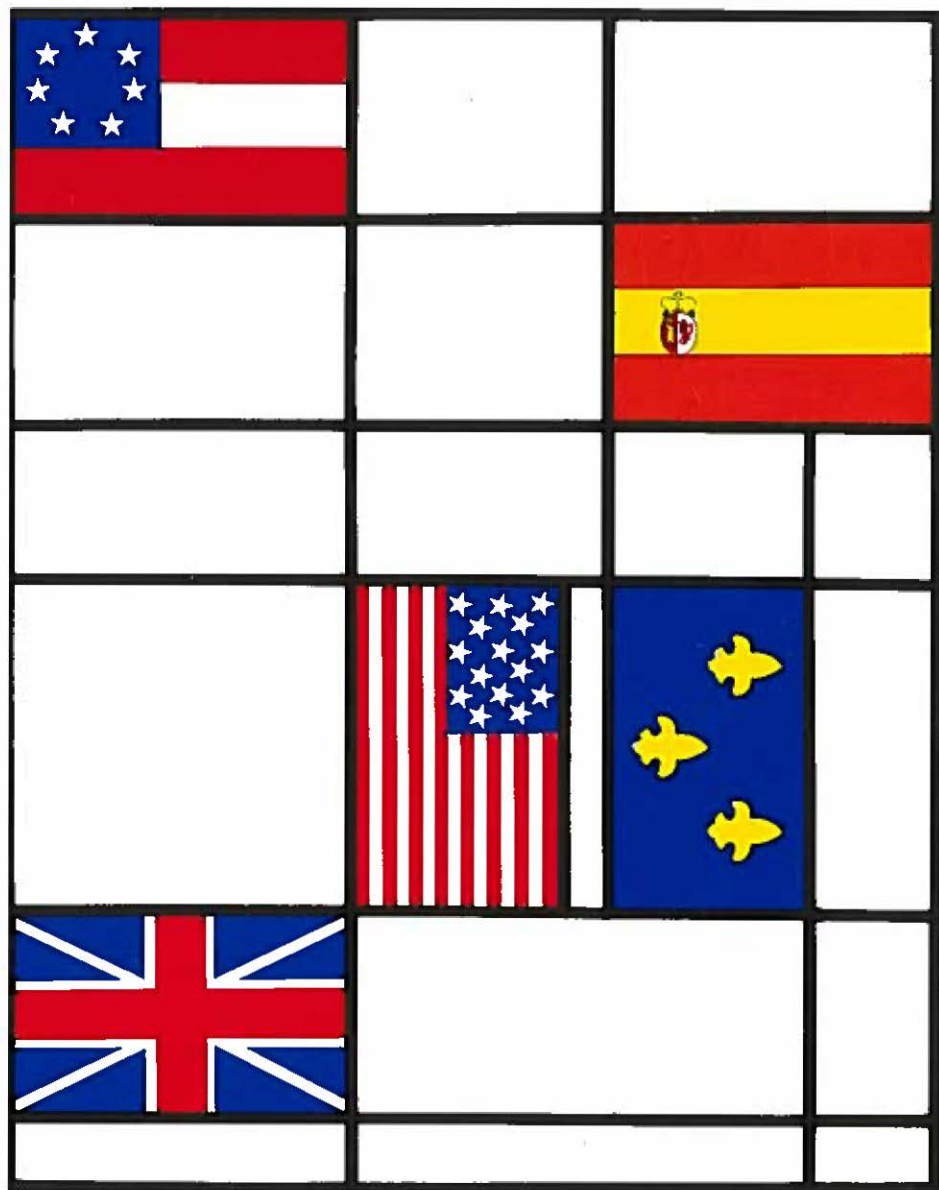


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Maritime History of the Gulf Coast



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Proceedings of the
Gulf Coast History and Humanities Conference

Volume XII

Sponsoring Institutions and Board of Directors, 1989

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From the Editors . . .

This issue of the *Gulf Coast Historical Review* is devoted to the best of the papers given at the Maritime History Conference held in Mobile in March 1989. At the outset it is important to define what we mean by "best." We tried to select those papers which best fit together to give readers an overview of current scholarship on Gulf Coast maritime history. Due to space limitations, which we have exceeded anyhow, we also decided not to include papers which required a great many illustrations, or those which we thought should stand alone in a subsequent issue of the *Gulf Coast Historical Review*. Finally, some of the conference sessions were devoted to audio-visual presentations or round table discussions which were not in publishable formats. Having said all that, we think the fifteen articles presented here will give our readers a feel for the conference and make the information and interpretations permanently available to a wider audience.

The meeting was the twelfth in the series of History and Humanities Conferences which began in Pensacola in 1970 and the first held in Mobile. It was co-sponsored by the Pensacola Junior College, the University of West Florida, and the University of South Alabama. On behalf of USA we wish to thank our colleagues from the two Pensacola schools for their assistance and advice as we muddled through our first conference. The size of the audience at the sessions, the number and quality of the papers, and the interaction between scholars and lay people during and between sessions made for an exciting few days.

While the printed word probably does not convey that excitement, we hope that quality of scholarly insight these papers display does come through. We wish to thank all the conference participants for their cooperation as we prepared this issue, especially the authors of the articles chosen. Without their active support and the hard work of our history department's secretary, Ellen Williams, we could not have produced this issue.

Several of our authors submitted their articles on diskette, a form which we heartily encourage prospective contributors to adopt. We have prepared a basic style sheet for the *GCHR* and will happily send a copy upon request. The sheet explains our preferences with regard to computer and traditional formats. We hope it will make life a bit easier for us and for our contributors. Also the journal is now on Bitnet and can be reached by the following code: UGCR@USOUTHAL. Finally, this issue is printed on neutral ph paper, a change which will assure a longer life span for the journal. We are joining the move by university presses and others to use only archivally acceptable paper.

So recent months have been busy around the *Gulf Coast Historical Review* as we have worked to bring you the proceedings from the Maritime Conference and take advantage of the constant changes computer technology are bringing our way. We hope you enjoy this issue and, as always, look forward to hearing your reaction to it. The letters, notes, and phone calls we get from our readers really do help keep us going.

Call For Proposals

Proposals are invited for the next History and Humanities Conference which will be held at the Pensacola Hilton Hotel October 3-5, 1991. The meeting's title is "Discovery and Exploration on the Gulf Coast." Proposals need not be limited to any time period so long as they reflect the discovery and exploration theme.

Please contact Dr. William S. Coker, Chairman, History Department, University of West Florida, Pensacola, FL 32514. Dr. Coker asks that a brief proposal abstract, approximately one page in length, be submitted to him by September 1990. The conference is part of the celebration of the 500th anniversary of Columbus' discovery of the New World.

Maritime History of the Gulf Coast

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*Watercolor showing the British attack on
Ft. Bowyer by a midshipman in HMS Asia*

Mrs. Carter C. Smith Collection

The Men and the Ships of the British Attack on Fort Bowyer—February 1815

Sir Robert Ricketts

[As Sir Robert's account of the men and ships of the British forces employed against Fort Bowyer clearly has a personal quality, as well as being a product of exhaustive historical scholarship, it is presented in the first person as it was given. This, his opening address to the Maritime History Conference, set a high standard indeed for all participants. However, few could hope to match his connection with the men and events he describes so eloquently.—EDITOR]

A detailed account of the British attack on Fort Bowyer, Mobile Point, in February 1815 has been given by Dr. William S. Coker in an admirable article which appeared in the *Alabama Historical Quarterly* in the Spring of 1981. I would like this evening to supplement that account by looking at some of the British officers involved, at incidents in their careers and at their family connections. This will then lead us on to a look at the histories of some of the ships in the British Fleet.

On October 26, 1814 a convoy of transports sailed from Plymouth, England, escorted by HMS *Vengeur*, which was commanded by Captain Robert Tristram Ricketts, R.N., my great-great-grandfather. On board the *Vengeur* was Major General John Lambert and in the transports were some two thousand troops. These were to be reinforcements for the army which, members of the British government hoped, was going to capture New Orleans. Andrew Jackson was not even on their mental horizon.

Ricketts's orders, headed "most secret," informed him that he was to proceed to Jamaica where he might expect to find further instructions left for him by the British naval commander in chief on the North American station, Vice Admiral Sir Alexander Cochrane. The orders were signed by Lord Melville, the First Lord of the Admiralty, i.e., the government minister responsible for naval affairs. Of Melville it was later said that his sole qualification for the spot of First Lord was that in naval matters he was all at sea. Lambert's orders from the Secretary of State for War informed him that "a senior General Officer" was being despatched from England, under whose orders he was to place himself.

On the morning of December 13, 1814 Ricketts's convoy was off North Negril point, Jamaica, where it fell in with the British frigate HMS *Statira*. After signals had been exchanged Lambert and Ricketts went on board the *Statira*. Here they found "the senior General Officer" to whom Lambert's orders had referred. This was Major General Sir Edward Pakenham, brother-in-law of the Duke of Wellington. Pakenham had recently distinguished himself at the battle of Salamanca, probably the most celebrated of Wellington's victories in Spain and Portugal during what has become known as the Peninsular War. He had now been appointed to lead the expedition against New Orleans. With Pakenham were Major General Samuel Gibbs, Lieutenant Colonel John Burgoyne, Lieutenant

Colonel Alexander Dickson, Major Harry Smith and Lieutenant D'Este. Lambert, Burgoyne, Dickson, and Smith were all to be present at the attack on Fort Bowyer.

After he had held a conference on board the *Statira* and had learnt that Sir Alexander Cochrane had already left Jamaica for the Gulf, Pakenham hurried on to take up his command, followed by Ricketts and Lambert. In less than a month after that meeting the Battle of New Orleans would have been fought, Pakenham and Gibbs would be dead and command of the defeated British army would have devolved upon Lambert. Following the British defeat and unaware that the Treaty of Ghent had been signed on Christmas Eve 1814, Cochrane and Lambert, now effectively in joint command, decided that an attempt must be made to rescue something from the debacle at Chalmette. Consequently it was proposed to attack Fort Bowyer and thereafter possibly to proceed against Mobile. The army was reembarked and the fleet eventually anchored off Dauphin Island which became the British army headquarters.

On February 7, 1815 the naval captains and senior army officers who were to be involved in the attack assembled on board the *Vengeur* and were given their orders. The next day the first troops to be employed in the attack, together with supporting seamen, were landed from the ships in the naval force which had been assembled for the purpose under Ricketts's command. After a short siege the fort surrendered on February 11.

We now come to the first of the army officers whom Lambert and Ricketts had found on board the *Statira* with Pakenham, Lieutenant Colonel John Fox Burgoyne of the Royal Engineers. Burgoyne was an illegitimate son of the British general who is often referred to as Gentleman Johnny Burgoyne and whose portrait by his friend Sir Joshua Reynolds hangs in the Frick Collection in New York. It was Gentleman Johnny Burgoyne who surrendered to General Gates at Saratoga in October 1777.

Entering the Royal Engineers in 1798, John Fox Burgoyne joined Sir John Moore's ill-fated expedition to Portugal and Spain in 1808. This culminated in Moore's retreat to Corunna pursued first by Napoleon himself and then by Marshal Soult. The British army's line of retreat during the terrible winter conditions of 1808/1809 ran through the town of Benavente in the old province of Leon. To reach it the bulk of the army had to cross the nearby river Esla. The French were at their heels and it fell to Burgoyne, now a Captain, and his engineers to mine the stone bridge over the river in order to delay the pursuit. They worked for hours by day and night as the last stragglers were passing over the bridge, while the British rearguard held off the French cavalry who threatened at any moment to sweep onto the bridge. Then the charges were fired and the bridge so badly damaged that it took the French twenty-four hours to repair it. So physically exhausting were Burgoyne's experiences that he was later to write: "I was deaf five years from effects of the Corunna Retreat."

In 1809 Burgoyne joined Wellington's army in Portugal and by the end of the Peninsular War he was the Duke's commanding engineer. In that same capacity he was ordered to join Sir Edward Pakenham in 1814. Present at the

Battle of New Orleans he was subsequently responsible for the siege works against Fort Bowyer. After its capture he gave Ricketts a sketch of the fort, which is now in the Fort Morgan museum on Mobile Point.

Such was Burgoyne's reputation that after the outbreak of the Crimean War in 1853, when Britain, France and Turkey were allies against Russia, he was sent out to the Crimea although he was now over seventy. His appointment was as chief engineer adviser to the British commander in chief, Lord Raglan, an appointment which he held during the early stages of the siege of Sevastopol. Promoted to Field Marshal in 1868 he lived until 1871, when he was in his eighty-ninth year.

The artillery officer who was accompanying Sir Edward Pakenham on board the *Statira* was Lieutenant Colonel, afterwards Major General, Sir Alexander Dickson. He entered the Royal Artillery in 1794 and became the outstanding artillerist of his day. After he had joined Wellington's army in the Peninsula his ability was quickly appreciated by the duke, who soon left mainly to him the artillery aspects of the various sieges of Spanish fortresses held by the French. In May 1813 he was appointed commander of the allied artillery, although he was then only a brevet lieutenant colonel and such a command would normally be held by a lieutenant general. As such commander he was present at the Battle of Vitoria in May 1813, when Wellington defeated the French under Napoleon's brother Joseph, then king of Spain, and Marshal Jourdan.

Dickson commanded Pakenham's artillery at the Battle of New Orleans. Here circumstances were against him and he failed, partly because his guns were mounted on inadequate carriages and partly because his ammunition ran out, either to silence Jackson's artillery or to break the American defenses on the morning of January 1, 1815. Pakenham had therefore to call off his proposed attack on that day and wait for the arrival of Lambert and his reinforcements before launching his attack a week later in which he was killed.

Dickson was subsequently in command of the artillery landed for use against Fort Bowyer, and was back across the Atlantic in time to fight under Wellington at Waterloo.

If one looks at the Articles of Capitulation for the surrender of Fort Bowyer on February 11, 1815 (of which I have Ricketts's copy), one sees that they were signed by Ricketts on behalf of the Royal Navy and by "H. G. Smith, Major and Military Secretary." This was the future Lieutenant General Sir Harry Smith, one of the most colourful characters produced by the British Army. His long career took him to Portugal, Spain, France, The Netherlands, North and South America, Africa, and India. Joining the Ninety-fifth Regiment in 1805 he was with Sir John Moore's army in its retreat to Corunna and its subsequent embarkation for England. Returning to Spain to join Wellington's army he was present at one of the most famous sieges of the Peninsular War, that of Badajoz on the frontier between Spain and Portugal. In April 1812 Wellington took the town from the French after a desperate struggle, which cost the British some five thousand men. To escape the atrocities committed by the British soldiers after they had taken the town, two Spanish women, one a girl of thirteen, came

into the British camp seeking protection. The girl was Juana Maria de los Dolores de Leon and Harry Smith married her when he was aged twenty-four and she just fourteen. This romance is the subject of the well-known novel by Georgette Heyer, *The Spanish Bride*.

Following the end of the Peninsular War Harry Smith joined the staff of Major General Robert Ross commanding the British forces which crossed the Atlantic and proceeded against Washington and Baltimore. He was present at the Battle of Bladensburg and witnessed the burning of Washington, after which episode he was sent back to London with Ross's despatches. Very shortly after his return to England he was appointed to the staff of Sir Edward Pakenham. When Pakenham was killed and the command devolved upon Lambert the latter appointed Harry Smith to be his Military Secretary.

It was Harry Smith who, on the morning of February 11, 1815, was sent under a flag of truce to Lieutenant Colonel William Lawrence, commanding the garrison of Fort Bowyer, to demand the fort's surrender. Some hours later the terms of surrender were agreed and the garrison marched out the next day.

Harry Smith was present at Waterloo as brigade major to Lambert. He subsequently served in South Africa and then in India where on January 28, 1846, he won the battle of Aliwal against the Sikhs. Of this victory and of Harry Smith's despatch describing it William Makepeace Thackeray wrote: "A nobler deed was never told in nobler language."

The following year Harry Smith was appointed governor of Cape Colony where he remained until 1852. On November 18 of that year he was standard bearer at the funeral of the Duke of Wellington. He died in October 1860.

When Lambert and Ricketts left HMS *Statira* after their conference with Pakenham and Gibbs they were accompanied by Mr. Augustus D'Este, a lieutenant in the Royal Fusiliers. He had come to join his regiment in Ricketts's convoy and was to be Lambert's A.D.C. at the Battle of New Orleans. D'Este was a grandson of George III, being the son of the Duke of Sussex, the king's sixth son. One is tempted to wonder whether on his return to England he had an opportunity of telling his grandfather how roughly he and his comrades had recently been treated by His Majesty's former American subjects. The answer is almost certainly that he did not, since by 1815, the poor old king was in an advanced state of illness, blind and senile.

So much for the army officers who were on board the *Statira*. We now come to someone whose contemporary written account of the British attacks on Washington and Baltimore, of the Battle of New Orleans and of the attack on Fort Bowyer went into some six editions after it was first published in 1821. This was George Robert Gleig who served in the last stages of the Peninsular War as a lieutenant in the Eighty-fifth Regiment and who then crossed the Atlantic. He was present at the Battle of New Orleans and during and after the attack on Fort Bowyer he was stationed on Dauphin Island. While there he and his comrades were plagued by snakes and alligators and in his book he describes how shooting parties were made up to destroy them.

At the end of the war Gleig took holy orders in the Church of England and was ordained in 1820. To supplement his income he took up his pen and after the successful publication of his book in 1821 he produced histories and biographies. He became a friend of the Duke of Wellington whose biography he wrote. He also produced a biography of Warren Hastings, the first British governor general of India, which had the distinction of being described by Thomas Babington Macaulay as "the worst book that ever was written."

In 1834 Gleig was appointed Chaplain of Chelsea Hospital for military pensioners in London. He had captured a flag at Bladensburg and he had this suspended from his pulpit in the chapel at the hospital. He ended his career as Chaplain General of the Forces and as such he officiated at the funeral of Field Marshal Sir John Fox Burgoyne.

Major General Sir John Lambert was born in 1772, and joined the First Foot Guards in 1791. He served in the Peninsular War and attained the rank of major general in 1813. At the end of the following year we found him on board the *Vengeur* bound for the Gulf. In the Battle at Chalmette on January 8, 1815 Lambert commanded the British reserve. The deaths of Pakenham and Gibbs left him in command and in the unenviable position of having to draw off the British forces from the field. The subsequent capture of Fort Bowyer went some way towards soothing British pride, but as news of the Treaty of Ghent arrived only two days after the fort's surrender, it had to be returned to the Americans. Like Dickson, Lambert recrossed the Atlantic in time to join Wellington at Waterloo.

Lambert came of a distinguished naval and military family. One of his brothers was Captain Henry Lambert, R.N., who took part in a famous naval action off the Coast of Brazil in December 1812. This was between the British frigate *Java*, commanded by Lambert, and the American frigate *Constitution* ("Old Ironsides") commanded by Captain William Bainbridge. The *Java* was reduced by superior American gunnery to a floating wreck and, after Lambert had been mortally wounded, his first lieutenant had no option but to surrender.

The commander in chief of the Royal Navy fleet which arrived off Mobile Bay in February 1815 was Vice Admiral Sir Alexander Cochrane. He had seen service with the Royal Navy for over thirty-seven years and had had considerable experience of the American coast and of the West Indies. Promoted to rear admiral in 1804 he was second-in-command two years later to Admiral Sir John Duckworth when the British defeated a French squadron off St. Domingo. For his part in the action Cochrane received the thanks of both houses of Parliament and the Corporation of London and also a presentation sword.

In 1810 Cochrane was appointed governor and commander in chief of Guadeloupe and in 1814 naval commander in chief on the North American Station. He cooperated with Major General Robert Ross in the operations against Washington and Baltimore, after which the British Fleet brought Ross's army south to the Gulf via Jamaica, which Cochrane had left before Lambert and Ricketts arrived. Cochrane was a strong advocate of the New Orleans campaign.

After the capture of Fort Bowyer and the news of peace Cochrane sailed for England and saw no further active service.

Cochrane's second-in-command in the Gulf was also a Scotsman. This was Rear Admiral Pulteney Malcolm. Entering the Royal Navy in 1778 he attained the rank of rear admiral in 1813. In June 1814 he commanded the fleet which brought Ross and his troops, including George Robert Gleig, across the Atlantic. Malcolm came south for the operations against New Orleans and after Cochrane's departure for England he was left in command of the British fleet with his headquarters on Dauphin Island.

