphia: Thomas Dobson & Son, 1818), 59-61.

¹³¹ Howe, *What Hath God Wrought*, 271-272.

the American carrying trade, the proposed tariff united former Salem political rivals in rigorous defense of their foreign commerce. By the end of December 1819, notices appeared in the Salem newspapers calling all interested persons to a public meeting at the hall of the East India Marine Society to discuss the proposed tariff, particularly the measures abolishing drawbacks and requiring cash payments for duties in lieu of credits. The merchants who called this meeting included a mix of Federalists and Republicans: Joseph Peabody, Willard Peele, Pickering Dodge, Stephen White, Dudley Pickman, and Moses Townsend.¹³² Benjamin Pickman served as the meeting's Chairman and Franklin Story its Secretary. Most of these men already served together as officers, trustees, or incorporators of the Salem Savings Bank, incorporated in 1818, and many had already begun to collaborate in political affairs, most recently in the debate over the extension of slavery in the western territories and the drafting of a town petition to Congress against the establishment of slavery in the new state of Missouri.¹³³ As the December meeting progressed, a committee formed to assemble a memorial to Congress protesting the new tariff. Its members included many of those who had called the meeting, along with additional men like

¹³² See meeting announcement in both Salem newspapers. *Essex Register*, December 29, 1819; *Salem Gazette*, December 31, 1819. In August 1820, the merchants of Salem met and selected a committee to "represent the commercial interest of this town," and this group was similarly made up of men from both former parties: Benjamin Pickman, Joseph Peabody, Benjamin W. Crowninshield, Willard Peele, Dudley Pickman, Pickering Dodge, Stephen White, Gideon Barstow, Nathaniel West, Jr., William Silsbee, John H. Andrew, and James Cook. *Salem Gazette*, August 15, 1820.

¹³³ For a list of officers and trustees of the Salem Savings Bank see *The One Hundred Years of the Salem Savings Bank* (Salem: Salem Savings Bank, 1918), 17-18. On December 7, 1818, Willard Peele served as moderator for a town meeting to discuss the extension of slavery in the Western Territory. Benjamin Pickman drafted and presented resolutions against the establishment of slavery in Missouri, which was supported in a lengthy speech by Joseph Story and approved by the town meeting attendees. Pickman, Story, and Joseph Peabody served on a committee to present the resolutions to Nathaniel Silsbee in Congress. See account of town meeting in *Salem Gazette*, December 10, 1819. At a town meeting in March 1820, Joseph Peabody, Benjamin W. Crowninshield, Willard Peele, J. Ropes, and Stephen Phillips all served on a committee to petition Congress for funding for a new lighthouse for the Salem harbor. *Essex Register*, March 29, 1820. Robert Booth, *Death of an Empire: The Rise and Murderous Fall of Salem, America's Richest City* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2011), 62.

Benjamin W. Crowninshield and Joseph White.¹³⁴ The committee tasked Joseph Story, at the time a justice of the United States Supreme Court, with drafting the memorial.

In January 1820, as tariff supporters gathered in Boston to declare “American Independence” by committing to purchase only American-made clothes, Story drafted his *Memorial Against Restrictions on Commerce* outlining Salem’s enduring vision of American political economy and articulating merchants’ fears that policies promoting domestic manufacturing would undermine local and national prosperity.¹³⁵ Foreign trade was at the heart of the “commercial nation,” the memorial claimed, as “the most lucrative” means to generate federal revenue and sustain federal credit, to expand markets for domestic agriculture, and to grow the American navy. Believing that foreign commerce was “the best sources of our national glory, as well as our national wealth,” Story and his fellow townsmen who signed the memorial argued that government measures to protect and expand American trade throughout the global marketplace remained essential to the national interest.¹³⁶ Foreign commerce, particularly the carrying trade that moved circuitously through foreign markets, was not a mark of dependence on foreign powers, they believed, but a skillful means to produce capital that in turn supported American navigation, American agriculture, and the federal government. These memorialists had developed their ideas on the benefits of commerce to the federal project not from “theoretical reasonings,” they argued, but from “thirty years experience.”¹³⁷ Accustomed as they were to enjoying government protections for their circuitous global trade, they took “as an axiom

¹³⁴ Committee members: (from Salem) Joseph White, Joseph Peabody, Benjamin W. Crowninshield, Pickering Dodge, Dudley L. Pickman, Willard Peele; (from Marblehead) Nathaniel Hooper; (from Beverly) Thomas Stephens. Booth, *Death of an Empire*, 304, fn 6.

¹³⁵ *Essex Register*, January 26, 1820. The petition was dated June 1820, but confirmation that Story drafted the petition in January 1820 appears in Joseph Story to Professor Everett, January 17, 1820, printed in Story, *Life and Letters*, 376.

¹³⁶ William Story, *The Miscellaneous Writings of Joseph Story* (Boston: Charles C. Little and James Brown, 1852), 256.