From June 1816 to June of the following year Malcolm was naval commander in chief at St. Helena. From the beginning he was on excellent terms with Napoleon who was in exile on the island. A diary containing his conversations with the fallen Emperor was published in 1899. As an example of the entries, on July 4, 1816 Malcolm and Napoleon conversed for two hours. They discussed the Bourbons, Napoleon's preparations for the invasion of England, Trafalgar, and Waterloo.

Cochrane's captain of the fleet, or as we should call him today, chief of staff, was Rear Admiral Edward Codrington, who was by then almost a veteran. He had been signal officer in Admiral Lord Howe's flagship, the *Queen Charlotte*, when Howe defeated the French on June 1, 1794 in a battle known as The Glorious First of June, and he was later captain of the *Orion* in Nelson's fleet at Trafalgar.

It was Codrington who brought to England the official announcement of the capture of Fort Bowyer. Before his departure from Mobile Bay he paid a visit to Dauphin Island which, I am afraid, he described in a subsequent letter to his wife as "destitute of all beauty."

In 1827 Codrington was appointed commander in chief of the British Mediterranean Fleet, this appointment being at the time of the Greek War of Independence from Turkey. On October 20, 1827 Codrington, commanding an allied fleet of British, French, and Russian ships, sailed into Navarino Bay, where he found a Turkish/Egyptian fleet at anchor. Some shots were fired, probably by the Turks, and a general battle ensued in which the Turkish/Egyptian fleet was destroyed. The battle hastened Greek independence, but at the time Codrington's success was a considerable embarrassment to his Government since Britain was not at war with Turkey. Today Navarino is remembered as the last major sea-battle to be fought entirely under sail.

In the chapel of the Spencer family in the Church of St. Mary the Virgin at Great Brington, Northamptonshire, England, there is a marble bust of Captain the Honourable Sir Robert Cavendish Spencer, R.N., second son of the Second Earl Spencer and a direct descendant of John Churchill, First Duke of Marlborough. Our present Princess of Wales is a Spencer and the daughter of the Eighth Earl.

In September 1814 Captain Spencer commanded HMS *Carron* in the small British squadron which made the first and unsuccessful attack on Fort Bowyer. In December of the same year Spencer and another officer were sent by Cochrane

to find a route by which the army could be transported from the transports anchored off Cat Island in the vicinity of New Orleans. Having eventually reached the Mississippi they then reported back to Cochrane with details of the route to be taken. During the subsequent and successful attack on Fort Bowyer Spencer commanded the seamen who were landed to assist in the siege.

We have looked at two Scotsmen, Cochrane and Malcolm, and we now come to a Welshman, David Powell Price. During the operations against Fort Bowyer Price was under Ricketts's orders while commanding HMS *Volcano*, a bomb ship. He had already distinguished himself in the operations against Baltimore and had taken part, in the *Volcano*, in the celebrated bombardment of Fort McHenry.

On February 14, 1815 Price sent a despatch to Ricketts informing him that pursuant to his orders he had proceeded up Mobile Bay and had captured two schooners in one of which, he wrote, "a dispatch was found from Major Blew commanding an expedition in rear of Fort Bowyer, intended to attack our army in the rear which having been shown to the officer commanding on the point, has been forwarded to the Commander-in-Chief." This dispatch was obviously intended for Lieutenant Colonel Lawrence and referred to the relief force which had been sent from Mobile. However, these events had been overtaken by news of peace. Price was then sent under a flag of truce to Mobile to arrange for the handing back of Fort Bowyer. Today Price's great-great-grandnephew, Mr. E. Geoffrey Jeffreys, lives in Mobile.

Finally we come to Ricketts himself. Like Lambert he was born in 1772 and first went to sea when he was about eight years old. From 1789, the year of the French Revolution, to 1793 he served in the British East India Squadron commanded by Commodore Cornwallis. The commodore was the younger brother of the Lord Cornwallis whose surrender at Yorktown in 1781 was the major defeat for the British during the American Revolution. Lord Cornwallis was at this time governor general of India and engaged in the Third Mysore War against Tippo Sahib. Ricketts's elder brother John died while serving in Cornwallis's army as an ensign in the Engineers.

During part of his time in Commodore Cornwallis's squadron Ricketts served in the flagship under a certain Captain Delgarno. The latter was a friend of the commodore and also a drinking companion in Calcutta of the well-known memoirist William Hickey, who described Delgarno as "without exception the most drunken varlet I ever saw." So Ricketts had an early opportunity of observing the effects of alcohol at close quarters.

Promoted to the rank of post captain in 1802 Ricketts was appointed in October 1813 to command the *Vengeur*. The next year he brought Lambert to the Gulf. He thus describes the naval operation which resulted in the landing of the British troops, consisting of a brigade, for the attack on Fort Bowyer:

In the execution of this service I had placed under my orders four Sail of the Line, Frigates, Bombs etc., making 15 pendants. Mobile is a bar harbor. I therefore volunteered landing the troops 800 in number artillery,

etc., on the open beach exposed to a dangerous surf. Seamen from the Men of War were employed during the siege under the Honorable Captain R. Spencer by my appointment and I attended the approaches with the General Sir J. Lambert throughout and led the troops in my boat to the shore in face of a formidable Fort garrisoned with near four hundred American troops.

Ricketts's figures were, of course, only estimates. The effective strength of the garrison was some 320 men, and Dr. Coker puts the number of troops in the brigade which were landed as between thirteen and fourteen hundred men. After the surrender of the fort Lieutenant Colonel William Lawrence's sword was handed to Ricketts at Lambert's request.

Ricketts was back across the Atlantic in time to be one of the officers whose ships in the Channel Fleet were keeping a watch for Napoleon after Waterloo, when the emperor was thought to be contemplating an escape to America.

I had originally thought that the "four Sail of the Line" referred to by Ricketts included his own ship, but I have recently found that they were in addition to the *Vengeur*. We will now briefly look at these five ships. In Nelson's navy ships, or sail of the line, which today we would call battleships, were "rated" (i.e., classified) from first to fourth rates according to the number of guns they carried. First and second rates were three deckers, third and fourth rates were two deckers. All the ships of the line in Ricketts's force were third rates of seventy-four guns. A third rate was often referred to as a "seventy-four," and these and frigates then constituted the cornerstone of the Royal Navy.

The oldest ship in Ricketts's force was the *Bedford*, which had had a very distinguished history. Built in 1775 she was now forty years old. During the American Revolution she was present at the Battle of Chesapeake Bay in September 1781. Lord Cornwallis was then at Yorktown anxiously awaiting the arrival of a British fleet under Admiral Thomas Graves. The French Admiral de Grasse arrived first and, although the ensuing battle was indecisive, the effective result was that Cornwallis was not relieved and had to surrender.

Just over seven months later the *Bedford* was in the fleet of Admiral Lord Rodney when he defeated Grasse off Dominica in the engagement known as the Battle of the Saints. This was the last great sea fight of the American Revolutionary War. On October 11, 1797 the *Bedford* was in Admiral Duncan's fleet which defeated the Dutch under Admiral De Winter at the Battle of Camperdown.

The second seventy-four was the *Royal Oak* which was built in 1809 and took its name from the tree in which King Charles II hid after his escape from the battlefield of Worcester in 1651. In 1814 she became the flagship of Rear Admiral Pulteney Malcolm and it was in her that Malcolm brought Major General Robert Ross across the Atlantic to join Cochrane in Chesapeake Bay. George Robert Gleig in his book gives a description of a ball given by Malcolm on board the *Royal Oak* in mid-Atlantic: "the greater number of officers dancing, as you may believe, with one another."

An interesting detail in connection with the third seventy-four is that one of her midshipmen made a watercolour sketch of Fort Bowyer from the British batteries, which he signed and which is now in the possession of Mrs. Carter C. Smith of Mobile. The ship was the *Asia* and my correspondence with the National Maritime Museum at Greenwich, London, has established that the midshipman was probably George Knyvett Wilson, who died a rear admiral in 1866 and whose son, Admiral of the Fleet Sir Arthur Knyvett Wilson, V.C. (1842-1921) was First Sea Lord from 1910 to 1912 when Winston Churchill was First Lord of the Admiralty.

The fourth seventy-four was the *Norge*. In 1807 a British fleet bombarded Copenhagen after the Danes had rejected a British demand that they surrender their fleet, which was in danger of being seized by Napoleon. The Danes capitulated and among their ships of the line which were surrendered was the *Norge*. She was thereafter taken into the British Navy under her Danish name.

The fifth seventy-four, Ricketts's own ship, was built in 1810 and was probably named after the French ship *Vengeur* which sank soon after she surrendered during the Battle of the Glorious First of June, in which Codrington had taken part in 1794. Ricketts's ship had a complement of 606 men, but when she was paid off in August 1815 she was 47 men short. Sickness, desertions and death at sea meant that there were never enough volunteer seamen for the Royal Navy at this time, hence the necessity for impressment.

Perhaps the most interesting of the ships of the line in the British fleet was Sir Alexander Cochrane's flagship, the *Tonnant*, a third rate of eighty guns. "The huge *Tonnant*," as Marquis James, the biographer of Andrew Jackson, calls her, started life in the French navy. On August 1, 1798 when Nelson's fleet sailed into Aboukir Bay on the Egyptian coast, the French fleet under Admiral de Brueys, who had brought Napoleon and his army to Egypt, was at anchor in the Bay. Lying astern of the French flagship *L'Orient* was *Le Tonnant*. During the ensuing battle, usually called the Battle of the Nile, the French flagship caught fire and blew up (thus setting the scene for the famous poem "The Boy Stood On The Burning Deck") and *Le Tonnant* had to slip her cable to avoid being damaged by the explosion. She was subsequently boarded, captured and taken into the British Navy.

Now HMS *Tonnant*, she was in Nelson's fleet at Trafalgar and later became the flagship of Sir Alexander Cochrane. In August 1815 she was the flagship in the Channel Fleet of Admiral Lord Keith. On August 7 Keith left the *Tonnant* in his barge and went on board HMS *Bellerophon* at anchor in Torbay on the coast of Devonshire. Napoleon was on board the *Bellerophon*, having surrendered to the British after Waterloo. Keith escorted Napoleon in his barge from the *Bellerophon* to the ship which was about to take the emperor to St. Helena. As they chatted in the admiral's barge, Napoleon asked Keith if that was *Le Tonnant* of Aboukir. What a twist of fate that he should have seen her again in such circumstances.

Our look at Mobile Bay in 1815 has produced names linked with Napoleon, Nelson, and Wellington, with the Greek War of Independence, and with the

American Revolution. The death of Burgoyne in 1871 left only one survivor of those British officers whose careers we have considered. This was George Robert Gleig, who was to live another seventeen years. He had been born in 1796, the year of George Washington's Farewell Address, the year in which the young General Bonaparte had fought his way onto the Bridge of Arcola in his first Italian campaign. Now it was the summer of 1888: Grover Cleveland was in his first term in the White House and a new war lord had just mounted the throne of Imperial Germany—Kaiser Wilhelm II. It was seventy-three years since Gleig had shot at the snakes and alligators on Dauphin Island, and he was now in his ninety-third year. He died on July 9, 1888 and thus the last candle went out.

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A barrister by profession and a student of history by avocation, Sir Robert has had an enduring interest in Gulf Coast History.

How to Fight A Pirate: Provincials, Royalists, and the Defense of Minor Ports During the Age of Buccaneers

Amy Turner Bushnell

Foreign ships in Spanish waters stood in need of friendly ports, places where they could take refuge from storms, find fuel and fresh water, and stock up on provisions and naval stores; where, in addition, they could gather information, careen a vessel, replenish a crew, or turn over a cargo. Over the course of the sixteenth century, Spanish Americans, starved for markets and manufactures, allowed French, English, and Dutch corsairs to drop anchor in their ports. Trade with them under any of several guises was labeled *rescate*, an all-purpose word also used for barter, ransom, and tradegoods. Alarmed at the extent of illicit trade in the minor ports of the Indies, the Spanish Crown stopped classifying the intruders as *cosarios*, or sea rovers, and began to label and punish them as *piratas*, sea outlaws.¹ Caught on the wrong side of a definitional boundary, that is what they became.

Ideally, the corsairs would have been driven out, but Spain's few galleons were needed to convoy the annual fleets from one strong point to another and her galleys to sweep the seas around the major ports. As far as the minor ports, the Crown concluded in 1530 that the only recourse for local inhabitants faced by a force larger than the occasional corsair was to muster the militia, conduct the noncombatants, livestock, and baggage to safety, and send for help. A hundred years later conditions had not improved. From their hideouts on the "useless islands," the seventeenth-century buccaneers sailed forth in packs to prey on Spanish shipping and to visit the smaller ports, where by seizing ships, raiding storehouses, and holding people for ransom they could obtain provisions and supplies. The governor in Havana reported in 1639 that the coast was unsafe for two or three leagues inland and coastal traffic was restricted to canoes.²

It was in the buccaneers' interest to keep the minor ports in operation—to milk, not kill, the cow. They therefore came to an accommodation with local inhabitants in the stylized raid, formal as a duel, by whose unwritten rules defense was limited, damage contained, and honor satisfied. Paying off pirates was the price of doing business in the peripheries of empire: expensive, but, given the alternative, cost effective. From the Crown's point of view, the stylized raid was blatant collusion, no better than the earlier system of *rescate*. Spain was beset by enemies and her subjects were giving them aid and comfort.

Referring to those subjects as colonists, creoles, settlers, or even "the Spanish" obscures their true variety. Nor do they fit historical classifications based upon caste, class, or place of origin. For our purposes, they were either royalists or provincials, depending on whether their interests and the Crown's were in harmony or at cross purposes. This essay explores the controversy between royalists and provincials in the seventeenth century over the kind and degree of resistance to be offered to raiders in the minor ports—in other words, over how to fight

a pirate. It is based on a case in the records of the Florida captaincy general: a series in 1682 on the port of San Marcos.

San Marcos was a hidden harbor nine miles up the St. Marks River from Apalachee Bay on the Gulf of Mexico. It was the principal outlet for Apalache, an agricultural province of some thirty Indian towns and villages set in the red hills of the present Florida panhandle. San Luis, largest town in Apalache, with the headquarters of Spanish soldiers and missionaries, was twenty miles north of the port on the site of present Tallahassee. Of the captaincy general's three language-based provinces, Apalache was the smallest, richest, most populous, and farthest from the *presidio* of St. Augustine, Florida's one Spanish city, which lay tucked in the corner of a right angle formed by two lines of missions, those of Guala reaching up the Atlantic coast and those of Timucua stretching across the peninsula as far as the marshes of the Gulf.

Apalache was also the youngest province. Conversions began there in 1633 as an outreach of new missions in western Timucua. One of the conditions of Spanish expansion into these regions whose rivers debouched into the Gulf was the decline of Calusa, Pohoy, and Tocobaga naval power—a decline that was exacerbated, in ways that have yet to be examined, by the prolonged swarming of treasure salvors and pirates around the *buceo de la almiranta*, or wreck of the flagship of the 1622 Fleet of the Indies, the admiral's ship having gone down, heavily laden with silver, off Matecumbe Key. ³

In 1637 Florida governor San Luis de Horruytiner sent two *presidio* pilots to chart and mark the channel of the St. Marks in order, he said, to offer a Christian asylum to vessels fleeing from corsairs and storms. Guided by the chart, one of the pilots made his way from Havana to San Marcos in one week with a frigate laden with supplies for the western missions, which had until then been supplied two hundred miles overland on the backs of Indian bearers. The friars reported that the Indians were jubilant "when they saw a ship in their ports," and "many asked for baptism." Two years later, Governor Damián de Vega Castro y Pardo opened a direct sea route between St. Augustine and San Marcos, a two-week sail, and provisioned the *presidio* for the first time with Apalache corn. ⁴

Horruytiner and Vega Castro y Pardo stationed a detachment of soldiers in the port, having heard that "ships of enemies were entering there without anyone to report it." Interim governor Pedro de Horruytiner withdrew the soldiers to please the Franciscans. The following governor, Diego de Rebolledo, hearing that the *naturales* had again opened the port to the enemy, put the soldiers back. The men had no sooner arrived in San Luis than yet another vessel of corsairs appeared at San Marcos, was "refreshed," and departed, in a classic case of rescue. ⁵

The new port was put to more legitimate use as an outlet for deerskins, ranch products, and, most of all, the prosaic corn and beans, pigs, chickens, and dried turkey meat of Apalache Province, which went primarily, not to St. Augustine, but to Cuba to provision the fleets of the Indies and sustain the population of Havana. ⁶

Everyone who counted in Florida—governors, officers, friars, creoles, and chiefs—had an interest in what passed through San Marcos. The governors commandeered a large part of the Apalache produce to provision the presidio, purchasing it for two *reales* the *arroba* to resell it for eight. The friars, through syndics, sold another portion to beautify their churches, pay off a loan to their chapter, and vary their diet. The local creoles, *floridanos*, who had long since infiltrated the garrison and naturalized the bureaucracy, were go-betweens to Cuban merchants and shipowners. The chiefs, natural lords of the Indians, controlled resources of land and labor and were middlemen in the trade with Indian groups to the north.⁷

Recognizing the ease with which a royally appointed governor or treasury official could turn provincial, the Crown did not fully trust its own appointees. When, after the capture of Jamaica, Governor Alonso de Aranguiz y Cotes proposed to build a fort in the port of Apalache and preempt the English in the Gulf, the king's *Junta de Guerra* tabled his plan with this comment:

The governors of Florida, this one like his predecessors, for reasons of personal gain want to enlarge the military in order to enlarge their business ventures and be better placed to take advantage of the Indians. That this governor should offer to build a fort without cost to the royal treasury is proof of it.⁸

Supporting the captaincy general cost the Crown nearly fifty thousand ducats a year as it was. As far as port revenues paying for a fort at San Marcos, up to 1657 the customs officials had yet to produce a single real, or so said the friars. With regard to the charge that they were engaging in rescate, they confessed that it was true that Christian charity had moved them one time to succor "one little frigate in distress," "provisionless" and "defeated" by the sea.⁹

In 1668 the pirate Robert Searles out of Jamaica sacked St. Augustine, wantonly shooting down women and children in the streets. As a result, the Crown granted the Florida captaincy general ten thousand additional ducats with which to start on a stone fort in the capital, to be christened, confusingly, the Castillo de San Marcos. A lesser fort was authorized for San Marcos in Apalache, but not built.¹⁰

In June 1677, five years before our story begins, a party of French and English buccaneers slipped up the St. Marks River and seized a frigate belonging to Havana merchant Diego de Florencia. The vessel, lying at anchor near the warehouse at San Marcos Landing, was loaded with deerskins from Apalache and ranch products from Timucua, picked up at the port of San Martín on the Suwannee River, western outlet for the Province of Timucua.¹¹ In the attack, two Indian guards were killed and others injured. Shipmaster Juan de la Rosa escaped in his underclothes, with bullets singing around him. In the warehouse the pirates found further deerskins, along with the kind of rescates used to buy them, mostly beads and iron tools, consigned to Juan Fernández de Florencia, a local rancher, merchant, and at the time, acting *teniente* (lieutenant governor) of Apalache Province.¹² They also found La Rosa's sea chest, containing a

valuable chunk of ambergris that also belonged to the Florencias, and asked their captives how much they thought it was worth.