¹³⁷ Story, *Miscellaneous Writings*, 243.

in political economy, that productive capital, in whatever manner added to the stock of the country, is equally beneficial to its best interests.”¹³⁸

The set valuation on imported cotton goods remained in the proposed tariff of 1820, and the memorialists argued that such a high tax on these cotton items functioned as a “total prohibition” on this trade. The trade in India cloth had employed fifteen Salem ships in 1807, the memorialists noted, and only two since 1818. The hardships in this trade had reverberated through the Salem mercantile community, geared as it was toward trade beyond the Cape of Good Hope. The memorialists lamented the great “loss to our ship-owners, and seamen, and commercial artisans.”¹³⁹ They claimed that the Salem community had borne the tax on imported cotton goods in 1816—a “liberal indulgence” granted to manufacturers—with the expectation that the tax would eventually be repealed, but they now regretted that the tariff duty seemed poised to become permanent with “one prohibition heaped upon another.”¹⁴⁰

Still worse for Salem, the proposed tariff called for the removal of the drawback and credit system for the collection of duties on foreign imports. These measures had been in place since the first federal congress as encouragement for the American carrying and re-export trades. The credit system allowed traders three months to a year to pay duties on their goods, giving them time to find the best market for their imported cargoes and collect payments from their own customers. The drawback policy removed all but 2 ½ % of the duties on goods re-exported to foreign markets, making the re-export trade less expensive and more profitable and encouraging American merchants to funnel their shipping and foreign trade through American ports. In contrast to European policies that designated specific ports as entrepôt markets where imports

¹³⁸ Story, *Miscellaneous Writings*, 243.

¹³⁹ Story, *Miscellaneous Writings*, 257.

¹⁴⁰ Story, *Miscellaneous Writings*, 258.

could be stored and then re-exported without paying the full duties, the American drawback system gave any American port, particularly smaller ports, entrepôt privileges.¹⁴¹

The heightened costs and risks of trade under these new tariff policies would hinder most of all the trade of young and less capitalized merchants, the Salem memorialists claimed. The drawback and credit policies had been implemented by the first Congress to allow American trade to grow despite the scarcity of “moneyed capital” in the American economy.¹⁴² American commercial capital had increased since 1789, the memorialists acknowledged, but capital scarcities naturally remained among rising merchants just entering foreign commerce. These traders lacked the capital to pay cash duties upon importation before they could find the best market for their goods and make sales. “The young and enterprising merchants would be crushed in their attempts at competition, and would be compelled to navigate only in those narrow channels where trade almost stagnates or yields a scanty subsistence,” the memorialists warned.¹⁴³ American trade would not only lose its ability to succeed against the “monopoly and the competition of foreign nations,” but would be monopolized in the United States by an elite group of wealthy merchants: “They alone could carry on the great branches of commerce.”¹⁴⁴

The new tariff policies and the American System of which it was a part threatened to funnel American foreign trade through the largest commercial centers like New York and Boston and make smaller centers like Salem less integral to the importation and transshipment of goods.¹⁴⁵ Prioritizing the home market while making foreign trade more “hazardous and

¹⁴¹ Drawbacks gave Salem traders, for example, incentive to import their Sumatran pepper back to Salem, potentially combine it there with cargoes coming in from all over the globe, and then reship these goods for another foreign market.

¹⁴² Story, *Miscellaneous Writings*, 250.

¹⁴³ Story, *Miscellaneous Writings*, 254.

¹⁴⁴ Story, *Miscellaneous Writings*, 245, 253.

¹⁴⁵ The growth of commercial centers had been one of the great benefits of commerce to the settlement and strengthening of the United States since its founding, the memorialists believed. Cities had sprung up on the coast as places to gather cargoes, particularly the “products of our soil,” for shipment to foreign markets, while in the

precarious” and expensive benefitted larger ports capable of weathering the increased speculations. In December 1819, notice had appeared in the *Salem Gazette* that merchants in New York City had already petitioned Congress in support of measures to require cash payments for duties in lieu of credits.¹⁴⁶ Salem’s maritime hinterland consisted of ports across the global marketplace, but it maintained fewer connections to the American interior through canals and turnpikes than rival commercial centers like Boston or New York. The loss of the drawback system would further increase the cost to bring goods to Salem. The memorialists warned that “the abolition of the drawback system” for the carrying trade “would immediately lead to a direct trade between foreign ports” in which American shippers would “equip, repair, and man their ships in Europe” and give the profits of navigation to foreigners.¹⁴⁷ Merchants in the carrying trade would have increased incentive to construct their commercial geographies outside of American ports, the memorialists warned: “It would diminish the productive revenue, and give a foreign character to our seamen and commerce, instead of concentrating both, as their home, in the bosom of the country.”¹⁴⁸

It was in the freedom of American trade to grow that Salem had found its commercial advantage against larger shipping centers and that American trade in general had generated essential revenue for the federal government, the memorialists argued. Expanded market options lowered the risks of trade, but they also required a certainty of commercial policy and government protections. “The trade of a nation is of gradual growth,” the memorialists wrote, “and forms its channels by slow and almost imperceptible degrees. Time, and confidence, and

interior, towns had risen out of the wilderness due to the material benefits of commerce. Story, *Miscellaneous Writings*, 243-244.

¹⁴⁶ *Salem Gazette*, December 17, 1819.

¹⁴⁷ Story, *Miscellaneous Writings*, 255.

¹⁴⁸ Story, *Miscellaneous Writings*, 255.

protection, and experience are necessary to give it a settled course.”¹⁴⁹ The memorialists had long considered the drawback and credit systems “fundamental principles of our revenue policy” that increased merchant confidence in investing in and expanding foreign trade. The memorialists believed that lowering the costs of foreign commerce for American traders and protecting their circuitous and opportunistic voyages through the global marketplace remained essential to the project of declaring and protecting American independence. Removing the drawback and credit policies, they argued, would narrow the limits of American commerce and reduce the revenue for the government: “the more free trade is, and the more widely it circulates, the more sure will be its prosperity, and that of the nation.”¹⁵⁰

Serving as Salem’s Representative in Congress, Nathaniel Silsbee argued against the proposed 1820 tariff on the floor of the House to save his home port and other American seaports from commercial ruin. Already in the past year, American tonnage had declined by twenty-five percent, and Silsbee worried that this trend would worsen under the tariff, while seamen’s wages would similarly decline, driving to the poor house those sailors whose recent “renowned achievements have given such imperishable fame to our country.”¹⁵¹ Silsbee mirrored many of the points discussed in Story’s memorial about how the importation of foreign goods was in the national interest, not opposed to it, and how the drawback and credit systems allowed American seaports to flourish as entrepot markets.¹⁵² The less wealthy merchants would suffer under these proposed tariff measures, Silsbee argued, “and all the young and enterprising ones, of small property and limited means, will be driven from their business, or their business will be driven

¹⁴⁹ Story, *Miscellaneous Writings*, 246.

¹⁵⁰ Story, *Miscellaneous Writings*, 247.

¹⁵¹ Annals of Congress, 16th Cong., 1st Sess., 1994.

¹⁵² Silsbee stated: ““It is the policy of other nations to encourage the importation of almost every article, even if prohibited for consumption. This is done, not solely with a view to benefit the revenue, and to keep down prices, but also for the further purpose of sustaining the carrying trade; and we ought to do the same.” Annals of Congress, 16th Cong., 1st Sess., 1991.

from them into the hands of the capitalists.”¹⁵³ Silsbee dismissed balance of trade arguments in support of the tariff for their inaccuracy in assessing American foreign commerce. These statistics would be helpful if Americans sold their exports and purchased imports only on American shores, but Silsbee argued that these exchanges “are not sufficient for a commercial nation” that generated so much revenue from freight work and from the carrying trade through foreign markets.¹⁵⁴

Silsbee concluded his speech with remarks on the American East Indies trade that highlighted a sentiment he shared with many in Salem that their success in this specialized trade was the very epitome of how foreign commerce should function in support of the American commercial nation. In the congressional debate over the proposed 1820 tariff, the East Indies trade had come under attack due to its exportation of specie and importation of foreign goods. Silsbee responded with claims that East Indies commerce was not just a trade in foreign manufactures from India, particularly after the 1816 tariff, but a trade that operated in circuitous patterns throughout the globe. To purchase goods in the Indian Ocean, American ships carried specie from the United States or Europe, skins and sandalwood from the Pacific Ocean, or wine, opium, or quicksilver from other markets. Cargoes principally of sugar, tea, coffee, or pepper returned from markets throughout the Indian Ocean and South China Seas, destined for America or Europe. “This trade produces a large revenue for the Government; it employs from three to four thousand seamen; is the best nursery for that class of men, and the very best one for officers of any branch of our foreign trade, and has tended more than any other branch to improve the structure of our ships and the skills of our navigators,” Silsbee claimed. The East Indies trade suffered with the rest of foreign commerce in the current period, Silsbee acknowledged, but it

¹⁵³ Annals of Congress, 16th Cong., 1st Sess., 1992.

¹⁵⁴ Annals of Congress, 16th Cong., 1st Sess., 1995.

remained “more safe than any other now pursued from the United States. And if it is wished to paralyze the commerce and commercial enterprise of the country, it cannot so effectually be done in any other way as by restraints upon the India trade.”¹⁵⁵

Silsbee felt too unwell to continue, but before leaving the House floor he framed the vote on the proposed tariff as a choice between a system that for thirty years had been successful and “productive of immense wealth to the nation” and a new, untried system “which imposes such conditions as are not imposed by any other commercial nation, and such as ought not to be imposed by this, unless we are disposed to aid the nations of Europe to build up their commerce and navigation, upon the downfall of our own.”¹⁵⁶ For now, Silsbee and his Salem constituents would retain the benefits of the traditional system. The proposed 1820 tariff passed the House but lost in the Senate by a single vote.¹⁵⁷

IV

Salem traders who in 1821 had hoped that the tariff would be “indefinitely postponed” instead observed its growing permanence in federal policy, particularly as Congress met to debate the tariff’s renewal in 1823 and early 1824 with lengthy new additions of imports to be taxed.¹⁵⁸ The progression of the tariff seemed inexplicable to these people of commerce. “I notice that the tariff is now the order of the day in Washington,” Salem merchant William Fettyplace wrote to Story, his brother-in-law. “Its provisions in many respects are so outrageous that I can’t think it possible it will pass without many important alterations & amendments. In

¹⁵⁵ Annals of Congress, 16th Cong., 1st Sess., 1996.