The pirates took three prisoners: Captain Antonio Francisco de Herrera, who was the officer-in-charge, Fray Francisco de Medina, and Fray Juan de Mercado. For their combined return the Franciscans of Apalache paid a ransom of thirty hogs. Exchanging captives for provisions was common in the Caribbean. Dutch pirate Cornelis Corneliszoon Jol, *Piè de Palo*, boasted to Cuban authorities that he held forty or fifty Spanish soldiers, civilians, and Franciscan priests—the latter from Florida—for that purpose and he could always catch more.¹³

On the lowlands between the marshes of the coast and the piedmont were several villages of outsiders who lived under Apalache protection. The Yamasees of Candelaria were tanners. The Chines of Asunción "on the path to the sea" handled the traffic on the St. Marks river system and did some coastal navigation. The Tocobagas on the Wacissa River, which provided access by water to the large town of Ivitachuco, were coastal pilots and did the lightering across the bars of the Wacissa and the Suwannee.¹⁴

After the events of 1677, Governor Pablo de Hita Salazar advised the Tocobagas to close the Wacissa channel and withdraw from the coast so they could not be captured and used as guides. The governor's previous appointment as Corregidor of Vera Cruz had given him ample experience with pirates and the advice was warranted. Indian mariners with a knowledge of local waters often fell into enemy hands when presidio ships were taken or coastal villages raided. Probably in response to a similar warning from the governor, the Chines moved farther from the coast. But the Tocobagas answered evasively that the Wacissa's main channel was already blocked by fallen trees and that they took their canoes out by a secret passage, and the governor did not press the matter. Experiments on the north coast of Española had shown that drastic resettlement measures to prevent all contact with the enemy were a mistake, creating a population vacuum which buccaneers and runaway slaves were quick to fill, whereas the displaced settlers merely took their unruly habits elsewhere.¹⁵

After consulting with the treasury officials and Franciscans, Hita Salazar resolved to have the Indians start immediately on "some slight fort" to serve until the Crown could send funds for a more substantial one. He ordered military engineer Enrique Primo de Rivera to San Marcos, made arrangements with the chiefs for laborers and corn, and sent to Spain for one thousand pesos worth of European manufactures of low unitary value and ready convertibility.¹⁶ The Apalaches who did the construction, drawn from a provincial population of around eighty-seven hundred, descended to San Marcos in weekly shifts. They drew a ration of two and a half pounds of corn a day and wages of one real, paid weekly in the rescates: hawkbells in two sizes, knives with black or white hafts, blue and multicolored beads, sheet brass, lengths of blue or red cloth, razors and scissors—goods which they used in their trade with neighboring tribes. An Apalache whom the Spanish sent to spy on the English in Apalachicola in 1675 was outfitted to pass as a deerskin trader with a supply of beads, hatchets, and hawkbells.¹⁷

The castillo of San Marcos de Apalache was erected on the point of land where the Wakulla River joins the upper St. Marks. As contemporaries knew the landscape, to the east were the bluffs and narrow beaches of the Tagabona; to the west, the snake-infested palmettos outlining the banks of the Guacara.¹⁸ The castillo was a small, sixty-seven-foot-square stockade of palm logs whitewashed to look like plastered masonry, with a shallow moat flushed by river water. The four bastions were aimed in the four cardinal directions. In site plans the castillo appears to balance precariously on one corner.

The hamlet of San Marcos a little over a mile north of the fort contained a handful of palmthatched huts, a circular Indian lodge called the *bujío*, and a warehouse, all of them probably built on pilings. There was also a landing place, which may or may not have had a wharf. Beyond San Marcos stretched a sea of sawgrass, with the narrow, elevated path to San Luis disappearing into a distant stand of pines. Placed on a site prone to flooding and short on firewood and fresh water, the post had attracted few inhabitants in its fifty years of existence. The fort was manned by weekly detachments from the twenty-two-man garrison of San Luis, mostly younger men, and a similar detail of native auxiliaries guarded the warehouse. The warden of the fort and perhaps the ensign were the only soldiers on permanent assignment at the "redoubt and river of San Marcos." There were, by contrast, seven soldiers from the presidio protecting the trade frontier in the "conquest of Apalachicola."¹⁹

Governor Juan Marques Cabrera, who took over from Hita Salazar in 1680, shared the royal view that Spaniards were the only soldiers fit to occupy the 350 *plazas*, or man-spaces, in the Florida garrison. Floridanos and Indians properly belonged in the militia, who would presumably rise to the defense of their own homes unpaid. Spain, however, had been unable since the 1660s to supply the demand for soldiers without resorting to scouring Mexico City jails. To avoid enrolling Mexican mestizos on the roster, Florida governors had given *plazas* to floridanos. Many of these were officers in the reserves drawing the pay of a soldier without doing guard duty. One company showed a ratio of fifty-one officers to sixty-two soldiers. Furthermore, the governors had retained on the rolls officers and soldiers who had married into floridano families against regulations and thus become naturalized. Among those found guilty of marrying without license was Juan de Hita, a son of Hita Salazar. By the time Marques Cabrera arrived, at least half the garrison was Florida-born. Between 1680 and 1683 the governor discharged a total of twenty-four naturales, yet such was the shortage of Spaniards that he was left with 130 floridanos in the garrison, not counting fifteen *plazas* to widows and minors. If Marques Cabrera, like his successor, Diego de Quiroga y Losada, followed a policy of exiling naturales to undesirable posts in the provinces, probably more than half of the soldiers in Apalache were provincials.²⁰

In the winter of 1681-1682 a band of French buccaneers established themselves on Anclote Key, near present Tarpon Springs on the west coast of Florida, to give their attention to the Keys and Gulf.²¹ Ships sailing outside of convoy, the *navíos de permiso*, were their natural prey: dispatch boats, fishing boats,

supply frigates, and the pigs-and-chickens sloops that provisioned the fleets of the Indies. Within six months they had taken seven prizes, among them a St. Augustine supply frigate on her way home from Vera Cruz under the command of Salvador de Cigarroa, who despite his rank of sergeant major in the reserves was really a lesser official in the treasury. In the Searles raid, Cigarroa had lost his wife and a baby daughter, and had another daughter crippled. He surrendered the frigate without firing a shot.²²

That was in January 1682. Two months later, a sail was reported in Apalache Bay. Pedro de Arcos, warden of the fort at San Marcos, was at San Luis doing his Easter duty, that is, making his yearly confession.²³ Following proper procedure, Ensign Juan de Herrera, in charge during the warden's absence, notified Teniente Andrés Pérez at San Luis. The sail belonged to a *balandra*: a flat-bottomed, two-masted vessel of shallow draft and large capacity designed and developed, like the *filibote*, for Dutch canals. Crossing the bar of the St. Marks at high tide, the *balandra* came carefully up the channel between the oyster beds, made port, and anchored a stone's throw from the fort. She was out of Havana, property of the Cuban merchant Juan de Ayala.²⁴ Shipmaster Alonso Díaz Mejía, had a packet of mail to deliver and two Franciscan passengers to disembark.

Late that night Arcos returned to San Marcos with three soldiers. If they were afoot or on horseback, they probably came in by the road to San Luis. An alternate, partially water route would have taken them by way of San Martín de Tomoli, a town overlooking the flatlands from Cody Scarp, where canoes were available for travel below the fall line of the Wakulla.²⁵ All was in order when Arcos arrived and he sent his escort back to San Luis in the morning. A second party from San Luis was en route to San Marcos to welcome the passengers and receive the cargo: Teniente Pérez, two other Franciscans, and merchant Juan Fernández de Florencia.

Apparently it did not occur to anyone—soldiers, friars, floridanos, Indians, or Cubans—that pirates too might have spotted the ship and be waiting for cover of darkness to follow her into port. San Marcos retired for the night. Pérez, Florencia, and one soldier put up in the bujío, along with six Indians from the guard of the warehouse. Shipmaster Díaz and his cabin boy slept in the fort to escape mosquitos, as did three of the four Franciscans. Where the fourth, a lay brother, spent the night is unrecorded. Guarding the fort were Warden Arcos, his ensign, and five soldiers.

Three years earlier, when the castillo was new, Hita Salazar had written out a set of instructions for whoever would be warden, advising him to build a watchtower-beacon down on the Gulf and man it with two soldiers and two Indians during warm weather, the season of pirates, lest "a boatload of enemies" should "hide in the bay that the River of Wacissa makes at Cassina Point and from there introduce themselves by the River of San Marcos undetected."²⁶ But there was no tower on the headland and no watchers that evening, the nineteenth of March, when sixty-six French buccaneers left their frigate off Cassina Point and rowed into the St. Marks on the rising tide.

The pirates, in three fast, light *piraguas*, reached the confluence of the rivers before midnight. The moon came out as if on cue to reveal the white walls and menacing gun embrasures of the fort. They drew back on their oars, then, seeing what was either a mast or a tree trunk, squatted down to view it in silhouette. It was the mast of the *balandra*.²⁷ They pulled the *piraguas* over to a point of land and stepped ashore, but in the swampy terrain could get nowhere. Daylight was approaching and their boats were knocking against each other in the falling tide. They returned to the *piraguas* and sat awhile in debate, then the captain came to a decision and they headed in their boats for the *balandra*.

Antonio de Benavides, the youngest soldier in the fort, was on watch. It was a cold night for the middle of March and he went down to the kitchen to get warm. When he returned to his post at three or four o'clock in the morning and looked toward the water he saw a large, unidentified floating object. Antonio awoke corporal-of-the-guard Villalobos, who grabbed up a musket and ran to the wall. What he made out was not one large ghostly ship but three small ones. Villalobos shouted, "Who goes there?" There was no answer. He raised his musket and fired.

One of the Franciscans awakened Arcos, who sent for the shipmaster. By the time Díaz got to the wall voices were coming over the water. He shouted to warn first mate Francisco Romero and the others on the *balandra*: "To arms! To arms! The enemy is in the port!" As the first *piragua* drew up alongside, Romero and the crew jumped overboard. Díaz continued shouting to warn the *bujío*. The pirates responded with a shotgun blast in his direction. Yelling "Spaniards, to arms!" he went below, found a loaded musket leaning against the wall of the guardhouse, and rushed back to fire into the darkness in the direction of the *balandra*.

The less excitable Villalobos heard up to forty men wade ashore and divide into two parties, one of them heading toward the fort, the other toward the warehouse and *bujío*. Díaz continued to shout for ammunition and when it came, managed to reload this musket and get off a second shot. His voice awakened ensign Herrera, who ran with his weapons to the wall.

The real firepower in the *castillo* lay in the four iron cannon, two- and four-pounders. Díaz directed a soldier to aim one of the pieces toward the *balandra* and fire, but the gun carriage was caught and would not move. A second soldier refused to help the first and the two began to quarrel: "Pícaro!" and "Voto a Dios con armas!" Herrera, hurrying past to an embrasure overlooking the water, saw the carriage collapse. The gun knocked down corporal Villalobos and fell on him, injuring his ribs.

By this time the enemy had encircled the fort. Herrera repositioned himself at a landward embrasure, where he fought until daybreak, except for a short break to put on his clothes. As the fort came into view in the light of dawn the attackers realized that the eighteen-foot walls were not stone but wood, a virtual stage set. The captain called down to the *piraguas* for grenades to set them on fire.

This was too much for the listening friars. When Herrera returned to his post he found Fray Juan de León calling to the pirates through the porthole, asking for quarter. Turning to Herrera, Fray León urged him to go down and open the gate. Forgetting himself, Herrera swore: "No quarter! Voto a Cristo!" Another Franciscan, Fray Juan Ángel, opened his arms wide and prayed: "Lord, let them take me, not kill me!"

Soldiers heard Díaz protesting, "I'm not going to get involved, Padres!" and snatches of an argument between Arcos and Herrera: "No, not the door," "our reputations," "burn to death," "friars be killed"; then Arcos again: "Padre, leave us," and "Padres, what are you doing? We shall die before we surrender!"—which the Franciscans told him was no solution at all. When they demanded, "Are you going to let us be burned alive?" Arcos threw his hands in the air and cried, "What are you waiting for, Padres? Speak!" The French captain, disconcerted to see friars instead of soldiers show themselves on the wall to ask for quarter, asked them whether they spoke for everyone. As if in answer the gate swung open and the drawbridge started down. Arcos was standing on the curtain with the three friars "singing quarter" when the pirates strode in.

He found time to improve on this story, of course, before his courtmartial. As he then told it, a friar had awakened him with news of the assault. He had ordered the men to their posts and had fought beside them for two hours, firing one of the guns until the very carriage had fallen to pieces. It was the friars, he said, who had taken it on themselves to open the gate while he was down in the magazine getting ammunition, and the enemy were in the apron of the fort before he knew it. If anyone was to blame, he said, it was Teniente Pérez, who could have come to his aid and did not.²⁸

Those who were in the bujío at the time of the attack headed north toward San Luís with the teniente, as did those in the balandra, but the pirates netted thirteen others: the two officers and five soldiers, Díaz, the cabin boy, and the four friars. Their lives were in no danger. Those who could raise ransom would be released immediately. Those who could not, would probably work for the buccaneers for a year or two and then be let go. It was a form of indentured service doubling as a source of recruits for the brotherhood.²⁹

In the San Marcos warehouse the pirates found a valuable prize, two to three hundred arrobas of corn, which the prisoners loaded onto the balandra while they gathered up the muskets and other weapons and broke them in pieces, dismounted the artillery, and put the guns and ammunition on board. They then demolished the bastion of the fort facing the sea and retreated with their prize to the frigate at anchor in the channel down at Cassina Point. It had been a fine battle: nobody killed or badly hurt on either side and no pointless damage to property. San Marcos had been robbed but it would recover.

News of the attack on the port reached San Luís around noon. Captain Herrera, the officer who had been held for ransom in 1677, headed toward the port, accompanied by ranchers Marcos Delgado and Francisco de Florencia,³⁰ five soldiers, and around a hundred Indian auxiliaries. Teniente Pérez intercepted them and ordered Herrera to head toward San Marcos Landing and post sentinels,

avoiding an engagement until Pérez could return with reinforcements, and watch out for the ten or twelve Chines in his party, who might want to "try something stupid" like attacking on their own. Half a league north of the landing, Herrera's party ran into a sailor from the *balandra*, who reported that the enemy had finished sacking the port and was gone. It was true. Herrera took possession of an empty fort and set his men to repairing it.³¹

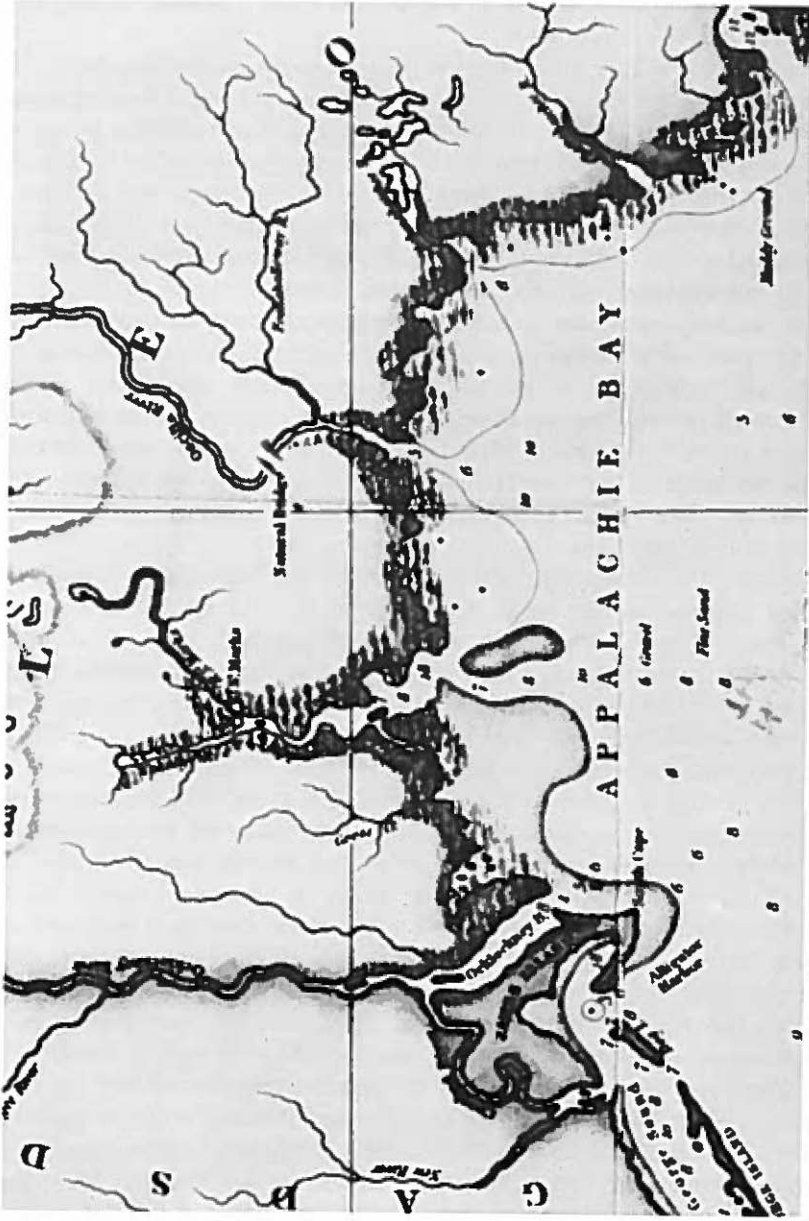
Meanwhile, at Cassina Point, the pirate captain was telling his prisoners that he would accept ransom in the form of provisions "as formerly." The group rate for ransoms was still, it seems, ten hogs. To handle the arrangements the buccaneers released six hostages in a launch: Fray Juan Ángel, Díaz and the cabin boy, and three soldiers, possibly those with injuries, as one of them was Villalobos. Captain Herrera sent all of them except his ensign on to San Luís. There, they learned that Teniente Pérez was under particular orders not to allow the payment of ransom. Governor Marques Cabrera, who followed royal instructions to the letter, was determined not to negotiate with pirates.

When their demands brought no response, the buccaneers sent for reinforcements. Backed by a second frigate, they prepared to reoccupy San Marcos. On a date that no one saw fit to record, three enemy vessels sailed into port in broad daylight and trained their guns on the fort. Herrera prepared to abandon his post, but first, lest the enemy should make use of it, he demolished the fort. The men who had been repairing the walls reversed themselves and razed them to the ground. They then set fire to the *bujío*, the warehouse, and the arbor under which the soldiers had cleaned their weapons. After posting sentries to watch the road, the landing, and both river entrances, Herrera retired as ordered, first half a league, then two leagues across the sawgrass and into the piney woods to El Pinal.

The enemy, in no hurry, allowed ample time for the Spanish to respond with ransoms or to attack, one or the other. Meanwhile, they made themselves at home. The larger ships left port; smaller vessels came and went, were careened and repaired. Perhaps this was when Samuel Johns, treasure salvor and turtle-hunter, brought his two frigates into port, along with four Apalache divers "given" him by the governor of Providence Island in the Bahamas. Local Indians killed two of Johns's men, whereupon, he said, "all those on the ships went ashore and burned the village."³² The Spanish record notes only that the enemy came in two frigates and set fire to the *casas*, meaning the buildings.

By this time, the governor's interference with the stylized movements of attack and accommodation had exasperated pirates and provincials alike. Another vessel released two more soldiers with letters from the friars still in custody. If ransoms were not forthcoming immediately, they warned, the pirates meant to go up into the province and cut off everybody's head.

Teniente Pérez had already thought of that possibility and was concentrating on the avenues of access to the interior. From San Luís he brought down artillery and reinforcements, deploying forty-five soldiers and over two hundred Indians in a series of three defense lines. Sergeant Major Salvador de Cigarroa was back; the pirates had released him and kept the pilots and the ship.³³ He commanded



Detail from 1827 map of West Florida
by John L. Williams

the first position, a trench near San Marcos Landing from which his men could watch both of the river entrances plus the point. Captain Herrera dug in at El Pinal. The third line of defense and base camp, complete with gun emplacements, was four leagues up the road, where a crossroad led to Tuscache Landing on the western side of the Tagabona.

After waiting a little while longer to give the governor one last chance to come up with ransom, the enemy released a third friar and began showing signs of preparing to land and invade. The frigates reappeared in port with four piraguas and a launch which went busily back and forth sounding the harbor and inspecting the shore. Cigarroa, no ordinary officer, confided to his troops that they had no business being where they were; what they needed to guard was the presidio's one last vessel, a ketch—"the whole salvation of the presidio and all the provinces"—which lay unloaded and camouflaged in Tuscache Creek.

On the morning of June 8 the pirates began to advance on the front line. When they were barely within arquebus range of Cigarroa's position, the defenders fired a ragged volley; half of the muskets misfired. Enemy landing craft could be seen going up the rivers on either side. If the buccaneers should land and meet in a pincerlike movement behind them, Cigarroa's troops would be cut off. The Apalaches in the front lines saw no virtue in being captured and sold to Barbadian planters or set to rowing pirate galleys.³⁴ Having scarcely loosed an arrow or fired a shot, they rose up in a body and ran.

Crying, "The Indians have gone off and left us!" the soldiers leaped up to follow, Cigarroa at their head. They overran El Pinal and Herrera's men joined them. When Herrera tried to stop the rout somebody gave him a shove and he fell in the river. Soldiers and Indians ran past together, Cigarroa yelling over his shoulder that they were on their way to Tuscache Landing with a hundred Frenchmen behind them. The men at the third line heard them coming. They too jumped up, abandoning the guns, and all three groups ran on together, not to the landing at Tuscache but to Tomoli. For those from the front lines it was a genuine twenty-one-mile marathon, corroborating the Franciscan view that soldiers were good for nothing except to "ask enemies into the house."³⁵

At Tomoli, where he could look out across the lowlands, Cigarroa made a stand to face his pursuers. There were none. There were no Frenchmen at Tuscache, either, where Herrera was tromping around in mudholes looking for the ketch, which he was supposed to scuttle. By the time Cigarroa marched back into San Marcos four days later the enemy had left, taking with them the last two prisoners: Pedro de Arcos and the soldier Francisco Hernández.