¹⁵⁶ Annals of Congress, 16th Cong., 1st Sess., 1994.

¹⁵⁷ Frank Taussig, *The Tariff History of the United States* (New York: G.P. Putnam’s Sons, 1910), 24.

¹⁵⁸ “Hope to hear that the Tariff bill is indefinitely postponed.” William Fettyplace to Joseph Story, February 17, 1821, Joseph Story Papers, Clements Library, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, Michigan [cited hereafter as JSPCL]. *Tariff, or Rates of Duties, Payable After the 30th of June 1824, on All Goods, Wares, and Merchandise, Imported into the United States of America in American Vessels, Under the Act Passed May 22nd 1824* (New York: C. S. Van Winkle, 1824).

fact the best thing that can be done with the bill is to burn it.”¹⁵⁹ Salem merchant Stephen White, another Story brother-in-law, believed the tariff a “conspiracy against the true interest of the nation at large.”¹⁶⁰ Jonathan Goodhue, the son of Benjamin Goodhue, working as a merchant in New York by 1824 wrote to Story that the proposed tariff “would be hardly less deserving of resistance than those of the Holy Alliance.”¹⁶¹ Fettyplace told Story that the Salem merchant committee had met again to address the renewal of the tariff and that Story’s 1820 memorial to Congress still expressed their views with such accuracy that they declined to write another for fear that could not match Story’s work.¹⁶²

In Congress, commercial people looked to Daniel Webster as their “champion” against tariff.¹⁶³ By taxing imports so extensively, the tariff threatened to close off the channels of commerce that had given American trade its elasticity and, consequently, its competitive

¹⁵⁹ William Fettyplace to Joseph Story, February 8, 1824, Joseph Story Papers, Microfilm, Library of Congress [cited hereafter as JSPLOC]. From Franklin Story: “We have strong fears that the tariff bill will pass with all its [enormities?]. It seems to be thoroughly matured by its advocates & as many interests have been conciliated as possible. It is a ruinous & oppressive system. Every thing must be sacrificed to the interests of the majority in Congress. Our national Legislature is to legislate for the benefit of particular classes with an utter disregard of the rights of the rest. I fear these things will prove to be of a more serious nature than is at present supposed. When a corruption [once?] finds its way in, it will be very difficult to say how far it will extend.” Franklin Story to Joseph Story, February 22, 1824, JSPLOC.

¹⁶⁰ Stephen White to Joseph Story, March 14, 1824, JSPLOC. This disconnect with the new American political economy pervaded in Salem on more than just the tariff. As the 1824 presidential election grew near, Franklin Story in Salem wrote to his brother Joseph in Washington that “Were it not that yr letters speak of the total uncertainty of the issue of the Presidential Election, we should be induced to believe that Mr. Adams’ success was quite certain.” Franklin Story to Joseph Story, February 22, 1824, JSPLOC.

¹⁶¹ Jonathan Goodhue to Joseph Story, February 18, 1824, JSPLOC.

¹⁶² William Fettyplace to Joseph Story, February 8, 1824, JSPLOC.

¹⁶³ *Speech of Mr. Webster upon the Tariff, Delivered in the House of Representatives of the United States, April, 1824* (Boston: Wells and Lilly, and Cummings, Hillard, & Co., 1824). After Webster’s speech in the House against the tariff, Stephen White wrote to Joseph Story: “We look on him here as the great champion of the commercial interests in Congress.” Stephen White to Joseph Story, March 14, 1824. Maryland Representative Samuel Smith also now spoke out against the tariff, despite his support for the 1816 measure. “One reason that our commerce was so depressed,” he argued, “was that we were, by our own unwise policy, depriving ourselves of all foreign markets.” For Smith, the tariff duties in support of manufacturing had reached the “point at which to stop.” *Annals of Congress*, 18th Cong., 1st Sess., 661, 739; Cassel, *Merchant Congressman*, 240. For a discussion of economic theory that informed this debate, see Richard C. Edwards, “Economic Sophistication in Nineteenth Century Congressional Tariff Debates,” in *The Journal of Economic History* Vol. 30 No. 4 (Dec., 1970): 802-828. Despite his praise in Salem by 1824, Webster had been the one in 1816 to insert the twenty-five cent valuation on cotton imports into the tariff measure after discussions with Francis Cabot Lowell. Baxter, *Henry Clay and the American System*, 20.

advantage, he argued, against traders of the other commercial nations. “We have enjoyed great benefit in our trade with India and China, from the liberty of going from place to place all over the world,” Webster argued.¹⁶⁴ Like Story, Webster outlined his belief that the tariff distorted commerce and impeded access to foreign markets: “Society is full of excitement; competition comes in place of monopoly; and intelligence and industry ask only for fair play and an open field....Commercial prosperity should be judged of therefore rather from extent of trade, than from the magnitude of its apparent profits.”¹⁶⁵

Like Silsbee, Webster argued that balance of trade statistics failed to accurately capture the “true nature of commerce” as it operated in ports like Salem that specialized in circuitous carrying trades through foreign markets. “Commerce is not a gambling among nations for a stake, to be won by some and lost by others,” Webster argued, but an “exchange of equivalents” that brought advantage and happiness to both sides.¹⁶⁶ To make his point, Webster used the example of the *Crowninshield*’s 1804 voyage in the *America* to Mocha, information Webster likely gained from Benjamin Crowninshield who had been the *America*’s captain and in 1824

¹⁶⁴ An American ship in Brazil, Webster offered, could acquire dollars, sail for India, and then “distribute her cargo in all the various ports of Europe of America.” *Speech of Mr. Webster*, 27.

¹⁶⁵ *Speech of Mr. Webster*, 36. Webster argued that balance of trade arguments in support for the tariff failed to recognize how American traders used circuitous trade to make up trade imbalances in foreign markets. In the Russian trade, for example, Webster argued that statistics of direct exports from the United States to Russia inaccurately suggested that Americans bought more than they sold in that market. In reality, Webster continued, Americans made up the difference by incorporating the Russian market into circuitous patterns of trade: “We send our own products, for example, to Cuba, or to Brazil; we there exchange them for the sugar and the coffee of those countries, and these articles we carry to St. Petersburg, and there sell them. Again, our exports to Holland and Hamburg are connected directly or indirectly with our imports from Russia.” Where and how Americans traded their cargoes, Webster argued, depended on momentary demand, on freight rates, on commission fees, or on the original cost of the cargoes. These calculations “determine the fortune of the adventurer,” Webster concluded, and “the relative state of our imports or exports with Holland, England, or Russia” provided no way to judge the health of this true form of American commerce. *Speech of Mr. Webster*, 24.

¹⁶⁶ “We inhabit a various earth,” Webster continued, and “we have reciprocal wants, and reciprocal means for gratifying one another’s wants....Commerce between nations has the same essential character, as commerce between individuals.” *Speech of Mr. Webster*, 23.

served in the House of Representatives.¹⁶⁷ In “better times,” a ship had left “one of the towns in New England,” Webster stated, with \$70,000 in specie, bound to Mocha. There she traded her specie for coffee, spices, and medicines. After returning to the United States she departed for Europe and sold two-thirds of her cargo in Holland for \$130,000 specie and the other third in the Mediterranean for \$25,000 specie and \$15,000 worth of Italian merchandise. The original export of \$70,000 had returned imports worth \$130,000.¹⁶⁸

The future of the United States was at stake in the impassioned speeches that Webster and Henry Clay both made on the floor of the House outlining their competing visions of American political economy and the tariff’s role in shaping that future. The situation for commerce was critical, Webster argued, since commercial communities throughout the United States stood to lose their lifeblood. These new taxes on commerce may be the final straw, Webster warned, that ruined the ability of the American merchant marine “to sustain the conflict in which it is now engaged, with all of the commercial nations on the globe.”¹⁶⁹ For Clay, the rearrangement of the American economy through internal improvements and the tariff was a necessary peacetime endeavor for lasting future success. The time was right, he urged, to bolster and protect the home market for American produce rather than continue to rely on “foreign markets which no longer exist.” “The foreign commerce of the country,” Clay stated, “has been extended as far as it can be.”¹⁷⁰ After passing in both the House and the Senate, President James Monroe signed the new tariff into law on May 22, 1824.¹⁷¹

¹⁶⁷ During the congressional debate over the 1824 tariff, Benjamin Crowninshield worked to minimize the effect of the tariff on Salem commerce, including unsuccessful proposed amendments to reduce or delay duties on woolen goods. *Annals of Congress*, 18th Cong. 1st Sess, 2313.

¹⁶⁸ *Speech of Mr. Webster*, 22.

¹⁶⁹ *Speech of Mr. Webster*, 32.

¹⁷⁰ “Speech of Henry Clay on American Industry, in the House of Representatives, March 30 and 31, 1824,” in *State Papers and Speeches on the Tariff* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1892), 284, 256.

¹⁷¹ New England Representatives in the House voted 23-15 against the tariff. Baxter, *Henry Clay and the American System*, 23.

Salem townspeople felt the decline in both trade and population as commercial agriculture, domestic manufacturing, and bulk exports and imports became the new expansive forces in American economy with the help of federal policies like the tariff. As merchants and trade left Salem for larger shipping centers, Salem ships departed more and more with crews composed largely of men who were strangers to one another, as the proportion of sailors who were born or lived in Salem declined.¹⁷²

From his post in Congress, Benjamin Crowninshield recognized that the permanent nature of tariff reforms spelled a likely doom for the Salem economy. In February 1824, as the tariff bill looked likely to pass, Benjamin wrote to his brother John in Salem assuring him that although John had been disappointed in the amount for which he had recently sold his Salem home, the sale had come at a fortuitous time: “I assure you that the Town is to go lower and lower in the scale of importance, it is not calculated for a manufacturing place, & if the Tariff passes, commerce, I mean such as most benefits Salem, foreign commerce, will be less & less.” Benjamin had supported government regulation of trade in support of neutral rights, but he regretted this new government interference in trade: “We ought not to be compelled to [leave commerce], to please manufacturers.”¹⁷³ True to Crowninshield’s predictions, by 1830 Salem’s population stood at just under 14,000 people, making it only the fourteenth largest city in the nation, now behind rising western cities like New Orleans at 46,000 people, Cincinnati at 25,000 people, and Albany at 24,000 people. Even Washington, DC had a population of close to 19,000 people by 1830. Though still the second largest port in Massachusetts, Salem’s population was less than a quarter of Boston’s in 1830 and smaller than the population of Providence, Rhode

¹⁷² Vickers, *Young Men and the Sea*, 174-175, 184-185, 193-194.