On the way back to Anclote Key the pirates forced one of their captives to guide a party of thirty-five Frenchmen up the San Martín River to the Spanish ranch of La Chua, where at two o'clock in the morning they surprised the ranch houses, set them on fire, and captured the owner, Tomás Menéndez Marquéz, his son-in-law Juan de Hita, and four servants, demanding a purse of money and 150 head of cattle in ransom. According to the governor, the five reserve captains in the vicinity of La Chua were so cowed by happenings in Apalache that not one of them went to don Tomás's rescue. Instead, the chiefs of three

Timucuan towns, with sixteen of their vassals, ambushed the French retreat and freed the captives in a skirmish that left one Indian dead.³⁶

When news of the second occupation of San Marcos and the attack on La Chua reached St. Augustine, Governor Marques Cabrera sent Captain Francisco Fuentes to Apalache to investigate. The act was deliberately provocative, for Fuentes and the Franciscans were antagonists of long standing; his path across the province can be traced by the furious letters that his visit generated, faithfully copied for the governor's files.³⁷ From one of these we learn that the Indians of Ivitachuco were starting on some defenses of their own.

Arcos and Hernández added details to the story of the first occupation when they arrived in St. Augustine in August, the pirates having dropped them off along the coast of Cuba. In captivity they had learned that five English and French pirate captains, including the feared Lorencillo (Laurens de Graff), had met that summer in the Keys and shaken hands on a plan to join forces under Monsieur Agramón (the Sieur de Grammont) and attack St. Augustine.³⁸ The attacks on San Marcos had been small stuff, intended to keep one band of buccaneers busy and in provisions while they waited for the brotherhood to agree on a leader and move against a larger prize.

During Warden Arcos's absence, his companions-at-arms convinced the governor that he was solely responsible for the loss of the fort. Arcos had no sooner returned than he was arrested, courtmartialed, dishonorably discharged, and banished. The Junta de Guerra, reviewing the matter two years later, demanded to know why the governor had made a scapegoat of the warden when others were equally guilty. The next time Marques Cabrera had delinquent soldiers to punish, he would grant no pardons.³⁹

About the role of the Franciscans, everyone was pointedly silent. They alone, of the Spanish eyewitnesses, were not called upon for testimony, and only two of the four were identified. But there are signs that their role in the fracas was not forgotten. When one of them, Fray Juan de Ángel, was appointed visitor to the provinces some time later, the governor objected that he was incompetent, and a fellow Franciscan volunteered that Fray Ángel was "illiterate" and "a public scandal."⁴⁰

Marques Cabrera returned to a policy of closing rivers and moving population. He did not exactly close the port of San Marcos, but he placed numerous obstacles in the way of those who wanted to go there and began collecting customs with an efficiency that Cuban authorities found unseemly. Floridanos and Franciscans spoke nostalgically of Governor Hita Salazar, who "let people make a living any way they pleased," and of the good old days when "everybody was free to buy and sell what he needed, licitly, without being hindered or disturbed."⁴¹

For the next five years, no pirate season was complete without a fresh attempt on the Atlantic coast. Buccaneers began to refit and revictual their ships in the minor ports of Guale, exposed mission towns along the inland waterway which the Indians soon abandoned. The Gulf remained a useful staging area for attacks on St. Augustine. In 1684, for instance, Captain Thomas Jingle of New England, with a letter-of-marque from the governor of New Providence

in the Bahamas, went out with five other captains to cruise the Keys, where they captured the St. Augustine frigate *La Plantanera* on her way to Vera Cruz. Jingle sent a raiding party inland, guided by Indians, in an unsuccessful effort to surprise an unidentified "Spanish city" on the Gulf Coast. In Apalachee Bay he joined forces with five more ships and only then did the fleet head for St. Augustine. ⁴²

Marques Cabrera was not the only governor in the Indies to refuse to negotiate with pirates. When buccaneers Laurens de Graff and the Sieur de Grammont took the city of Campeche in 1685, and Grammont proposed to exchange all of its inhabitants for a few of his men who had fallen into the hands of auxiliaries from Mérida, the Spanish governor responded haughtily that "Spain was rich enough in men and in treasure to rebuild and repopulate Campeche." ⁴³

But no one was rebuilding the defenses at San Marcos, nor would they for another thirty years. ⁴⁴ All that Hita Salazar had accomplished by putting a fort there was to accumulate a cache of artillery, ammunition, and provisions for the enemy to take. Attention turned to Apalachicola, Apalache's trading partner to the north, where provincials and royalists agreed that they should not give ground to English deerskin traders. Governor Quiroga y Losada ordered Primo de Rivera into Apalachicola in 1689 to build a blockhouse trading post, which he did near Coweta, with the help of twenty-four soldiers and a hundred Indians. But Spain was not equipped to win a trade war. In 1691 the Apalachicolas left the Spanish sphere of influence to move closer to the traders of Charleston, entering Anglo history as the Lower Creeks. ⁴⁵

The Apalaches built a third fort in 1695, at San Luís. Fortifying the capital instead of the port was a correct choice, but a moot point. The next invader, Colonel James Moore of Carolina, came by land, with an army of Carolinians and Creeks large enough to destroy the province. San Luís and Ivitachuco were the only exceptions. Safe in the fort at San Luís, Teniente Jacinto Roque Pérez, true to royalist form, refused to ransom soldiers or auxiliaries, who went to the stake side by side. The "King of the Attachookas," as Moore called don Patricio de Hinachuba, chief of Ivitachuco, did not put his 130 armed men and "strong and well-made Fort" to the test, but true to provincial form compounded with the enemy. With "his church plate" and "horses leaden with provisions," don Patricio ransomed Ivitachuco. ⁴⁶

On the peripheries of empire, both Spanish and Indian provincials survived by pursuing their own interests regardless of the interests of the Crown. Their exposed situation obliged them to come to terms with enemies who could move into minor ports and isolated outposts whenever they chose. The ingenious solution of the stylized pirate raid, combining limited defense with limited damage, allowed the minor ports to stay open and continue operating much as they had during the earlier age of corsairs under the system of rescate. The defiant smuggling of the eighteenth century, a third solution to the same problem, would only increase the royalist distrust of provincials, as "Spanish governors attributed contraband to a combination of the foreigner's greed . . . and the creole's inherent degeneracy." ⁴⁷

Provincial and royal interests were irreconcilable. Not one of these systems for accommodation could the Crown condone. Its efforts to force provincials to conform to distant royalist policies could only unite them in the conviction that as a group they were doubly victimized—by the king's enemies, and by the king's men.

Notes

¹ Irene Wright, "Rescates: With Special Reference to Cuba, 1599-1610," *Hispanic American Historical Review* 3 (1920): 335.

² Paul E. Hoffman, *The Spanish Crown and the Defense of the Caribbean, 1535-1585: Precedent, Patrimonialism, and Royal Parsimony* (Baton Rouge, 1980), 224-36; I. A. Wright, "The Dutch and Cuba, 1609-1643," *The Hispanic American Historical Review* 4 (November 1921): 628.

³ Gov. Juan Fernández de Olivera, 10-13-1612, Archivo de Indias, Santo Domingo, legajo 229, document 74 [hereafter SD 229/74]; Oliver Dunn, "Trouble at Sea: The Return Voyage of the Fleet of New Spain and Honduras in 1622," *Terrae Incognitae* 11 (1979): 29; I. Wright, "The Dutch and Cuba," 610.

⁴ Gov. Luís Horruytiner, 6-24-1637, SD 225; Gov. Damián de Vega Castro y Pardo, 8-22-1639, SD 225.

⁵ *Junta de Guerra*, [Spain], 7-14-1660, SD 839/10.

⁶ I. Wright, "Rescates: With Special Reference to Cuba," 341-42; John H. Hann, *Apalachee: The Land Between the Rivers*, Ripley P. Bullen Monographs in Anthropology and History No. 7 (Gainesville, 1988), 126-59.

⁷ Friars in chapter, 9-10-1657, SD 235; Amy Turner Bushnell, *The Archaeology of Mission Santa Catalina de Guale: The Supporting and Supplying the Seventeenth-Century Doctrina*, Anthropological Papers of the American Museum of Natural History (New York, forthcoming); idem, *The King's Coffers: The Proprietors of the Spanish Florida Treasury, 1565-1702* (Gainesville, 1981); idem, "Ruling the Republic of Indians in Seventeenth-Century Florida," in Peter Wood, M. Thomas Hatley, and Gregory A. Waselkov, eds., *Powhatan's Mantle: Ethnohistory of Indians in the Colonial Southeast* (Lincoln, NE, 1989), 134-50. A *real* was one-eighth of a *peso*, one-eleventh of a ducat. An *arroba* was a weight of twenty-five pounds.

⁸ *Junta de Guerra*, [Spain], 7-14-1660, SD 839.

⁹ Bushnell, *The King's Coffers*, 64-65, 90-91; Friars in chapter, 9-10-1657, SD 235.

¹⁰ Luís Rafael Arana and Albert Manucy, *The Building of Castillo de San Marcos* (Eastern National Park and Monument Assoc., 1977); Dorris LaVanture Olds, "History and Archaeology of Fort Saint Marks in Apalache" (M.A. thesis, Florida State Univ., 1962), 6-15.

¹¹ Testimonies of Juan de la Rosa, Antonio de Herrera, and Juan Fernández de Florencia, San Luís, 12-24-1677, fols. 584-86 in the Domingo de Leturiondo Visita of Apalache and Timucua, 1677-1678, Archivo de Indias, ramo Escribanía de Cámara, legajo 156

[hereafter EC 156]; Bushnell, "The Menéndez Marquéz Cattle Barony at La Chua and the Determinants of Economic Expansion in Seventeenth-Century Florida," *Florida Historical Quarterly* 56 (April 1978): 415-17, 424, 428.

¹² On the Florencias see Bushnell, "Patricio de Hinachuba: Defender of the Word of God, the Crown of the King, and the Little Children of Ivitachuco," *American Indian Culture and Research Journal* 3 (July 1979): 1-21; idem, *The King's Coffin*, 6, 14, 34, 135, 145-48.

¹³ Robert S. Weddle, *Wilderness Manhunt: The Spanish Search for La Salle* (Austin, 1973), 44; Gov. Pablo de Hita Salazar, 9-6-1677, SD 839/46; Hann, *Apalachee: The Land Between the Rivers*, 136-39; I. Wright, "The Dutch and Cuba," 625-29.

¹⁴ Hann, *Apalachee: The Land Between the Rivers*, 33-45, 68, 153-54; "Don Patricio, Cacique of Ivitachuco, and Don Andrés, Cacique of San Luis, to the King," San Luis, 2-12-1699, in Mark F. Boyd, Hale G. Smith, and John W. Griffin, *Here They Once Stood: The Tragic End of the Apalachee Missions* (Gainesville, 1951), 25; Bushnell, "The Menéndez Marquéz Cattle Barony," 416, 424.

¹⁵ Presidio in Common, [6-4-1681], in the Hita Salazar Residencia, EC 156-G; Robert S. Weddle, *Spanish Sea: The Gulf of Mexico in North American Discovery, 1500-1685* (College Station, TX, 1985) 391-97, 401-2, 411; idem, *Wilderness Manhunt*, 71; Gov. Juan Marques Cabrera, 7-16-1682, SD 839/71; Hann, *Apalachee: The Land Between the Rivers*, 40-45, 153-54; I. Wright, "Rescates: With Special Reference to Cuba," 348, 353-59.

¹⁶ Gov. Hita Salazar, 9-6-1677, SD 839/46; idem, Order for the Trade Goods, 4-26-1678, SD 839/50; Weddle, *Spanish Sea*, 396-98; Luis Rafael Arana, "Enrique Primo de Rivera (1621-1707): A Spanish Florida Soldier," *El Escribano* 5 (July 1968): 17-26.

¹⁷ Ex-Gov. Hita Salazar, 5-15-1683, and Francisco de la Rocha, 5-20-1683, testimonies in Auto on the Trade Goods, 6-3-1683, SD 229/159; Juan Fernández de Florencia, 5-25-1675, SD 839/32-28.

The figure of 8,700, taken from a 1675 census, represented four-fifths of the population of the three provinces combined. See Bushnell, "That Demonic Game": The Campaign to Stop Indian *Pelota* Playing in Spanish Florida, 1675-1684," *The Americas* 35 (July 1978): 4-5; Hann, *Apalachee: The Land Between the Rivers*, 160-80.

¹⁸ Descriptions of the topography and the 1679 fort are taken from Olds, "Fort Saint Marks"; Mark F. Boyd, "The Fortifications at San Marcos de Apalache," *Florida Historical Quarterly* 15 (July 1936): 3-34; Boyd, Smith, and Griffin, *Here They Once Stood*, 101-2; Lucy L. Wenhold, "The First Fort of San Marcos de Apalache," *Florida Historical Quarterly* 34 (April 1956): 301-14; Hann, *Apalachee: The Land Between the Rivers*; Clifton Paisley, *The Red Hills of Florida, 1528-1865* (Tuscaloosa, 1989), 1-43.

Bernard Romans mistakenly identified the western river as the Tagabona in his 1774 "two whole sheet maps" reproduced in P. Lee Phillips, *Notes on the Life and Works of Bernard Romans* (Deland, FL, 1924), facs. ed. with intro. by John D. Ware (Gainesville, 1975), 19.

¹⁹ Gov. Marques Cabrera, 6-14-1681, SD 839/67.

²⁰ Fiscal of the Council of the Indies, 5-12-1682, comment on Gov. Marques Cabrera, 6-14-1681, SD 839/67; Bushnell, *The King's Coffey*, 64-65; Nicolás Ponce de León II, 2-19-1664, SD 225, and 8-4-1690, SD 234/113; Joseph de Prado and Juan Menéndez Marquéz, 6-30-1668, SD 229/134; Gov. Marques Cabrera, 6-28-1683, SD 229/160.

²¹ Weddle, *Spanish Sea*, 398. For a broader view of the French presence see Weddle, *Wilderness Manhunt*; William Edward Dunn, *Spanish and French Rivalry in the Gulf Region of the United States, 1678-1702: The Beginnings of Texas and Pensacola* (Austin, 1917).

²² Gov. Marques Cabrera, 7-16-1682, SD 839/71; idem, Muster [early 12-1680], with idem, 6-28-1683, SD 229/160; Bushnell, *The King's Coffey*, 115, 147-48; Salvador de Cigarroa, 11-3-1678, SD 229/147; Ex-Gov. Hita Salazar, 5-20-1683, SD 226, and 2-8-1684, SD 839/84.

²³ This narrative of the first 1682 occupation of San Marcos is pieced together from testimonies taken in St. Augustine, from Juan González on 5-25-1682 and Antonio de Benavides on the same day; in San Luis, from Juan de Herrera on 7-20-1682, Juan de Villalobos on 7-21-1682, Antonio Francisco de Herrera on 7-22-1682, and Juan Jiménez on 7-24-1682; and again in St. Augustine, from Alonso Díaz Mejía on 8-6-1682, Francisco Hernández on 8-20-1682, and Pedro de Arcos's confession on 8-25-1682, all with Gov. Marques Cabrera, 7-16-1682, SD 839/71.

²⁴ His career is summarized in William R. Gillaspie, "Sergeant Major Ayala y Escobar and the Threatened St. Augustine Mutiny," *Florida Historical Quarterly* 47 (October 1968): 151-64, and detailed in his "Juan de Ayala y Escobar, *Procurador* and Entrepreneur: A Case Study of the Provisioning of Florida, 1683-1716" (Ph.D. diss., Univ. of Florida, 1961), 29-30.

²⁵ Paisley, *The Red Hills of Florida*, 4, 25, follows Boyd in calling this a "secret canoe route." It has since disappeared. See Boyd, Smith, and Griffin, *Here They Once Stood*, n. 77, 101-2.

²⁶ Gov. Hita Salazar, Instructions for the Fort of San Marcos de Apalache, 4-7-1679, with idem, 3-6-1680, SD 839/62-60.

²⁷ Alonso Díaz Mejía reported the pirates' side of the story. He was in their hands only one night, being in the first group released.

²⁸ Pedro de Arcos confession, 8-25-1682, filed with Gov. Marques Cabrera, 7-16-1682, SD 839/71.

²⁹ Francisco Ruiz, Declaration on the pirates, 10-15-1685, SD 839/82; Declarations on Martín de Goyas, Martín Fernández, and Pablos Delgado, all on 5-9-1683, in Auto on the Corsair Abraha, 5-8-1683, with Gov. Marques Cabrera, 6-28-1683, SD 226/104.

³⁰ On these two individuals see Bushnell, "Patricio de Hinachuba," 3-4, 14-16; Mark F. Boyd, trans. and ed., "The Expedition of Marcos Delgado from Apalache to the Upper Creek Country in 1686," *Florida Historical Quarterly* 16 (July 1937): 2-32; Weddle, *Wilderness Manhunt*, 75-86; Hann *Apalachee: The Land Between the Rivers*, 53-60.

³¹ This account of the post-raid period and the second occupation of San Marcos is reconstructed from Gov. Marques Cabrera, 7-16-1682, SD 839/71, and the aforementioned testimonies of Juan de Herrera, Juan de Villalobos, Antonio Francisco de Herrera, and Juan Jiménez, plus testimonies taken in San Luis from Francisco de Florencia on 7-21-1682, Salvador de los Santos and Carlos Pérez, both on 7-22-1682, and Lorenzo Guerrero on 7-24-1682, all of which were filed with it.

³² Weddle, *Spanish Sea*, 401-2, 411. The Johns statement is on 402.

³³ Gov. Marques Cabrera, 7-16-1682, SD 839/71; Ex-Gov. Hita Salazar, 5-20-1683, SD 226.

³⁴ Gov. Marques Cabrera, 7-16-1682, SD 839/71; Auto on the Corsair Abraha, 5-8-1683, with idem, 6-28-1683, SD 226/104; Declarations of Glodo Satre and Elmo Mermique, runaway servants, 1-11-1686, in idem, 3-19-1686, SD 839/82; Weddle, *Spanish Sea*, 408.

³⁵ Friars in chapter, 9-10-1657, SD 235.

³⁶ Bushnell, "The Menéndez Marqués Cattle Barony," 428; Gov. Marques Cabrera, 7-16-1682, SD 839/71.

³⁷ With other anticlerical materials, they went to the Crown in Gov. Marques Cabrera's mail packet of 6-28-1683, SD 226/105.

³⁸ Francisco Hernández testimony, 8-20-1682, and Pedro de Arcos confession, 8-25-1682, filed with Gov. Marques Cabrera, 7-16-1682, SD 839/71; Weddle, *Spanish Sea*, 399-400.

³⁹ Gov. Marques Cabrera, Sentencing of Pedro de los Arcos, St. Augustine, 9-22-1682; Fiscal of the Junta de Guerra, Madrid, 10-20-1684, appended to idem, 7-16-1682, SD 839; Appeal of the Five Sentries, 4-15-1688, SD 234/9.

⁴⁰ Maynard Geiger, O.F.M., *Biographical Dictionary of the Franciscans in Spanish Florida and Cuba (1528-1841)*. Franciscan Studies 21 (Paterson, NJ, 1940), 25. See also Hann, *Apalache: The Land Between the Rivers*, 120-21.

⁴¹ Gov. Marques Cabrera, 7-16-1682, SD 839/71; Auto on Resettling the Guales, 8-21-1684, with idem, 8-26-1684, SD 226/118; Gov. Joseph de Córdoba Ponce de León, Havana, 10-6-1683, SD 234/55; Franciscans of the Province of Santa Elena, 6-4-1681, and Presidio in Common, [6-4-1681], in the Hita Salazar Residencia, EC 156-G.

⁴² Auto on the Corsair Abraha, 5-8-1683, with Gov. Marques Cabrera, 6-28-1683, SD 226/104; idem, 10-6-1687 [sic], SD 839/113; Ex-Gov. Hita Salazar, Report on the Pirates, 5-20-1683, with idem, 5-24-1683, SD 226; Auto on Resettling the Guales, 8-21-1684, with Gov. Marques Cabrera, 8-26-1684, SD 226/118; Auto on the Pirates, 11-11-1684, in the Marques Cabrera Residencia, EC 156-C-3, fol. 17; Thomás Menéndez Marqués and Francisco de la Rocha, 9-30-1686, SD 234/65; Gov. Diego de Quiroga y Losada to Gov. James Colleton of Carolina, 11-12-1687, SD 839/116; J. Leitch Wright, Jr., "Andrew Ransom: Seventeenth Century Pirate?" *Florida Historical Quarterly* 39 (October 1960): 136-38.