¹⁷³ Benjamin Crowninshield to John Crowninshield, February 9, 1824, John Collins Warren Papers, MHS.

Island by 2,000 people.¹⁷⁴ Since 1810, Boston's population had nearly doubled, while Salem's had grown by only ten percent.¹⁷⁵

Abigail Mason experienced this economic and demographic transition at her Salem Dame School. In 1824, she struggled to maintain steady enrollments, and in 1831, Mason decided to leave Salem for employment as a tutor for the Temple family in Springfield, Virginia.¹⁷⁶ The move to the American South brought Mason face to face not only with a new culture of plantation life in which homes had rooms "the size of a Salem house" and enslaved people waited on her every need, but also with an alternative economy increasingly at the heart of American political economy but at odds with her New England frame of reference. The Temple plantation was "in the midst of a wilderness," she wrote to her sister in Salem, and Mason "could see nothing but impenetrable forests" around her. When it rained, she was happy to have her rubber boots, a token of Salem's commerce with South America in the 1830s. Mason watched with awe as workers on the Temple plantation burned down the surrounding trees to clear the land for farming. In Salem, wood had been a precious staple commodity that connected her town to forests throughout New England and to the global marketplace. Wood prices in Salem rose and fell with the state of the roads in winter for sledding, and the lumber trade had been a mainstay of Salem's Atlantic commerce in the colonial period and a means to open new American commerce with markets in Africa, Europe, and Asia since the 1780s. Burning the wood seemed "wicked" to Mason, and she conversed with Robert Temple about his occasional regret that "them that lived in towns could not have some of it." The Temples, for their part, did

¹⁷⁴ "Population of the 90 Urban Places: 1830," U.S. Census Bureau, Accessed November 30, 2014, <http://www.census.gov/population/www/documentation/twps0027/tab06.txt>.

¹⁷⁵ "Population of 46 Urban Places: 1810," U.S. Census Bureau, Accessed September 14, 2014, <https://www.census.gov/population/www/documentation/twps0027/tab04.txt>.

¹⁷⁶ Bessie Henry, "Yankee Schoolmistress Discovers Virginia," in *Essex Institute Historical Collections* CI (April 1965), 121-132.

not burn the wood out of wastefulness. In their place, Robert Temple planned to grow cotton, tobacco, and grain.¹⁷⁷

Through the nineteenth century, Salem traders continued to exploit their knowledge of distant ports and their ability to use information to capitalize on commercial opportunities as first movers in the global marketplace, but Salem could not competitively service these trades for long. Just as they had initiated and then monopolized the American trade to Sumatra for pepper, in the 1820s Salem traders were also the first to import rubber boots to the United States from Brazil. They found freight work in the trade in sea cucumbers between Fiji and Canton.¹⁷⁸ Through the 1830s they continued to expand—and keep secret—their nearly exclusive American trade at Zanzibar as part of their larger trading patterns throughout the region, selling cotton manufactures in the eastern Indian Ocean and bringing back to Salem ivory and gum copal, an ingredient in varnish. In the 1830s, the Secretary to the Sultan of Oman, who held political authority over Zanzibar, named his plantation Salem, and arriving British traders noted how many Zanzibarians believed Great Britain was Salem’s satellite.¹⁷⁹ Salem merchant Nathaniel L. Rogers, who had started as a clerk and then ship master for George Crowninshield & Sons, maintained extensive trade in the region and helped establish the 1833 Treaty of Amity and Commerce between the United States and Oman.¹⁸⁰ This treaty won American trading rights in all ports under the Sultan’s authority from the Arabian Peninsula down through eastern Africa and established an American consulate for the region, first held by Salem merchant Richard

¹⁷⁷ Abigail Mason to Mary Mason Brooks, March 1831, printed in Henry, “Yankee Schoolmistress,” 125, 127. New Englanders had also cleared their land to procure wood for their own timber trade and to make room for agriculture, though before Mason’s time. See William Cronon, *Changes in the Land: Indians, Colonists, and the Ecology of New England* (New York: Macmillan, 1983).

¹⁷⁸ Vickers, *Young Men and the Sea*, 174.

¹⁷⁹ Norman Bennett and George E. Brooks, Jr, eds., *New England Merchants in Africa: A History Through Documents 1802 to 1865* (Boston: Boston University Press, 1965), 194-195, 213.

¹⁸⁰ *The New England Historical and Genealogical Register* Volume XIII (Boston: Samuel G. Drake, 1859), 65-66. By this time, the Sultan of Muscat had moved his residency to Zanzibar.

Waters. But increased knowledge of Zanzibar brought increased competition, both from British and American traders, and Salem's hold over this market diminished by the 1840s.¹⁸¹ In these initiatives in the global marketplace, including the pepper trade, Boston and New York eventually absorbed this commerce, along with many of Salem's leading merchants.