⁴³ Quoted by Jean Bassford von Winning in "Forgotten Bastions Along the Spanish Main: Campeche," *The Americas* 6 (April 1950): 424-25.

⁴⁴ When he was acting governor, shipowner Juan de Ayala built a blockhouse to use as a Yuchi and Yamasee trading post. See Olds, "Fort Saint Marks," 21-25, 28-35; Gillaspie, "Sergeant Major Ayala y Escobar," 163-64.

⁴⁵ Fred Lamar Pearson, Jr., "Anglo Spanish Rivalry in the Georgia Country, 1670-1691," in Eugene R. Huck and Edward H. Moseley, eds., *Militarists, Merchants and Missionaries: United States Expansion in Middle America* (University, AL, 1970), 14-16.

⁴⁶ Hann, *Apalachee: The Land Between the Rivers*, 210-12, 393; Bushnell, "Patricio de Hinachuba," 9.

⁴⁷ G. Earl Sanders, "Counter-Contraband in Spanish America: Handicaps of the Governors in the Indies," *The Americas* 34 (July 1977): 75.

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Suppressing the Anglo-American Trade at Mobile, 1733-1737

Michael James Forêt

Enforcing the strict tenets of mercantilism was difficult for all colonies in eighteenth-century North America, but in Louisiana it was practically impossible. Louisiana had a long coastline, and bordered the New World colonies of England and Spain, so there were a great many opportunities to trade with foreign powers. Its population contained a disproportionate number of underpaid officers and convicted criminals, both groups prey to the temptations of easy profits in clandestine trade. But even those willing to abide by the strict laws were sometimes forced into trade with foreigners.

The French crown and its licensed merchant fleet often neglected Louisiana, which was never self-sufficient in even the most basic foodstuffs during its entire history as a French colony. It had been established for strictly strategic purposes, and except for John Law's "Mississippi Bubble," no great effort was made to create a strong settlement on the Gulf Coast. Despite her small population, Louisiana was expected to play a key role in France's strategic plan for North America.¹ Balancing the local and imperial needs of the colony and France was the job of its governor. It was never an easy task.

Jean-Baptiste le Moyne de Bienville returned as governor in 1733 to find that neither the French government nor private traders had brought any appreciable quantity of trade goods to the colony in several years.² Because of this, the Choctaws, the most important Indian ally, lacked almost everything. To make matters worse, almost everything that had been traded to them for almost two years was of English manufacture, obtained in the coastwise trade Mobile enjoyed sporadically with Charles Town, Jamaica, and other English islands in the Caribbean. Thus English agents were not only able to tell the Indians that the French would never be able to supply them their needs sufficiently, as Bienville himself lamented, they were able to point to the pitiable amount of French-supplied goods as being of English manufacture anyway. Bienville learned of this talk, and ordered Martin Diron Dartaguiette to inform the next English ship to sail into Mobile Bay that any further English arrivals would be confiscated.³ Bienville was worried that the Indians might make the case that if it was alright for the French to trade with the English, they should enjoy the same privilege, which the French had always vehemently denied to them.⁴

Because of the dearth of French vessels trading French goods, the English trade was not without its practical attractions. In August 1733 Mobile was visited by three English ships which traded beer, cider, flour, and *limbourg* for deerskins, which the infrequent French ships who visited accepted only in the most dire necessity.⁵ French officials profited from the arrival of the first two ships by obtaining goods to supply the garrison and to trade with the Indians. The third ship was denied entry into Mobile harbor, as much for the low tide as for the presence of a royal ship to escort her out to sea. The captain of this ship was

informed of Bienville's trade ban, and was told to inform English authorities of it as well. ⁶

As was so often the case, Commandant Diron's ideas on this matter were diametrically opposed to Bienville's. While the Chickasaws controlled the Mississippi River, of course, the English were a grave threat to Louisiana. ⁷ Diron proposed to destroy or subjugate the Chickasaws, then block the landward passage to Mobile via the Alabamas. With the river and landward routes to the Indians denied to the English, Diron saw no real problem with allowing them to trade at Dauphine Island, away from the possibility of any Anglo-Indian contact. From the island they could provide Mobile with food and merchandise, and at a much better rate than French merchants, because of the price they were willing to pay for deerskins. Diron insisted the commerce would do no harm to France, and would confer no corresponding advantage on England. ⁸

Bienville, Minister of the Marine Jean-Frederic Phelypeaux, Comte de Maurepas, and Louis XV all rejected this chimerical scheme. ⁹ The king approved Bienville's decision regarding the English trade at Mobile, and reminded Louisiana officials that the letters patent of October 1727 forbidding trade with foreigners were to be enforced. The minister agreed with Bienville that the sale of English limbourg in the Choctaw villages by the French would be nothing but disastrous. Any confiscations made under such circumstances had the full support of the French government. ¹⁰

Actually by this time a confiscation had already been made. On November 3, 1733 an English flag was spotted off Mobile; the following day it was confiscated. It was purchased by *Sieur* Philippe Olivier, a local habitant who then outfitted the vessel for a voyage to Saint Dominigue. ¹¹ The confiscation was certainly good for the local treasury. The sale of the ship and its cargo netted the government 11841 *livres* 17 *sols* 8 *deniers*, which was divided among various marine and admiralty officers as prescribed by law. The colony also benefited from the distribution of some thirty-two pieces of limbourg included in the ship's cargo. Part of the king's share was donated to help repair the fortifications of Mobile, which as usual were in a terrible state. ¹²

Another merchantman appeared off Mobile at the same time as the Englishman, but this was the *Marguerite* of St. Malo. The captain did a brisk business, as Mobile was bereft of almost every form of food and merchandise. The *Marguerite* unloaded brandy, wine, flour, and various dry goods; she took on pitch, deerskins, and logwood for her return voyage. According to Cremont, the Mobile commissary, the captain went away pleased, and promised to return the following September. The *habitants* were also happy with this trade, and Cremont predicted they would probably increase production of pitch and tar to take advantage of his return. ¹³

But it seemed that the English were also interested in returning. Among the papers confiscated from the English ship was a letter from the ship's owner to Diron. In it the merchant asked for the same good will toward the captain of his vessel as he himself had received on his earlier visit to Mobile; in recognition of these graces, he sent the commandant a "small present" of twenty bottles

of wine, a box of tea, and a sugar loaf. Diron, probably fearing that Bienville would use this letter against him, immediately penned a letter to the minister excusing himself and the Englishman. Besides, he informed the minister, there were other letters there addressed to French officers and settlers. The service he was being thanked for was having allowed the Englishman to trade for skins with the habitants. The Englishman had not only brought badly-needed goods to people who lacked everything, but had given much of it on credit. Diron hoped the minister would allow this trade, since it was the only outlet for the colony's skins. French merchants usually refused to take skins in payment, and in Louisiana deerskins were the only currency available to most people. But when they did accept skins, Diron complained, they took them at such low rates that they were forcing the habitants to abandon this avenue of commerce.¹⁴

Apparently word had gotten out among the English that there was a profitable trade to be had at Mobile, because the English ships kept coming. On March 24, 1734 the English vessel *Phoenix* came into Mobile and ran aground four leagues from Mobile. Captain Robert Sharp of Carolina gave a suspicious account of himself, and had papers of questionable authenticity. His valuable cargo of Guatemalan indigo and Campeche wood raised French officials' suspicions even higher. The ship was capable of carrying forty to forty-five tons, but was actually only carrying twelve.¹⁵

The tale of the *Phoenix* was not one to ease French suspicions. Sharp said he was carrying syrup and guildives to New England from St. Christophe when he was met by a pirate and taken to Yucatan. His cargo was taken from him there, but he managed to escape, though with no more than "two mice" on board. His first stop was at Campeche, but he was made a prisoner there by the governor. The officer in charge of the *asiento*, however, arranged for him to go to Jamaica for a cargo. Because his two cabin boys stayed in Campeche to become Catholics, he was forced to take on a new crew of three whites and three Negroes, all of them foreigners who had been stranded by fate at the Spanish port. Three days after their departure from Campeche, the Captain said, they met a storm so violent they were forced to throw their kitchen overboard, as well as an anchor they had been using to keep the keel of the *Phoenix* down. This allowed water into the captain's cabin, and his papers were lost. After the storm he sailed before the wind, not knowing where he was until he arrived off Mobile Bay.¹⁶

After hearing this wild story Cremont decided to investigate further. He discovered that the bill of lading for Sharp's cargo, reportedly issued by the *asiento* factor, was in fact written by Sharp himself at a local habitant's house. Because of this Sharp was put into the prison at New Orleans, while Bienville and Salmon wrote to Campeche and Havana for verification of his story. In July, however, the Superior Council ordered the Englishman freed while they waited for word from the Spanish. Their suspicions were later confirmed, both by news from Campeche and the account of one of Sharp's own sailors, that his cargo was indeed stolen from the Campeche *asiento*. Sharp took advantage

of the freedom granted him by the Superior Council to escape, but he reportedly died among the Indians making his way back to Carolina.¹⁷

In the meantime Mobile was visited by two more English ships in June 1734. The first ship was the *Dolphin*, Captain John Watson commanding, which arrived off Mobile on June 26.¹⁸ Watson had come to pick up five thousand livres worth of skins owed to a Captain Colcock by Philippe Olivier on credit extended the year before. Though the captain protested he was not there to break any laws, according to letters seized on his ship his purpose was to establish a regular trade with Olivier. While the case was being investigated, Watson and his son were brought ashore and a detachment of French soldiers was put aboard the *Dolphin*, both to guard her and to prevent her cargo being unloaded without permission. The second ship, the brigantine *John* under Captain Samuel Parsons, came to Mobile under the general pretext of a port call for wood and water. After Watson indicated that the *John* carried twenty men and eight cannons, a detachment of eighteen men was sent to the *Dolphin* to reinforce her in case the *John* offered any trouble.¹⁹

Trouble indeed followed in the Englishmen's wake. When the *John* ran aground, French officials thought it sufficient precaution to occupy the *Dolphin* and keep watch on the *John*. But the detachment sent aboard the *Dolphin* consisted of only five men, who all fell asleep on their first night of watch. The *Dolphin's* crew managed to seize the soldiers' arms and retake their ship. Meanwhile the *John* had freed itself, and the two ships made their way out to sea. They kept with them one of the soldiers, who had taken several saber wounds in the retaking of the *Dolphin*, and the Swiss sergeant of the detachment, who claimed he would be punished if returned.²⁰

Maurepas had tolerated the trade because it was the only way to obtain a market for the colonists' trade goods. The entry of the St. Malo merchants into the Louisiana trade was being encouraged by the minister through a bounty of forty livres per ton on food and merchandise traded at Mobile. This French trade was doubly needed, not only for the supply of Mobile, but because of the adverse results of the English trade on France's relations with the Indians. The minister was absolutely opposed to the entry of English trade goods in the Choctaw nation.²¹ Maurepas ordered Bienville to rebuke all officers to whom the English had addressed letters, and to warn everyone against any contact at all with the English and of the punishments they could incur under the letters patent of October 1727.²² Diron received a firm rebuke from Maurepas for his complicity in the illegal trade, and a warning to be on his best behavior.²³

The affair of the *Dolphin* and *John* also caused some rare official contact between Louisiana and South Carolina. Bienville wrote to the governor of South Carolina protesting the actions of the English ships, especially in taking the two Swiss soldiers whose return he demanded.²⁴ But at the same time the governor allowed Watson to return to South Carolina on the strength of a thousand livres bond and the promise to return with the two Swiss soldiers and all the clothes and arms taken with them by the English. Watson returned during June 1735, but only brought back the Swiss soldier. The sergeant refused to return, claiming

that he would be court-martialed and shot if he went back to the French colony, and requested security for his return. Watson did return some of the clothes and arms, and paid specie for the rest. While Watson was there on legitimate business, Bienville allowed him to sell his cargo of wheat, salt meat, beer, and pewter—all of which were unavailable locally.²⁵

The confiscation of each English vessel seemed to lead inevitably to the arrival of another in its wake. On July 14, 1735, Captain John Channel arrived off Mobile with a power of attorney for the reclamation of the *Phoenix*. Since the prescribed year-and-a-day allowed for reclamation had passed, the ship had been sold to the crown's benefit at a price of 1280 livres, which the hard-pressed colony's treasury was allowed to keep as extraordinary receipts. The Guatemalan indigo and the two slaves, all of which had been stolen by Captain Sharp, were returned to the asiento factor Hamilton at Campeche. The papers requesting the return of the *Phoenix* had to be presented to the Superior Council in New Orleans, though, which meant a somewhat extended stay for the English vessel off the Louisiana coast.²⁶

In the meantime, Diron gave Captain Channel permission to take on wood and water while he waited, but forbade him to trade, and informed him that if he stayed in Mobile Bay longer than twenty-four hours he would be subject to confiscation. But then Diron foolishly allowed Olivier to assist with the wood and water, and further, failed to keep a watch on the English ship, which stayed in the bay for two days while Olivier and Channel conferred. When Diron learned what was going on at Olivier's, which was only four leagues from Mobile Bay, he sent a detachment of thirty-five men under Lieutenant De Velle to arrest the two men. The arresting party found Olivier in possession of a *quart* of wheat, some cider in bottles, and some jellies, though Olivier claimed they were merely given in payment for refreshments given the Englishmen.²⁷ They also found that another local habitant had traded some skins for a quart of wheat.²⁸

Since it had clearly violated the ordinance against contact with foreigners and the permission given to collect wood and water, Diron ordered the English ship confiscated. The confiscation turned into a battle, with the French losing four men killed, twelve wounded, and two crippled for life. Of course, Bienville blamed Diron for his inept handling of the incident, and again the minister reprimanded the hapless lieutenant-governor. Maurepas stressed to Bienville that Mobile was to receive no English ship whatsoever, except one from Carolina returning the Swiss sergeant. The ship returning the sergeant would be allowed to sell his cargo, but this was all that would be allowed, since this commerce was so prejudicial to the king's interests.²⁹

Despite Maurepas's unequivocal instructions to the contrary, in early spring 1736 Diron was forced to allow an Englishman to trade at Mobile. Captain Colcock limped into Mobile requesting entry to replace his bowsprit, which had been damaged. As his ship was unseaworthy, Diron would probably have allowed him in anyway; when he saw that the Englishman had flour, cheese, and beer aboard, he could not refuse him. The Illinois wheat crop had failed the previous year, and Mobile was in dire need of food.³⁰ Since Diron had nothing to trade

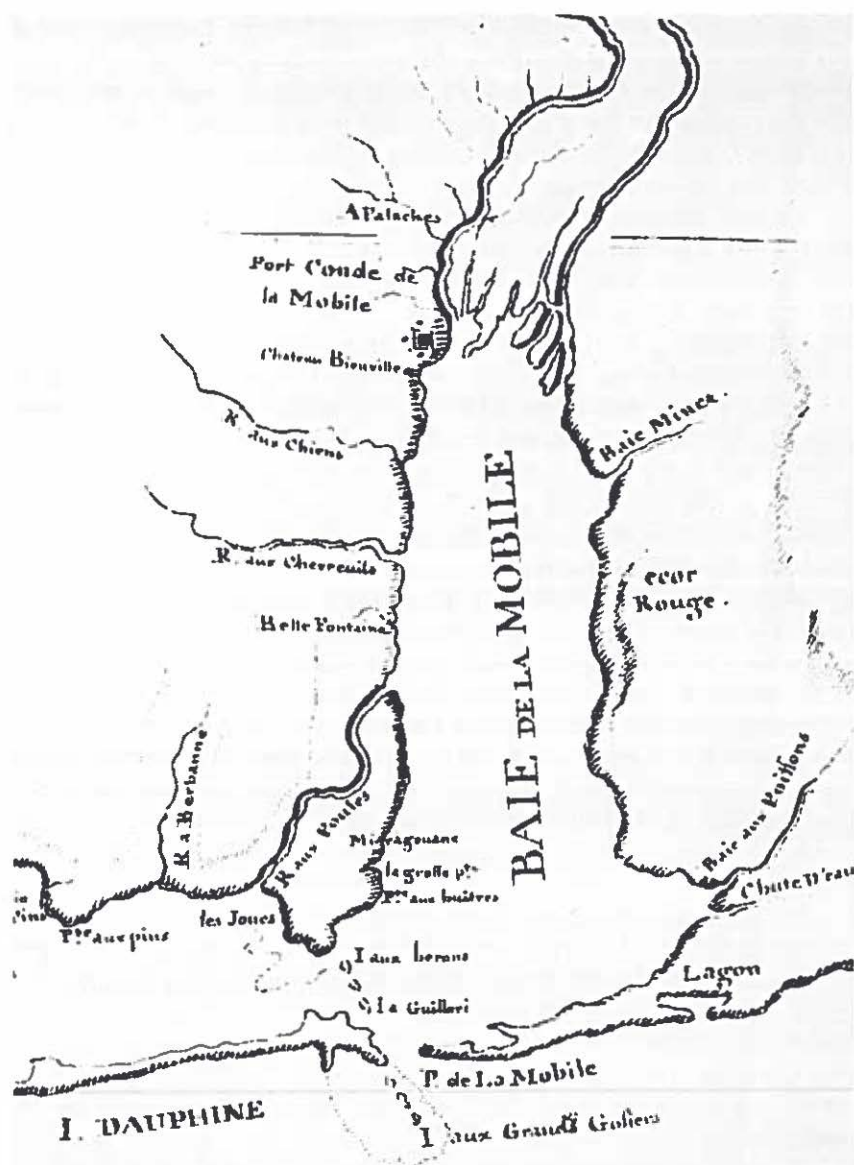
for the desperately needed goods, he asked Colcock to give them to him in the king's name. The captain did so, and went one better by giving it for four months without interest. Diron told the Englishman he could return for payment; not sure how Maurepas would take this, he warned the Englishman that the only commodity he would be allowed to trade on his return was flour.³¹ Maurepas nonetheless approved of Diron's actions, and admitted that though he was unhappy with the trade, under the circumstances it had to be tolerated.³² While he was in Mobile Colcock gathered some valuable intelligence on Louisiana's losses in the first Chickasaw campaign.³³

Colcock returned to Mobile for his payment in the prescribed time. He was paid for his earlier cargo, and sent away. A second English ship arrived soon after, out of New York, which came to sell a cargo of wheat. He too was sent away, but he then proceeded to run aground off Chandeleur Island. Not surprisingly, perhaps, it was Sieur Philippe Olivier who requested and was granted permission to buy the disabled ship's cargo. In April 1737 Colcock returned to Mobile, this time with a letter addressed to Bienville himself from the governor of South Carolina. Colcock was escorted to Mobile to deliver his letter, and returned to his ship off Dauphine Island. Because of contrary winds he was there for a total of one and one-half days. Diron reported to Maurepas that Colcock did not do one *sous* of business on this trip, and that he had been sent away as quickly as possible.³⁴

Despite Diron's assurances to the contrary, however, Colcock had done more than simply play postman. Not only did Diron bring the Englishman to land; what was worse, however, was that Diron paid Colcock 4652 livres which he claimed to be owed from Olivier. Bienville had paid Colcock all he claimed to be owed from the French on his earlier journey, thus hoping to avoid an obvious excuse for him to return. As it turned out however, Olivier had pressed Colcock to conceal the debt, claiming that he had only four hundred livres to his name, and that he would be forced into bankruptcy if the debt were called in. Diron ascribed Colcock's willingness to defer the debt as evidence of his generosity.³⁵

Maurepas did not agree. Diron's claim that he had paid Colcock before Olivier's French creditors to prevent the Englishman's return did not impress the minister. This time the minister forbid Diron to receive any Englishmen in his department, and to suffer no grounds or any pretext whatsoever which could lead to any commerce at all with foreigners. Maurepas also relayed a message from Louis XV. The king declared that if he received any more complaints about Diron's conduct in this regard, he would take measures Diron would not find "agreeable."³⁶

Olivier and others owed more money besides. When the New York ship wrecked off Chandeleur Island, Bienville gave its captain permission to sell his cargo to Olivier and others, in order to permit the captain to pay for passage on a Spanish ship that offered to take him to South Carolina. The Englishman requested permission to return for his payment by sea; Bienville warned him on pain of confiscation that he could return by land but not by sea. However,



Map of Mobile Bay, c. 1780

Local History and Genealogy Division
Mobile Public Library

Olivier and the Englishman had other plans. Unfortunately for them they included in their scheme one *Sieur Girard*,³⁷ with whom Olivier had contracted to buy the ship-wrecked wheat.³⁸

Their plan was to meet secretly at Ship Island, an uninhabited open roadstead. Bienville was notified of the scheme by Girard, and ordered Diron to arrest the conspirators and seize the English ship, hoping to stop these activities once and for all. Girard asked Diron for ten men to try to take the English ship by surprise, but Diron refused him the command. Diron did however instruct Girard to engage the habitants and slaves of Pascagoula and Biloxi to be ready for action if called on. Diron instructed *Sieur Graveline*, the commandant of the local militia, to be ready also.³⁹

As Louisiana commissaire-ordonnateur Edmé Salmon rightly noted, the English were an enterprising people whose love for gain led them to run great risks in the pursuit of profit. The English ship soon appeared as expected. It was armed with ten cannons and a crew of sixteen that included five Negroes. Because they were not strong enough to take the ship in battle, the French resorted to subterfuge. At first they planned to draw the Englishmen to land with a letter written in Olivier's own hand, but contrary winds prevented them from sailing to the Englishman with the message.⁴⁰

A counterplan was quickly devised. *Sieur Graveline* offered to take the ship with aid of four habitant volunteers, two Negroes, and three soldiers from Mobile. To allay suspicion, they brought fresh meat with them from the fort and sat down to eat with the crew. On a signal from Girard they seized the pilot and crew. One Englishman managed to get hold of his arms and fire, but the French habitants returned fire, killing two Englishmen and three Negroes. The French lost one Negro killed and another wounded, but they became masters of the vessel. Taking advantage of a north wind, Girard sailed the captured ship to Balize, the French post at the mouth of the Mississippi River, where he declared it as a prize. The commandant of the local militia was furious at this, as it left him out of the prize money. Diron, also seeing a tidy sum sailing away, took advantage of the situation and declared that Girard had done this on his orders, thus hoping to get at least a piece of the action.⁴¹

Because of the rather complicated manner in which the confiscation occurred, the matter was brought before the Superior Council of Louisiana, which made several rulings on the affair. Probably because of the conflicting claims concerning responsibility for the capture of the ship, the Superior Council awarded Bienville the one-third part of the proceeds due its captor. Bienville in turn donated these funds for the repair of New Orleans' St. Louis Church, which was a simple wooden structure on the verge of collapse and ruin. In what was probably a dig at Diron, who Bienville was sure would protest the division of the confiscation proceeds, the governor declared to Maurepas that he had given the money to the church because he already felt rich in the favors of the king and minister.⁴²

The Superior Council also decided not to fine the captain and crew of the confiscated ship the one thousand livres prescribed by the letters patent of October 1727. The man had apparently been pillaged by *Sieur Girard* and party,

as they arrived at New Orleans practically naked. Moreover neither the captain nor crew had any interest in the cargo and would not have been able to pay the fine. This would have necessitated holding them in prison until their fine was paid, and the Superior Council wanted to spare his majesty the expense.⁴³

With this confiscation the Louisiana-Carolina coastwise trade was ended for at least a decade. No one seems to ever have been punished for engaging in this trade, and Olivier ended his days as one of Mobile's most prosperous citizens. But the problems—chronic undersupply by French royal officials, the lack of native products to trade with the merchants of France, and later the interruption of supplies by war and blockade—persisted until the end of the French regime in Louisiana. Though even Maurepas admitted that the Anglo-American coastwise trade had to be tolerated at times as a matter of life and death, its effects on the Indians made it a dangerous practice that had to be allowed only in the most dire necessity, and it had to be carefully managed. Habitant smugglers, independent-minded Mobile commandants, and persistent Anglo-American traders made enforcing France's mercantilist laws on the Gulf Coast an exasperating exercise.

Notes

¹ Mathé Allain, *Not Worth A Straw: French Colonial Policy and the Early Years of Louisiana* (Lafayette, LA, 1988).

² Despite the central role played by Bienville during Louisiana's first forty years, he has not received the attention due his importance. Although the subject of Grace King's romantic biography *Jean Baptiste Le Moyne, Sieur de Bienville* (New York 1892), the best short account can be found in C. E. O'Neill, "Jean Baptiste le Moyne de Bienville," in Frances G. Halpenny et al., eds., *Dictionnaire Biographique du Canada* (Montreal, 1974), vol. 3, 1741 à 1770, 409-14.

³ For a biographical sketch see Dunbar Rowland and A. G. Sanders, eds., *Mississippi Provincial Archives: French Dominion* (Jackson, MS, 1927), vol. 1, 1729-1740, 56-57n. The commandant signed his name and was known as "Diron," while his brother Pierre, who died in the disastrous Chickasaw Campaign of 1736, was known as "Dartaguiette."

⁴ Bienville to Maurepas, July 26, 1733. Archives Nationales, Archives des Colonies, Série C 13a (Louisiane: correspondance générale), vol. 16, fol. 280verso-282. Hereafter cited as AC, C 13a, with volume and folio numbers.

⁵ *Limbourg* was a woolen cloth, usually dyed scarlet or blue, that was the basic trade cloth of the Southeast for both the French and English. *MPA*, 1: 26.

⁶ Cremon to Maurepas, August 1, 1733, AC, C 13a, 16: 273-74.

⁷ Dawson Phelps, "The Chickasaws, the English, and the French, 1699-1744," *Tennessee Historical Quarterly* 16 (1957): 117-33.

⁸ Diron to Maurepas, April 23, 1733, AC, C 13a, 17: 213vo-214.

9 Maurepas, the son and grandson of secretaries of state, guided France's colonial empire throughout much of the "long peace" of the early eighteenth century. For his career see John C. Rule, "Jean-Frederic Phelypeaux, comte de Pontchartrain et Maurepas: Reflection on his Life and Papers," *Louisiana History* 6 (Fall 1965): 365-77.

10 Maurepas to Diron, September 15, 1733, Archives Nationales, Archives des Colonies, Série B (France: correspondence envoyé, ordres du roi), vol. 59, fol. 617vo-618. Hereafter cited at AC, B, with volume and folio numbers. Maurepas to Bienville, September 15, 1733, AC, B 59: 598vo-599. Maurepas to Bienville and Salmon, February 24, 1734, AC, B 61: 631-631vo.

11 For a short sketch of Olivier and his career see Patricial Galloway, ed., *Mississippi Provincial Archives, French Dominion* (Baton Rouge, 1984), vol. 4, 1729-1748, 133, note 1.

12 Crement to Maurepas, February 24, 1734, AC, C 13a, 19: 151-52, 155-56. Crement to Maurepas, April 30, 1734, AC, C 13a, 19: 158vo-160.

13 Crement to Maurepas, February 24, 1734, AC, C 13a, 19: 151-57.

14 Diron to Maurepas, March 20, 1734, AC, C 13a, 19: 113-20.

15 Crement to Maurepas, April 30, 1734, AC, C 13a, 19: 161-163vo.

16 Ibid.

17 Ibid. Crement to Maurepas, June 20, 1734, AC, C 13a, 19: 166vo-167. Crement to Maurepas, October 27, 1734, AC, C 13a, 19: 172-73. Bienville and Salmon to Maurepas, August 29, 1735, AC, C 13a, 20: 94-94vo.

18 This captain is referred to variously as "Matson" and "Watson" in French documents, but as he is always referred to as "Watson" in the English references, that spelling is used.

19 Crement to Maurepas, October 27, 1734, AC, C 13a, 19: 173-75.

20 Ibid., 19: 173-75. Diron to Maurepas, July 15, 1734, AC, C 13a, 19: 124vo-125vo. *South Carolina Gazette*, August 10, 1734. Like other colonial powers, France employed mercenaries to augment the defense of her empire. For the Swill presence in Louisiana see David Hardcastle, "Swill Mercenary Soldiers in the Service of France in Louisiana," in Alf Andrew Heggoy and James J. Cook, eds., *Proceedings of the Fourth Meeting of the French Colonial Historical Society* (Washington, DC, 1979), 82-91.

21 Crement to Maurepas, February 24, 1734, AC, C 13a, 19: 151-57. Maurepas to Diron, September 9, 1734, AC, B 61: 672vo-673vo. Maurepas to Bienville and Salmon, September 13, 1735, AC, B 63: 592vo-593.

22 Maurepas to Bienville, September 2, 1734, AC, B 61: 654vo-655.

23 Maurepas to Diron, September 9, 1734, AC, B 61: 672vo-674.

24 Crement to Maurepas, October 27, 1734, AC, C 13a, 19: 176.

25 Bienville and Salmon to Maurepas, August 29, 1735, AC, C 13a, 20: 94vo-95.

³⁶ Ibid., 20: 94-94vo.

³⁷ A quart of wheat weighed between 160 and 200 pounds. Nancy Miller Surrey, *The Commerce of Louisiana During the French Regime* (New York, 1916), 196.

³⁸ Bienville and Salmon to Maurepas, August 29, 1735, AC, C 13a, 20: 94vo-95vo.

³⁹ Ibid., 20: 95vo-98vo. Maurepas to Bienville, December 27, 1735, AC, B 63:633. Maurepas to Bienville, May 29, 1736, AC, B 64: 502.

⁴⁰ Salmon noted to Maurepas that food supplies were so low they were being forced to blend rice and corn into the troops' bread. Rice and corn were becoming so scarce that their price had shot up from the usual three livres per quart to seven, and that price was still rising daily. Salmon to Maurepas, June 3, 1736, AC, C 13a, 21: 258vo-260.

⁴¹ Diron to Maurepas, May 19, 1736, AC, C 13a, 21: 346-350vo.

⁴² Maurepas to Diron, November 11, 1736, AC, B 64: 530vo-531.

⁴³ Diron to Maurepas, May 8, 1737, AC, C 13a, 22: 229-229vo.

⁴⁴ Diron to Maurepas, May 8, 1737, AC, C 13a, 22: 229vo-230.

⁴⁵ Maurepas to Diron, September 23, 1737, AC, B 65: 532vo-533.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ His name is given variously as "Girard" and "Gerald." Hamilton identifies him as Jean Girard de St. Jean, a pilot in the service of the king. Peter J. Hamilton, *Colonial Mobile* (1910; reprint, University, AL, 1976).

⁴⁸ Bienville to Maurepas, December 27, 1737, AC, C 13a, 22: 107-107vo.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 22: 107vo-108.

⁵⁰ Ibid., 22: 108-108vo. Salmon to Maurepas, December 12, 1737, AC, C 13a, 22: 198vo.

⁵¹ Bienville to Maurepas, December 12, 1737, AC, C 13a, 22: 108vo-110.

⁵² Ibid., 22: 202-202vo.

⁵³ Salmon to Maurepas, December 12, 1737, AC, C 13a, 22: 201vo-202vo.

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Authenticating Pierre Viaud's *Shipwreck and Adventures*

Robin F. A. Fabel

In 1768, in Bordeaux,—not one of France's major publishing centers—a short book of 143 pages was first printed. Its title was *Naufrage et aventures de M. Pierre Viaud, natif de Bordeaux, capitaine de navire* (Shipwreck and Adventures of Mr. Pierre Viaud, Bordeaux-born Ship's Captain). It soon became one of the eighteenth-century's best sellers. Extra editions came from Bordeaux in 1770 and 1772. Paris editions appeared in 1780 and 1790. In a not very felicitous English translation, *Naufrage* was published in London in 1774, in 1780, in 1798, in 1800, and in 1814. From different cities two German editions came out in 1770, and an Italian version in 1772. It was even translated into Finnish, and American readers unable to obtain a British copy could buy an identical reproduction from Philadelphia in 1774 or, after 1799, a reprint from Dover, New Hampshire.

For its appeal the book relied on ingredients of enduring flavor. They included shipwreck on a desert island, an exotic landscape, encounters with hostile Indians and wild animals, a fight with an alligator and even, to evoke a shudder of horror, resort to murder and cannibalism. There was much violence, and even sex too: not much at all by the standards of cloyed twentieth-century palates, but eighteenth-century readers would have found the discreetly-phrased implications of the narrative unmistakable. The hero toiled through the Gulf Coast wilderness in the company of a mature woman. They shared the same bed. Occasionally, for practical purposes, such as swimming across a river, they stripped off all their clothes. Together they suffered almost unendurable hardships, but finally the narrator was able to bring his story to a conclusion with an appealingly happy ending. Above all *Naufrage* was attractive for the same reason that today's *National Enquirer* finds so many customers: the apparently incredible was true. Viaud's exciting and novelistic adventures had really happened. Or had they?

After the first publication of *Naufrage* there was initially little skepticism. In *L'Année littéraire* for 1769 the book's first reviewer—perhaps—wrote that "all of the events . . . bear a realistic stamp which would be difficult to convey through falsehood."¹ A year later the *Journal encyclopédique* also implicitly believed the story.² In Britain the first English version of *Naufrage* was similarly accepted. It was a "heart-rending narrative which is unquestionably authentic" wrote a reviewer in the *London Magazine*,³ a verdict echoed in the *Critical Review*.⁴ The first major assault on Viaud's veracity came from Bernard Romans, a Dutch-born American who knew the part of Florida where Viaud's alleged adventures had taken place.⁵

Doubt grew too in France. In successive decades *Naufrage* was reprinted in collections, not of factual memoirs, but of imaginary voyages.⁶ A further layer of doubt was applied in 1828 when *Naufrage* was scouted as no more

than a reprint of a superficial novel of intrigue, Gaspard Dubois-Fontanelle's *Les effets des passions*, a canard reproduced in 1936 in the *Bibliotheca Americana*.⁷

This author read *Naufrage* for the first time in the 1970s, and had no reason to think that it was not fiction. Even so it was absorbing. After all, even if it were made up, here was a story about Florida in the 1760s by a man who certainly knew the area. As such it was a unique literary work.

Viaud's tale began plausibly. In February 1765, as a demobilized naval officer, he accepted a job as first mate on a merchant ship trading with Haiti, or St. Domingue as it was then called, which, in those days, was France's most prosperous colony. There sickness prevented him from sailing back to France aboard his ship, *L'Aimable Suzette*. While he convalesced, Viaud was talked into investing his capital in a trading voyage to Spanish Louisiana. Such ventures were commonplace at the time: European manufactures, rum or slaves from St. Domingue, could be profitably exchanged for Louisianan indigo and tobacco. Embarking on the brigantine *Le Tigre* on January 2, 1766 as a passenger, Viaud soon realized that the vessel was frail, that the captain did not know his business, and that the ship's mate was too ill to be of any use. It was an ominous beginning, even if *Le Tigre* were to enjoy a fair passage. She did not. A winter storm arose and the seas turned rough. The craft began to take water and her pumps could not cope. Viaud took charge. He jettisoned the cargo and when it became clear that *Le Tigre* could not possibly make New Orleans, headed her for the nearest haven, a port in British West Florida. The westerly gales were too strong for *Le Tigre*. She could make neither Mobile nor Pensacola but driven relentlessly eastward, wrecked on a reef off Dog Island, near modern Apalachicola. Again Viaud took charge, ensuring that all sixteen of those aboard the now shattered craft were ferried safely to the island. On his own Viaud salvaged guns, blankets, and food from the wreck of *Le Tigre* before it disintegrated.

The castaways had achieved merely a respite. They could not survive indefinitely on Dog Island, a barren rock unvisited by ships. If they were to live they had to make their way to a European settlement. The nearest was the small fort of St. Marks at Apalache, some thirty miles away as the crow flies. Without a stout boat such a journey was impossible to contemplate. This seemingly insuperable problem was apparently solved by the arrival in a pirogue with his family of Antonio, a Spanish-speaking Indian. In return for a promise of future reward, Antonio offered to take all the survivors of *Le Tigre* to St. Marks. He left with three sailors immediately. Two days later, he returned. Six more castaways, including Viaud, embarked with him on a second trip. Antonio took them to another island, where they rejoined the three sailors. Thereafter Antonio's cooperation became ever more difficult to secure. With great reluctance he returned to lift the five remaining castaways off Dog Island, but during the next five days could not be persuaded to ferry any of the French castaways to the mainland.

Finally, bribed with presents from their pitiful store of possessions, and leaving the rest of their family behind, Antonio and his wife took off six of the French

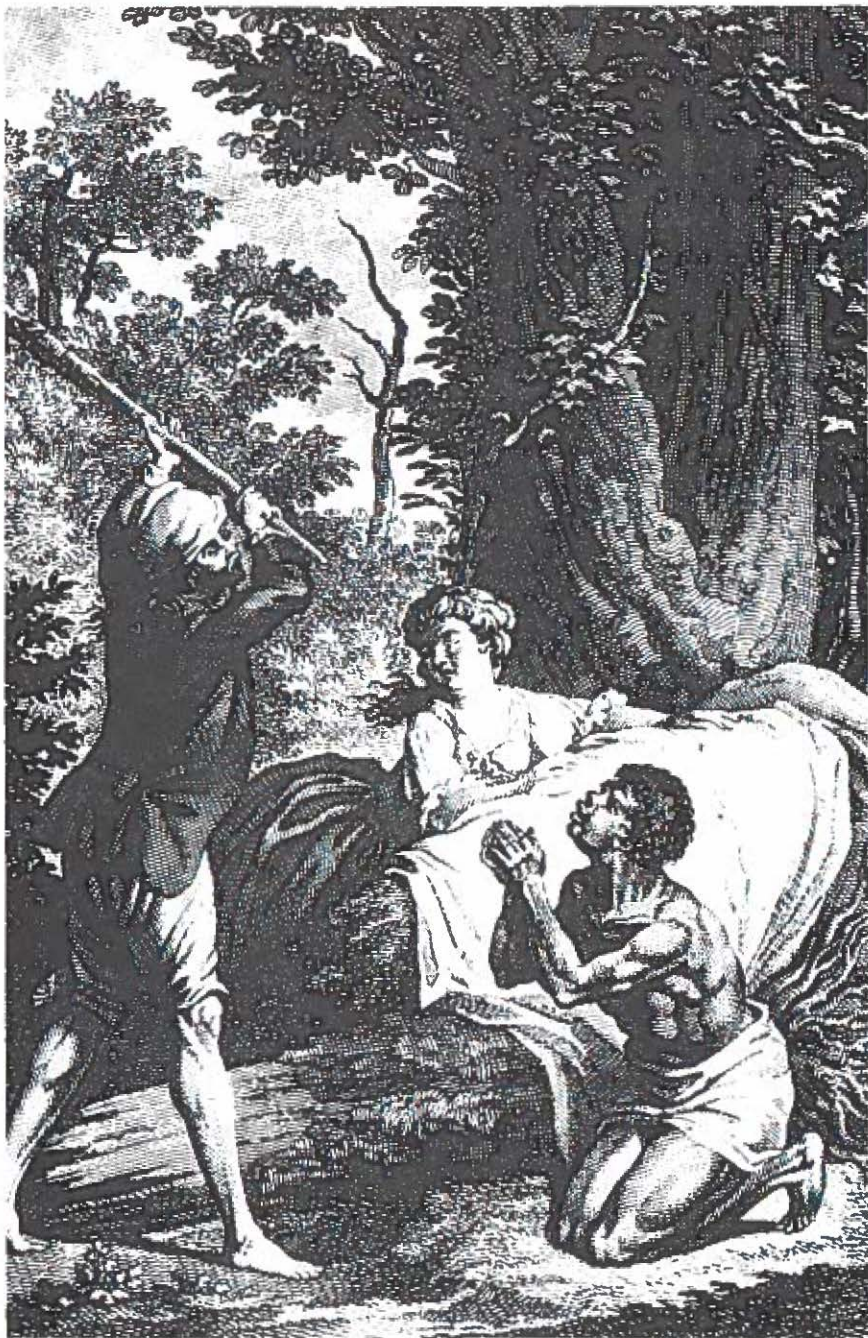
party in his pirogue: Viaud and his slave, Viaud's business partner, Desclau, the captain of *Le Tigre*, his wife, Mme. La Couture, and their teenage son.

Viaud pondered the Indian's motives, arriving at gloomy conclusions, when it became clear that Antonio had no intention of paddling to the mainland. Instead he went from island to island: in those days St. George Island was not united, but a chain of islets. His passengers became increasingly frustrated, hungry—and careless. One night, while they all slept, Antonio and his wife decamped with all the castaways' possessions, including firearms and food.