As foreign commerce collapsed in Salem through the nineteenth century, new enterprises emerged in its place. In 1850, Nathaniel Hawthorne, angered by his dismissal from office at the Salem Customs House because the Whigs had come to power and he was a Democrat, penned his preface to *The Scarlet Letter* with a sketch of Salem's harbor, quiet from a lack of commerce. Built in 1819 according to an "idea of subsequent prosperity destined never to be realized," the Custom House was a much bigger and grander space than the operations of the Salem port required, Hawthorne wrote. The front windows of the Custom House looked out on to Derby Wharf, lined by 1850 with unused warehouses and visited only occasionally by ships unloading hides or outfitting for voyages to South America or Africa. Only the older townspeople could remember the days when "when Salem was a port by itself," and its merchants did not shuttle their trade through Boston or New York.¹⁸²

In 1860, the cargoes arriving in Salem reflected the old and new political economies in which the port operated, but the small volumes relative to the early national period revealed the port's significantly diminished role in national commerce: principal imports were hides and skins, likely for the growing tanneries and shoe industry in the nearby towns of Lynn and Haverhill, followed by ivory and palm oil, reflecting the port's continued but much decreased

¹⁸¹ Norman Robert Bennett, "Americans in Zanzibar: 1825-1845," in *Essex Institute Historical Collections* 95 (July 1959), 252-257.

¹⁸² Nathaniel Hawthorne, *The Scarlet Letter* (Boston: James R. Osgood & Company, 1878), 29, 4.

commerce in the markets of Africa and Asia since the 1780s.¹⁸³ Salem did remain an active harbor with ever-changing commercial enterprises, such as Stephen Phillips's adaptation of Crowninshield Wharf in the 1850s into a transfer center to move coal off schooners arriving from the mid-Atlantic on to rail cars destined for Boston.¹⁸⁴ The arrival of the railroad in Salem by the 1840s increased the flow of business and commuters from Salem into Boston, but it also brought artists, writers, and travelers to Salem. By the 1890s, Salem silversmith Daniel Low, whose shop was just a few blocks from the Salem train station, began selling Witch Spoons and other witch-themed novelties from "the old Witch Town of Salem" and "historic Salem," as part of the port's new embrace of its witchcraft history and the tourism industry.¹⁸⁵

From the 1820s, when the national economy shifted into greater dependence on domestic agriculture and manufacturing, the aims of the new American System were increasingly at odds with the practices of the carrying trade through broad commercial geographies that had given rise to early American ports like Salem. Salem commerce had thrived in the global marketplace because Salem traders had cultivated the mercantile skills necessary to out-compete their rivals in exploiting distant commercial opportunities: they had built their port into a hub of commercial knowledge and navigational information, and they constructed broad networks of correspondents and trading partners across the globe and throughout the American union. But after 1815,

¹⁸³ Robert Greenlaugh Albion, "From Sails to Spindles: Essex County in Transition," in *Essex Institute Historical Collections* XCV (April 1959), 116-120.

¹⁸⁴ Albion, "Commerce and Industry," 122.

¹⁸⁵ *The Baltimore Sun*, October 28, 1896; Pamela E. Apkarian-Russell, *A Collector's Guide to Salem Witchcraft & Souvenirs* (Atglen, PA: Schiffer Publishing, 1998). By 1893, Low began advertising his spoons in national papers and in his catalog, the Daniel Low Yearbook, and started a successful mail order business. "A New Cataloging Idea," in *Advertising & Selling* Vol. 23 (March 1914), 43-44. On Salem witchcraft in American, rather than Salem's, historical memory, particularly for its negative associations, see Gretchen Adams, *The Specter of Salem: Remembering the Witch Trials in Nineteenth Century America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008). For the New England tourism industry, particularly as an economic alternative to former agricultural or commercial industries, see Dona Brown, *Inventing New England: Regional Tourism in the Nineteenth Century* (Washington, DC: The Smithsonian Institution, 1995).

national political-economic independence was now forged in the mills of domestic manufacturing or in the west through staple agriculture and internal improvements. Even a more expansive redefinition the home market under the Monroe Doctrine in 1823 to include the whole Western Hemisphere did not encompass Salem's global commercial geography.¹⁸⁶ Salem traders remained entrepreneurial in the global marketplace, but their circuitous trade became exceptional in the broader development of the American economy and indeed in American foreign commerce that was increasingly specialized according to bulk imports.

¹⁸⁶ For the expansion of the American "neighborhood" to include the Western Hemisphere under the Monroe Doctrine, see James E. Lewis Jr., *The American Union and the Problem of Neighborhood: The United States and the Collapse of the Spanish Empire, 1783-1829* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1998), 156-187.

Epilogue

The Salem mercantile community had forestalled Salem's demise for years, but in the 1820s, their use of commercial knowledge to capitalize on new and enterprising trading opportunities in distant markets could no longer hold off competition from Boston or New York. In 1828, even Daniel Webster sided with Boston manufacturers as he switched his allegiance and became a proponent of the federal tariff. The rise and fall of Salem as a shipping center for foreign trade paralleled the rise of a distinctive American political economy that defined the late colonial and early national periods. The operation and changing geography of Salem's foreign trade as a manifestation of this American political economy constituted a critical component of the federal union that Americans struggled to fit within international system of states after 1776, spurring great debate and intensifying political divisions throughout the early national period.