Abandoned on an utterly desolate island, death seemed certain for the wretched castaways. Captain La Couture and Viaud's trading partner drowned while trying to make the mainland in a crazy, patched-up derelict canoe. A crude raft held together with torn-up blankets proved more seaworthy. On it Viaud, his slave, and Mme. La Couture sailed across the six-mile strip of sea to Florida's southern coast. On the island they left young La Couture, who was too sick to move, with a pile of raw oysters and some water in shells as his only, albeit pathetic, hope of survival.

Their landing place on the mainland proved utterly bare of inhabitants and almost everything else that could have helped them. Wild beasts, including bears and, allegedly, lions and tigers, robbed the wanderers of sleep, but starvation threatened them more surely with death. Revolting experiments with roots and leaves did not relieve their hunger: they merely made them vomit. The castaways could walk for only short distances before collapsing from exhaustion. After four days without food, Viaud killed his slave. He stunned him with a tree-branch and then, while Mme. La Couture held the poor fellow's head, cut his throat, using a blunt pocket-knife, the only weapon of any sort which they possessed.⁸ So great was the hunger of Viaud and his companion that, according to the Frenchman's narrative, they ate the severed head of the corpse before it was completely cooked. The rest of the body, cut up and carried in packets hung about their persons, kept them going for several days. They supplemented this grisly diet with the flesh of two rattlesnakes which died of smoke inhalation and of an alligator which Viaud managed to beat to death. Even so, the wandering pair began to suffer from severe malnutrition. Their bodies ballooned. Insects and brambles inflamed and tore their skin. It became clear that their strength would not sustain them until they reached St. Marks. Viaud's was the first to fail: his legs would no longer carry him. Stretched out in the shade of trees on the edge of the Florida seashore, Viaud prepared to die.

In this crisis, Mme. La Couture did not desert her companion. Instead she went to search for food. The wanderers had seen a wild turkey hen in their vicinity. Madame La Couture thought that, if she could find its nest, eggs might restore Viaud's strength. The Frenchman, meanwhile, had given up all hope of survival. After three hours on his own and as the sun was setting, he suddenly heard voices from the sea. In his narrative Viaud alleged that his condition was by then so extreme that whether they were those of European rescuers or of Indians come to kill him had become a matter of indifference. Either alternative, however, must have seemed preferable to death from starvation, and he tried



Viaud killing his slave

*Frontispiece from an early French edition of
Naufrage et aventures de M. Pierre Viaud,
Courtesy University Presses of Florida*

to attract attention to himself. By this time Viaud had totally lost his voice, but he did summon just enough strength to lift up a tree-branch, on which he had hung his cap and a strip of Mme. La Couture's chemise. They were seen by what proved to be British soldiers from the garrison of St. Marks, Apalache, whose alert commander had reacted to Indian tales of a shipwreck by sending out a search party. After the redcoats had revived Viaud with food and rum, Mme. La Couture returned. Both were soon being rowed eastward toward Apalache. At Viaud's insistence, the subaltern in charge of the search patrol went ashore at the island where young La Couture had been abandoned. Astonishingly, for he had been on his own from April 17 to May 1, the lad was still alive.

Taken to Apalache in the boat of the British soldiers, Viaud and the two La Coutures were there restored to health by the garrison's army surgeon. From Apalache the La Coutures voyaged to Mme. La Couture's native Louisiana. Viaud went, by way of St. Augustine and New York, back to France, where he wrote *Naufrage* in the form of a long letter to a perhaps mythical friend.

It is easy to suppose that *Naufrage* is a work of imagination. It does not have the flavor of a logbook. A great deal of it is concerned with what happens to Viaud's mind and spirit under the impact of his ordeal. Initially, and understandably in that he wrote in the heyday of the European Enlightenment, Viaud addressed the castaways' problems with the force of reason. But reason did not solve them. More and more he turned to Providence for their salvation, putting his trust in premonitions and hunches as guides to survival. He discovered that animal needs not only distort judgment but can override firmly held moral principles. He confessed to acting both irrationally and, with particular reference to the murder of his poor slave, immorally. By the time he broke physically too, he had become supremely aware of the essential helplessness of any human being battling with hostile Nature and this recognition brought a fatalistic peace of mind. Viaud's narrative is thus much more than a diary of events.

Though loosely constructed, it has some literary merit. One episode in particular may be mentioned here. The castaways were all threatened with death from exposure. North Florida in winter can be very cold. Parenthetically one may note that eighteenth-century America suffered what may be called the opposite of the 'greenhouse effect.' Temperatures in 1766 were on average at least six degrees lower than they are today.⁹ Viaud and his companions had no means of making fire on the sandy pebbleless islet on which they were stranded. Viaud describes in detail how he recalled that Antonio had discarded a gun-flint on a neighboring island, how he persuaded his companions to wade to that island, how he pursued the apparently hopeless task of finding the flint amid the acres of beach and, finally, how he became aware that something hard was pressing against the bare sole of his foot as he searched. His joy at discovering that he had indeed found the flint is well told, a moment of high drama comparable to Robinson Crusoe's discovery of Friday's footprint. It is but one of several similarly treated incidents in *Naufrage*.

In 1984, some years after first reading Viaud's narrative, this author was researching the papers of James Grant, a private collection housed in Ballindalloch Castle, Scotland. Although looking for something quite different, the research uncovered several letters to Grant, who was then the governor of British East Florida, from Lieutenant George Swettenham, commandant of Fort St. Marks, Apalache. In one of them, written less than a week after Viaud's arrival at Apalache, Swettenham explained why he sent out the rescue party that found Viaud and he repeated his conversations with the Frenchman.¹⁰ It was clear that *Naufrage* was no mere novel, even if parts of it had been fictionalized by Viaud's collaborator, Gaspard Dubois-Fontanelle. It would have to be reevaluated as a historical document, one concerning a part of the British Floridas about which any information is extremely scarce. Scarce, but not totally lacking. It seemed probable that official records could not have ignored Viaud's rescue at government expense, and indeed they had not. The Public Record Office at Kew contained the reports of Governor Grant to the Board of Trade. Among them was a lengthy description of the Viaud affair, written some eleven weeks after Swettenham had talked to the castaway.¹¹

The next step was a trip to France. Paris yielded little, except for reading in the *Bibliothèque Nationale* Dubois-Fontanelle's novel *Les effets des passions* which, far from being identical to *Naufrage*, proved to have absolutely nothing in common with it. The municipal archives in Bordeaux revealed that there was a vessel named *L'Aimable Suzette*, and that she did sail to the West Indies in the 1760s, although there was no specific record of her voyage to St. Domingue in February 1765, when she carried Viaud as mate.¹²

Of more use were the archives of Charente-Inférieure which contained much information in manuscript on Viaud's early life. He was born in St. Nazaire on September 16, 1725, went to sea as a teenager, and served on both merchant vessels in time of peace and royal vessels during the War of the Austrian Succession and the Seven Years' War. He worked his way up from cabin boy to second officer until, in 1761, he applied for certification as a captain in the mercantile marine. He received it on October 2, 1761.¹³ What proved impossible to find was any material whatever on what happened to Viaud after his book was written. Perhaps he died soon after its publication: we know from *Naufrage* that even before his ordeal in Florida his health was poor.

A research trip to Louisiana in search of information about Mme. La Couture was arid. Archives there yielded only one item which might or might not refer to her. Twenty years after the wreck of *Le Tigre* a Frenchman sold another habitant a small farm forty miles above New Orleans. It was described as bounded on the south by the land of the widow La Couture.¹⁴ For her son, not even this kind of clue to his destiny has survived.

Research in colonial newspapers revealed that Viaud did sail from Saint Augustine to New York as he said he did. Records in the New York Historical Society confirmed that Viaud's alleged benevolent host actually existed and had extended his charity to Viaud.¹⁵

Where it is impossible to check Viaud's story is in his account of the fortnight during which he and Mme. La Couture wandered alone along the Florida coast. Skeptics' doubts often centered on this period, particularly in connection with Viaud's alleged encounters with wild beasts, especially the lions and tigers. Of course lions and tigers as we think of them did not exist in Florida but smaller animals, at that time called by those names, did. In the official record of exports from Florida to Britain in 1774, for instance, were listed eight "tyger" skins as well as lion skins.¹⁶ There is no question that bears and alligators, both of which are the subjects of lively anecdotes in *Naufrage*, existed in Florida in the 1760s. It is interesting that Viaud's contemporary, William Bartram, described in his famous book of travels a contest with an alligator in which its attackers used precisely the same method against it as did Viaud: they thrust a pointed stick down its throat.¹⁷

Some eighteenth-century reviewers were incredulous too that young La Couture could possibly have survived his ordeal. Deathly sick and stranded on a desert island with nothing to sustain him but some raw oysters and a little water, he was allegedly found alive after nineteen days. The letters of both Swettenham and Grant prove that he did survive, although, when discovered, he was unconscious, maggots were eating him, and he seemed within hours of death.

If so much can be shown to be factual, it seems possible that, on the fifteen days out of eighty-one about which no confirming documents can exist, Viaud could have told the truth—in outline at least, for on every possible occasion in *Naufrage* Viaud exaggerated his own bravery, ingenuity and concern for others. It is also possible and even more probable, that the fortnight on the mainland never occurred at all. While Governor Grant's report was vague on the subject of location, George Swettenham's earlier letter stated that his men found Viaud on an island. With one exception all of the most implausible episodes in *Naufrage* took place on the mainland: it was there that Viaud's slave was chased by a bear; there that Viaud deterred lions and tigers with flaming brands, and there that he fought and killed a twelve-foot alligator. These episodes all concerned animals which did not live on the islands. It is probable that Viaud's novelist collaborator, Dubois-Fontanelle, thought to ginger up a tale of unrelieved privation and suffering by adding excitement and saleability with invented incidents which have something of the flavor of the exploits of Indiana Jones.¹⁸ The one mainland incident which is authenticated by a contemporary document is the cannibalistic murder of Viaud's slave. That crime occurred, but Viaud could have committed it on an island.

There will always, probably, be debate as to how much fictional material was incorporated into *Naufrage*, but a number of questions have now been resolved. Viaud not only existed, but was what he claimed to be, a certified ship's captain who had served France at sea in time of war. He certainly was wrecked on an island near Apalachicola. He undoubtedly did murder and eat his slave and he was rescued, together with a woman, the wife of the captain of the wrecked vessel, by troops sent from the garrison of Fort St. Mark. The

soldiers also found the woman's son on the point of death on another island. From Grant's correspondence we know that Viaud's report of his dealings with Indians was essentially true. After rescue the mother and her son went to Louisiana while Viaud went back to France via New York, where he recovered from his ordeal in the home of the benefactor named in *Naufrage*. Henceforth that work will interest not only students of literature who specialize in that popular eighteenth-century genre, the *voyage imaginaire*, but must also command the attention of historians, particularly those whose field is the eighteenth-century Gulf Coast.

Notes

¹ *L'Année littéraire* 7 (1769): 123.

² *Journal encyclopédique* 20, pt. 2 (January 1770): 212, 229.

³ *London Magazine* 40 (April 1771): 225.

⁴ *Critical Review* 31 (1771): 238-39.

⁵ Rembert W. Patrick, intro., *A Concise Natural History of East and West Florida* (1775; reprint, Gainesville, 1962), 300-301.

⁶ Charles G. T. Garnier, *Voyages imaginaires, songes, visions et romans cabalistiques* (Paris, 1787), 12: 5; *Nouvelle bibliothèque universelle de romans* (Paris, 1798), vol. 1, pt. 2, 47.

⁷ Cited in Joseph Sabin, Wilberforce Eames and R. W. G. Vail, eds., *Bibliotheca Americana* (New York, 1868-1936), 26: 492.

⁸ It had been in the pocket of his coat in which Viaud was sleeping at the time when Antonio made off with the rest of the castaways' goods.

⁹ Carl Bridenbaugh, *Early Americans* (New York, 1981), 80.

¹⁰ Swettenham to Grant, May 14, 1766, Bundle 243, Grant Papers, Ballindalloch Castle, Banffshire, Scotland. I am most grateful to Mr. Oliver Russell of Ballindalloch Castle for permission to research in the Grant Papers.

¹¹ James Grant to the Board of Trade, August 5, 1766, Public Record Office, Kew, CO5/548: 199-207. Two historians of East Florida familiar with this document accepted the facts of Viaud's existence and his ordeal but, evidently uninterested, mention them only in passing. Mark F. Boyd, "The Fortifications at San Marcos de Apalache," *Florida Historical Quarterly* 15 (1936): 13; Charles L. Mowat, *East Florida as a British Province, 1763-1783* (Berkeley, 1943), 179. Grant's rendering of accounts too, confirmed some of the minor detail in *Naufrage*, CO5/548: 397.

¹² Archives Municipales de Bordeaux, Fonds Dépit, f. 142.

¹³ Archives de la Charente-Inférieure, La Rochelle, Series B, no. 144, ff. 1-11.

¹⁴ Glen Conrad, *Saint Jean-Baptiste des Allemands: Abstracts of the Civil Records of St. John the Baptist Parish with Genealogy and Index, 1753-1803* (Lafayette, LA, 1981), 104.

¹⁵ Thomas Watts De Peyster, *De Peyster and Watts Genealogical Reference* (New York, 1854), 28; Walter W. Spooner, *Historical Families of America* (New York, 1907), 1: 4, 9, 19.

¹⁶ PRO T64/276.

¹⁷ Mark Van Doren, ed., *Travels through North and South Carolina, Georgia, East and West Florida* (1791; reprint, New York, 1955).

¹⁸ These and other implausibilities are discussed in the first twentieth-century edition and translation of *Shipwreck and Adventures of Pierre Viaud*, which is scheduled for publication by the University Press of West Florida in the fall of 1990.

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Lieutenant Hutchins To The Rescue! The Wreck and Recovery of the *Mercury*, 1772

Robert R. Rea

In the eighteenth century, the Gulf Coast was pock-marked by wrecks—the skeletons of ships and the bones of men. Few mariners survived to tell their harrowing tales; fewer ships survived to sail another day. But there are lucky ships, as every seaman knows, and such a one was the schooner *Mercury*. She owed her survival to the caprice of wind and wave and her resurrection to Lieutenant Thomas Hutchins.

A native of New Jersey, in his forty-second year in 1772, Hutchins had seen extended service on the Indian frontier of the upper Ohio when he was commissioned in the 60th, the Royal American Regiment, in 1762. He was an engineering officer at Fort Pitt during the siege of 1763, accompanied Captain Harry Gordon down the Ohio and Mississippi rivers and visited the Gulf Coast for the first time in 1766. In March 1772, Hutchins was assigned to Pensacola by General Thomas Gage and was employed at surveying, map-making, and strengthening the defenses of West Florida. He went to London in 1776, became involved in some obscurely subversive business, and fled to France where he adopted the American cause as his own. Returning to North America with Benjamin Franklin's blessing, he was named Geographer to the United States in 1781 and three years later published his well-known *Historical Narrative and Topographical Description of Louisiana and West-Florida*. Hutchins surveyed the initial lines and ranges prescribed by the Land Ordinance of 1785 and died at Pittsburgh in 1789.¹

Our story begins² in December 1771, when Brigadier General Frederick Haldimand, commanding at Pensacola, purchased the schooner *Mercury* for the use and convenience of the army.³ Apparently a merchant vessel no longer profitable to its owners, *Mercury* was thoroughly overhauled—"indeed almost Rebuilt . . . at a prodigious Expence to Government . . . not in a smaller sum than three thousand dollars"—between March and August 1772.⁴ At 9 A.M., Friday, August 21, Captain Edward Wild took on board sixteen men of the 16th Regiment ordered to duty at Fort Charlotte, Mobile. That evening Wild worked down to Santa Rosa Island and anchored off the fort for the night. The next morning he sailed across to the Red Cliffs, and two artillerymen joined his party.⁵ Throughout the day the ship tacked westward, following the shore. On Sunday morning, the twenty-third, Wild made for the bar outside Mobile Bay, but as it began to rain and blow hard from the north, *Mercury* could not enter the bay and was forced to come to anchor. For the next seven days Captain Wild stood on and off the bar in total frustration. Sometimes he faced squalls, heavy winds, and swells that made it too dangerous to risk the shallow bar; at other times light and shifting breezes were insufficient to enable him to breast the current coming out of the bay.

On Monday, the thirty-first, Wild bore to the west, anchoring off Ship Island at noon, intending to fill his water casks. The next day he worked *Mercury* up to the watering place and got men ashore on Wednesday, but the winds were too fresh for them to raft the heavy casks out to the ship. It was also evident that the perverse weather was worsening dangerously. The wind became so strong that a man could hardly hold himself on deck; seas washed over the ship from stem to stern. Fearing that *Mercury* would be blown ashore upon the island, on the morning of Thursday, September 3, Wild ordered the masts cut and heaved overboard. Nonetheless, about 2 P.M. the ship struck and beat upon the bank of Ship Island for ten to fifteen minutes. *Mercury* was assaulted by mountainous waves, but Captain Wild noted that as the waves threatened his ship, they also washed away the sand of the island so that she beat upon the low shore less violently than might have been expected. About this time, Thomas Piggott, an artilleryman, was washed overboard. A main deck hatch went flying, and *Mercury's* crew struggled to batten the remaining hatches with tarpaulins and hammocks. At three o'clock *Mercury's* bowsprit broke, but as yet the ship was not taking water below decks. The gale rose and the ship tossed; Wild observed that Ship Island was completely inundated, and they were drifting among the tops of bushes just rising above the foam. *Mercury* was now blown in a westerly direction in shoal water. About noon the next day, she struck fast in a soft bottom. By mid-afternoon the wind dropped off, and as the seas diminished, Wild discovered that *Mercury* had been deposited high and dry on a sandy isle patterned by shallow lagoons. He later identified the place as one of the Samphire Islands off the coast of Louisiana. ⁶

The hull of the ship was intact, though topside she was a jumble of lines and broken timbers. On Friday, September 4, Wild and his men set out to clear the stumps of the foremast and bowsprit and to scout the island for water. Food was no problem, for *Mercury* carried army supplies for Mobile, ⁷ and these were opened on the fifth. To a Spartan diet of one pound of flour per day, the seamen and soldiers soon added cockles, clams, turtle and pelican meat. But survival depended upon water. Having failed to replenish his casks at Ship Island, Wild had only five barrels on hand, so he immediately put his men on a ration of one quart of water a day.

As the ship's boat had gone with the storm, and it was obvious that they must make the mainland or perish of thirst, Captain Wild put his men to constructing a boat from available planking and firewood. The work kept the men busy and cheerful. By the thirteenth, the carpentry was complete; caulking, secured by scraping the ship's seams for pitch, occupied the fourteenth, and the boat was launched in the lagoon on the fifteenth. It took another day to ballast her with bags filled with clay. The make-shift boat was provisioned with six days' rations for two men, and on the morning of the seventeenth, Wild and another man got her under way—only to find the sea too rough for their cranky little craft. Returning to the island, Wild began to build a raft of logs which had been driven ashore by the storm. The boat was used to reach nearby islands in search of water, but to no avail. It rained on the eighteenth, providing a

little relief for the diminishing water supply, but between that day and the twenty-ninth, water was rationed at one pint a day. Then on Wednesday morning, September 30, *Mercury's* castaways caught sight of a sail to northward. A signal was hoisted and two large fires were lit; the boat was sent out of the lagoon toward the approaching ship. At 10:30 or so, they hailed their rescuer, Lieutenant Thomas Hutchins.

The storm that had toyed with *Mercury* is not recorded as one of the great Gulf hurricanes, though it left a sufficient path of destruction in its wake; its violence was visible at Pensacola and Mobile. On September 9, General Haldimand advised Gage that all but one jetty at Pensacola had been destroyed, boats had been tossed ashore, trees were down and houses wrecked. Croftown, on the east side of Mobile Bay, had also suffered heavy damage. It appeared inevitable the *Mercury* and her company had been lost.⁸ Haldimand was not one to jump to conclusions, however, and perhaps he heard rumors of survivors of the storm. In any case on September 23, he ordered Lieutenant Hutchins, whose eye for coastal observation was well-established, to take out a boat and search the beaches and offshore island to the west of Mobile in order to establish the fate of *Mercury* and her men.