As a post-Revolution boom port, Salem had to find new avenues for trade and new methods of commerce in order to compete and survive in the new geopolitical context. Salem traders drew on the circuitous Atlantic trading that had undergirded their colonial and revolutionary commerce, as it had served capital-poor traders throughout the global economy, as a means to expand their commerce to new markets after the American Revolution. In 1807, they had supported the national embargo as a logical and critical strategy to protect the broad commercial geography that the Salem mercantile had built over the preceding decades. In 1812, they had supported going to war to defend their definition of neutrality that sanctioned their vast and often transnational engagement in the global economy. After 1812, with America's north American frontier secured and with more congressional seats coming from the western states, Americans turned inland to build their own territorial empire, and they looked to global markets to consume the products of America's expanding commercial agriculture. With few ties to

inland markets and with a shallow harbor unable to accept large ships for the exportation and importation of bulk goods, Salem drifted away from its position on the vanguard of creating an American political economy.

During a journey through the United States in 1834, British social and economic writer Harriet Martineau stopped in Salem and found the port “remarkable” for the broad and enterprising trade carried out by its merchants, the same type of trade that would have been familiar to Jacob Crowninshield or Elias Hasket Derby or Henry Elkins.¹ It was common practice in Salem, Martineau learned, for a ship to depart in ballast for some distant foreign market “where he procures some odd kind of cargo, which he exchanges with advantage for another, somewhere else; and so goes trafficking round the world, bringing home a freight of the highest value.”² The “enterprising merchants of Salem” existed in constant deliberation over the next market to visit and the next commercial opportunity to exploit, she wrote. They had recently figured out how to ship ice to India, and a few years earlier they discovered the fine quality of Manilla hemp and had been the first to import it into the United States. Both ventures had netted great profit. In 1834 they hoped for a bigger share in the whale industry, and they had great expectations from trade with New Zealand. Salem mariners were familiar with, even at home in, many corners of the world, from the Baltic, to the Azores, to Cairo and Muscat.³ Meanwhile, the material evidence of their expansive global trade networks filled their homes:

¹ Webb, R. K.. “Martineau, Harriet (1802–1876).” R. K. Webb In *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, edited by H. C. G. Matthew and Brian Harrison. Oxford: OUP, 2004. Online ed., edited by Lawrence Goldman, October 2006. <http://www.oxforddnb.com.proxy.its.virginia.edu/view/article/18228> (accessed December 1, 2014).

² Harriet Martineau, *Society in America, Vol. II* (New York: Saunders and Outley, 1837), 260-263.

³ Martineau wrote: “They are favourite customers in the Russian ports, and are familiar with the Swedish and Norwegian coasts. They have nearly as much commerce with Bremen as with Liverpool. They speak of Fayal and the other Azores as if they were close at hand. The fruits of the Mediterranean countries are on every table. They have a large acquaintance at Cairo. They know Napoleon's grave at St. Helena, and have wild tales to tell of Mosambique and Madagascar, and store of ivory to show from thence. They speak of the power of the king of Muscat, and are sensible of the riches of the south-east coast of Arabia” Martineau, *Society in America*, 260-263.

Chinese prints decked the halls of their drawing rooms, Mediterranean fruits covered their dining tables, and Ceylon shells filled the curiosity cabinets of Salem ladies. Salem's global and opportunistic commerce seemed remarkable to Martineau, but she observed that in Salem this type of trade was tradition, fueled by the community's deep bank of commercial knowledge:

They often slip up the western coasts of their two continents; bring furs from the back regions of their own wide land; glance up at the Andes on their return; double Cape Horn; touch at the ports of Brazil and Guiana; look about them in the West Indies, feeling there almost at home; and land, some fair morning, at Salem, and walk home as if they had done nothing very remarkable.⁴

Salem's trade particularly struck Martineau in the 1830s because it was exceptional among the other maritime communities she had visited. She was awed by the wealth of this community relative to its small population, and the "vast" and "speculative" commerce that tied this American port into the global marketplace. As the nation looked west for economic independence and for the creation of a domestic market, and as American foreign trade focused more and more on the importation of raw materials for manufacturing and the exportation of bulk agricultural staples, the traders in Salem still considered circuitous ventures to master new opportunities in the global marketplace their familiar means to prosper in 1834 and for the future. Salem traders were people of the world, not just of Massachusetts or of the Atlantic, and they continued to capitalize on commercial opportunities using their circuitous trading patterns and their intricate knowledge of foreign waters and foreign markets. In the 1830s Salem merchants succeeded in plying niche trades for specialty goods, but no longer competed with larger ports over the trade in bulk staple goods that now drove American foreign commerce. Nonetheless, having observed Salem's distinct engagement with the global marketplace, Martineau wrote with

⁴ Martineau, *Society in America*, 260-263.

confidence that “this ‘city of peace’ will be better known hereafter for its commerce than for its witch-tragedy.”⁵

⁵ Martineau, *Society in America*, 260-263.

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