Hutchins embarked from the Red Cliffs on September 24, in the open, undecked schooner *Elizabeth*, which drew only three feet of water. The next day he passed Mobile Bay, and on the twenty-seventh he was at Mme. Boudreau's place on Biloxi Bay. There Frenchmen told him of a small boat having been found on the Chandeleurs, and the next day he was able to see for himself that it came from *Mercury*. At Biloxi Hutchins was advised that all of the coastal islands had been awash during the storm. Cattle and hogs had been lost, some said as many as three hundred from Horn, Buck, and Ship islands. One of the Chandeleurs had been washed away, and its site was now under ten to fifteen feet of water. Old residents on the coast declared it to have been the worst storm in fifty years.

Sailing at once, Hutchins made his way west, touching at each of the offshore islands to look for signs of the British ship. At Presque Isle a ship's hatch was found, and Hutchins heard that a mast had washed ashore nearby. On the twenty-ninth he surveyed Ship and Cat islands, discovering that both had been inundated to a depth of at least ten feet, and all houses had been swept away. Five Frenchmen had survived the storm on Cat Island by climbing trees, where they had remained for eight hours during the height of the hurricane. On the thirtieth, Hutchins set his course for the Chandeleurs, bearing on toward the Louisiana coast, intending to search it as far as the Balise. His track took him past the Samphire Islands, and there his search ended.

"I wish," wrote Hutchins, "I could describe the joy that appeared in every countenance on my arrival to the relief of these distressed people who had not the last prospect of ever leaving these Miserable Islands." "They had nothing before their Eyes but the dreadful prospect of perishing in a short time by the Worst of Deaths, a total want of water." He noted that several of the men had begun to drink large quantities of salt water, which not only made their

thirst worse but "left them in a bad Habit of body, and gripings in their Bowels."

That same afternoon Hutchins departed with Captain Edward Wild and thirteen of his company. To guard the stranded *Mercury*, eight men were left behind with ample supplies of water, meat, flour, butter—and two gallons of rum. The trip back to Pensacola was agonizingly slow as the wind held against Hutchins's little vessel. They were forced to row and pole the boat, making only a few leagues a day. Between Mobile Point and the Perdido they went ashore and hauled the boat along with ropes. As a result, Hutchins found the corpse of some poor victim of the storm. "He was so much disfigured," Hutchins reported, "we could not make out who he was." As a French canoe had been lost in that area and one of its crew had drowned, Hutchins assumed the body to be his. It was not until midnight, October 8, that Hutchins landed at the Red Cliffs, from whence he sent word of his success to General Haldimand.

The next week at Pensacola was filled with rejoicing and planning for the relief of the men remaining on Samphire Island. Hutchins had even more daring thoughts—why not rescue the ship itself? When he first saw the schooner he had estimated that a crew of thirty men could get her off in six or seven days. Captain Wild got away from Pensacola first, in the vessel *Warwickshire Wag*, and reached his marooned crewmen by October 19. Hutchins, in *Elizabeth*, was detained some days at the Red Cliffs by boisterous seas, but by the twenty-fifth he was off Presque Isle, where he engaged the "very serviceable" M. Boudreau and took on water, cut spars and masts, and shifted to the *Wag*, which joined him there.⁹

The recovery expedition, which included two army non-coms, ten privates, and a seaman from HMS *Carysfort*, apparently used Free Mason Island as its base of operations. The *Elizabeth* was sent back to Pensacola with news of Hutchins's progress. The party went ashore on Samphire Island on November 5, and began the laborious task of shifting *Mercury* into the lagoon. Hutchins found his situation extremely "disagreeable" and blamed Edward Wild.

If Capt. Wild had Conducted himself . . . with the smallest share of common prudence . . . I should not with thirteen others have nearly perished with Hunger, which was the case, besides the danger I was exposed to with open Boats at Sea.¹⁰

On November 9, *Mercury* was floated over the bar and made ready to take on sailing gear—a work in which Captain Wild proved most helpful. She was ready to sail by the twelfth, although contrary winds constantly threatened to shoal her again. But sail she did, and by November 18, *Mercury* was safe at the Ship Island anchorage, where Lieutenant Hutchins left her.¹¹ The ship returned to Pensacola about November 24, though Hutchins, engaged in other business, was not back until late December.

Lieutenant Hutchins would have been pleased to know that news of his gallantry was carried north by the first ship leaving Pensacola after the rescue mission and was mentioned in the *New York Gazette* as early as November 23. The *Maryland Gazette* copied the story on December 3, and from the

newspaper account General Gage might have gotten his first news of the affair.¹² Haldimand's notice of the loss of *Mercury* did not reach Gage until the end of November,¹³ and it was mid-December before army headquarters received Haldimand's report of the rescue operation and a copy of Hutchins's journal.¹⁴ The commander in chief's reaction was to suggest that Haldimand sell the hulk for whatever it would bring.

At Pensacola they had other thoughts. When *Mercury* returned to the capital of West Florida, General Haldimand asked Captain William Hay of HMS *Carysfort* to conduct a survey of damages to the ship. Hay was ready to provide naval advice and assistance but felt he must await the return from Mobile and participation of Captain Thomas Gamble, the resident army engineer.¹⁵ Gamble, an eternal complainer and trouble-maker, had long since made up his mind that "the old hulk" was not worth her cost before the wreck, certainly not after her recent mishap.¹⁶ But Gamble carried no weight with Haldimand, and the survey of *Mercury* was completed in December. By the end of the month Haldimand had determined to restore *Mercury* and return her to service.¹⁷ Captain Hay cooperated in that work until he sailed from Pensacola in January 1773. Haldimand then sought assistance from Captain William Cornwallis and HMS *Guadalupe*.¹⁸ Cornwallis was able to lend an anchor and other gear, but seamen were in short supply. He advised Haldimand that he had no men whom he would trust without an officer, and he felt that he could not assign an officer to a vessel not engaged in the naval service.¹⁹ Work proceeded slowly, but by March *Guadalupe*'s sailmaker was employed in fitting canvas on *Mercury*'s new masts and spars.²⁰ The schooner's hull was sound, her upper works new. Resurrection was achieved. When Frederick Haldimand sailed for New York in April 1773 to take up his new command as Thomas Gage's replacement, he embarked upon the good ship *Mercury*.²¹

Notes

¹ Joseph G. Tregle, Jr., "Introduction" to Hutchins, *Historical Narrative* (1784; reprint, Gainesville, 1968), v-xlviii.

² Unless otherwise noted, the following narrative is based upon Captain Edward Wild's "An Account of the Proceedings of his Majesty's schooner *Mercury* since her Departure from Pensacola until she was wreck'd on the Samphire Islands in the Latitude of 30-01 N" and Thomas Hutchins's report to Haldimand, October 8, 1772, in Haldimand to Gage, October 17, 1772, Gage Papers, William L. Clements Library, Ann Arbor, Michigan.

³ Haldimand to Gage, December 28, 1771, Haldimand Papers, British Library, London.

⁴ Thomas Gamble to Gage, October 19, 1772, Gage Papers.

⁵ The exact number of men aboard *Mercury* is uncertain. Hutchins's figure does not seem to include two sergeants and two corporals, or Wild may have carried a crew of four men.

⁶ The Samphire Islands appear on George Gauld's contemporary chart of the coast of West Florida and are located east of the northernmost of the Chandeleurs. See John D. Ware and Robert R. Rea, *George Gauld, Surveyor and Cartographer of the Gulf Coast* (Gainesville, 1982), Plate 6. Topographical changes make identification risky, but the Samphire Islands may correspond with the modern Holmes Islands. See Mitchell Key Map LA H2.

⁷ Wild was concerned by the impropriety of breaching army supplies for which he might subsequently be charged; he insisted that Sergeant George Abbott take responsibility for their distribution—and that only after the provisions belonging to the ship had been exhausted.

⁸ Haldimand to Gage, September 9, 1772, Haldimand Papers.

⁹ Hutchins to Haldimand, October 25, 1772, Haldimand Papers.

¹⁰ Hutchins to Haldimand, November 13, 1772, Haldimand Papers.

¹¹ Hutchins to Haldimand, November 21, 1772, Haldimand Papers.

¹² I am indebted to Professor Robin Fabel, Auburn University, for the newspaper references.

¹³ Gage to Haldimand, November 30, 1772, Gage Papers. Headquarters was clearly unaware of the survival of the ship and crew at this date.

¹⁴ Haldimand to Gage, October 17, 1772; Gage to Haldimand, December 18, 1772, Gage Papers.

¹⁵ Hay to Haldimand, November 26, 1772, Haldimand Papers.

¹⁶ Gamble to Gage, October 19, 1772, enclosing Gamble to Haldimand, October 12, 1772, Gage Papers.

¹⁷ Haldimand to Gage, December 27, 1772, Gage Papers.

¹⁸ Haldimand to Cornwallis, January 20, 1773; Cornwallis to Haldimand, January 21, 1773; Cornwallis to Sir George B. Rodney, January 24, 1773, Cornwallis's letter-book in the possession of Jack B. McGuire, Mandeville, Louisiana. I am most grateful for access to this material.

¹⁹ Cornwallis to Haldimand, January 21, 1773, Haldimand Papers.

²⁰ Cornwallis to Haldimand, March 5, 1773, Haldimand Papers.

²¹ Haldimand to Lieutenant John Campbell, April 14, 1773, Haldimand Papers.

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E. H. Suydam
1930

Drawing of Jean Lafitte by F. H. Suydam

*Lyle Saxon, Lafitte the Pirate
(New York, 1941),
Caldwell Delaney Collection*

Jean Laffite, the Baratarians, and the Historical Geography of Piracy in the Gulf of Mexico

Robert C. Vogel

The Gulf of Mexico has been a favorite haunt of pirates since the seventeenth century. During their two-century reign of terror, French, Spanish, and English corsairs caused great losses of lives, ships, and property. While by the end of the eighteenth century old fashioned buccaneering was beginning to be effectively suppressed throughout the West Indies, maritime brigandage still persisted in peripheral regions. Indeed, the early decades of the nineteenth century witnessed a resurgence of piracy along the northern rim of the Gulf of Mexico, and after 1804 the United States Navy was engaged in a twenty-year-long running fight with various pirate gangs who infested the coasts of Louisiana, Texas, and the Floridas. Foremost among these were the Baratarians, a band of smugglers, slave traders, and brigands. Many of them were former French privateersmen or Anglo-American filibusters, who occupied Barataria Bay on the Louisiana coast, and later Galveston Island off Texas.¹

The Louisiana Gulf Coast is inseparably linked in history and legend with the career of Jean Laffite. While a fog of legend shrouds the beginning and the end of his story, the consensus is that he was most likely a native of southwestern France, probably born in or near Bayonne around 1780, and was three or four years younger than his brother Pierre.² The Laffite brothers appear to have migrated to Louisiana by way of the West Indies, and persistent rumors have them joining the Creole exodus from Santo Domingo in the wake of the catastrophic slave rebellion there. The brothers may have reached New Orleans as early as 1802, though the story of the blacksmith shop on Bourbon Street is legend. There is no authentic record of their involvement in smuggling or privateering in Louisiana prior to the year 1812.³

Pierre and Jean Laffite were *armateurs* (outfitters), and in some cases owners of privateers which operated in the Gulf of Mexico under letters-of-marque from France, and later from the revolutionary councils of various Latin American insurgent governments. After the British seized Guadaloupe in February 1810, making the French corsairs "as homeless then as Noah's raven," refugee corsairs started bringing their prizes in to points along the Louisiana coast between the Mississippi and the mouth of Bayou Lafourche. There the Laffites acted as agents for disposing of the prizes and their cargoes.⁴

The Barataria region is located in southern Louisiana, west of the mouth of the Mississippi River in what is now Jefferson parish.⁵ The dominant geographic feature is Barataria Bay itself, an irregularly shaped coastal indentation formed out of an ancient estuary of the Mississippi River. The bay is approximately twelve miles deep and four miles wide, surrounded on three sides by a low, marshy area covered by a broad, sweeping expanse of *prairie tremblante* and salt marsh interspersed with deep, primeval swamps and a labyrinth of lakes and bayous. A line of barrier islands, the largest of which are Grand Isle and

Grande Terre, protect Barataria Bay from the Gulf, and in Laffite's day helped to protect the Baratarians from their naval enemies as well.

The geographical significance of Barataria lay in its remoteness and the fact that it afforded the first avenue of approach to New Orleans west of the mouth of the Mississippi.⁶ Although subject to frequent channel changes caused by hurricanes, in Laffite's day Barataria Bay was navigable by deep water sailing vessels as far up as *Chenièrre Caminada*, and by pirogue or bateau up most of its tributary bayous and bays. The sandy barrier islands across the mouth of Barataria Bay afforded attractive, if somewhat precarious opportunities for settlement, but until the arrival of the pirates the area was virtually uninhabited except for a handful of creole farmers and fishermen, whose cottages were half hidden in the live oak groves on *Grand Isle* and *Chenièrre Caminada*.⁷

Lonely, windswept Grande Terre Island, the "Isle of Barataria," is a relict beach ridge of sand dunes built up by wave action, with mangrove swamps on the landward side. The island was owned by François Mayronne from 1795 until 1821, but was not permanently settled until the middle of the nineteenth century. In colonial times, the Spanish maintained a watchtower there as a guard against pirates and smugglers. While it is well documented that French privateers started to bring their prizes to Barataria Bay as early as 1810, reports that the pirates actually erected fortifications as the mouth of Barataria Bay are confused and contradictory.⁸ On the eve of the War of 1812, the United States guarded the entrance to Barataria Bay with a patrol of gunboats supported by a small shore establishment, a continuation of the earlier Spanish presence. United States naval vessels had several encounters with "French" corsairs off Barataria during 1812, and the following year, pirates hijacked a Spanish schooner in the Mississippi and sailed her to Grande Terre. The garrison there recaptured the prize and its cargo.⁹ However, in July 1813 the collector of the port of New Orleans reported that the United States naval presence had been withdrawn from Barataria Bay at the end of the previous summer. A large body of freebooters were active in the area fitting out privateers under French colors in spite of a militia force stationed at *Grand Isle*.¹⁰ The Spanish counsel at New Orleans reported that by early 1813 there were 200-250 French pirates occupying the Isle of Barataria, which they had fortified with fourteen cannon.¹¹ But when the United States finally broke up the Baratarian rendezvous in September 1814, there were no shore batteries on Grande Terre, and the stories of Laffite's "fort" at the western end of Grande Terre (the site occupied since 1842 by Fort Livingston) appear to be legend.¹²

While the exact nature of the pirate establishment on *Grand Terre* is clouded by legend, there can be little doubt that smugglers and pirates bivouacked in the groves of oaks on *Grand Isle*. The Baratarians also occupied *Chenièrre Caminada*, site of the old French Fort Blanc on the "Isle of the Chitimachas" (*Chico Island*), a land-locked beach ridge within Barataria Bay, where the pirates rubbed shoulders with the inhabitants of a small indigenous settlement.¹³

Another favorite stomping ground of the Baratarians lay closer to New Orleans, within the area bounded by the bayous Villars, Barataria, Rigoletes,

and Perot, and Lake Salvador (near the present day communities of Crown Point and Lafitte). In Jean Laffite's day, the Baratarian interior was a wilderness of deep, silent bayous, tangled swamps and primeval forests—the ideal smuggler's habitat. The Temple, an ancient Indian shell midden on the western shore of Lake Salvador, was the most important Baratarian trading station where the smugglers auctioned off the privateers' cargoes of slaves and other merchandise. A secondary depot, a shell mound called the Little Temple, was located at the confluence of the bayous Rigoletes and Perot.¹⁴

The Baratarians also made extensive use of the Bayou Lafourche, another ancient Mississippi River channel immediately west of Barataria Bay. The largest and most important waterway between the Mississippi and the Sabine River, Bayou Lafourche was a veritable smuggler's highway, running nearly a hundred miles from the Gulf to Donaldsonville on the Mississippi above New Orleans. The bayou was deep, except at its mouth, where a bar prohibited access by deep water craft from the Gulf. Baratarian privateers also frequented Timbalier and Terrebonne bays, the next two important coastal indentations west of the Bayou Lafourche. Timbalier Bay offered a safe haven from the Gulf through the two-mile-wide Grande Pass, but lacked connecting land or inland water routes and so was probably little used by smugglers. Terrebonne Bay, separated from Timbalier Bay by the islands of Caillou, Vine, and Dernière (Last Island), was a secondary rendezvous for the Gulf corsairs, who transshipped their captured cargoes in small coastal vessels and pirogues.¹⁵

In order to give a semblance of legality to their campaign of maritime terrorism, the Baratarians at first sailed under commissions issued by the French government: the Laffite brothers operated their armed schooner *Diligente* under a letter-of-marque secured from the French consul at New Orleans.¹⁶ Most of the Baratarians eventually sailed with commissions from Cartagena, the republican stronghold on the coast of New Granada (modern Colombia) which declared its independence from Spain on November 11, 1811.¹⁷ Only one Baratarian, Renato Beluche, sailed against the British during the War of 1812 with an American letter-of-marque.¹⁸ In 1814 Louisiana-based privateersmen started cruising the Gulf under letters-of-marque issued by the Mexican insurgents. The Laffites always claimed that they and their associates operated within the norms of international law, and while the Baratarian privateers were technically not pirates when they attacked Spanish or British shipping, they nevertheless frequently hijacked neutral merchantmen and even vessels of American registry.¹⁹ Their prime targets were slavers—especially Spanish schooners inward bound from Africa.

The Baratarians profited greatly from the prohibition of the slave trade and the effects of the British blockade, and they operated with near impunity. "The nature of the coast is peculiarly favourable to their schooners; and the disposition of a very great proportion of the population are unfortunately too favourable to the execution," lamented Collector Thomas H. Williams to the secretary of the treasury.²⁰ Captain John Shaw, Williams' opposite number in the naval service, complained to the secretary of the navy that his gunboat flotilla was incapable of clearing the coast of this "Marine Banditti." "Our whole

coast Westwardly of the Balize," wrote Shaw, "is at this moment, infested with *pirates* and *smugglers*, who appear to have arrayed themselves, with a determination of opposing the laws of our country." ²¹ Shaw's successor, Master Commandant Daniel T. Patterson, also remonstrated against the chronic shortages of manpower and ships that prevented him from carrying out his mission to suppress the Baratarians. ²²

While openly defiant of government authority, the Baratarians seem to have indeed enjoyed broad popular support. In January 1812, a federal grand jury investigating the violation of the revenue laws reported "that many facilities have been afforded to the persons engaged in this violation of the laws of the United States by characters considered respectable in this Community." ²³ According to one contemporary witness, planters and merchants from all over Louisiana journeyed to Barataria, "without being at all solicitous to conceal the object of their journey. In the streets of New Orleans it was usual for traders to give and receive orders for purchasing goods at Barataria, with as little secrecy as similar orders are given for Philadelphia or New York. The most respectable inhabitants of the state, especially those living in the country, were in the habit of purchasing smuggled goods coming from Barataria." ²⁴

The activities of the Baratarian underworld greatly injured legitimate merchants throughout the Mississippi Valley by depressing prices and siphoning hard currency out of the economy. "The smuggling at Barataria has greatly injured all honest traders," reported an anonymous correspondent in the *St. Louis Missouri Gazette & Illinois Advertiser*. "In consequence of his [Laffite's] piracy and smuggling, a great variety of goods are very cheap here. Flour is 6 dollars per barrel, pork 10, bacon 10 cents per lb., tobacco 5 dollars per cwt." ²⁵ Africans bought from the corsairs at \$150-\$200 a head at the Temple slave mart in Barataria sold for \$600-\$700 in New Orleans, and the merchant Vincent Nolte complained in his memoirs that the proceeds from the illegal trade in slaves and British manufactured goods remained in the coffers of the pirate agents. ²⁶

The United States authorities in Louisiana, led by Territorial (later State) Governor William Charles Cole Claiborne, sought in vain to suppress the Baratarian smugglers and enforce the Neutrality Act against privateers fitting out in Louisiana waters. Early in 1812 the Collector of the Port of New Orleans formally requested the assistance of the military in suppressing smuggling, and his request was quickly granted. The contest between the Baratarians and the American navy and revenue service quickly escalated into a small war, complete with firefights on the bayous and running gun battles with privateers offshore. ²⁷

On the night of November 15-16, 1812, a troop of dragoons under the command of Captain Andrew Hunter Holmes surprised several pirogues laden with contraband in a bayou a few miles below New Orleans. Among those taken into custody were Pierre and Jean Laffite, who promptly jumped bail and resumed their illicit business. ²⁸ In October 1813 revenue officers seized another cargo of contraband in the Baratarian marshes, but were attacked by "a number of armed men under the orders of a certain John Lafite," who recaptured their goods after a brief skirmish in which federal agent Walker Gilbert was wounded. ²⁹

The uncoordinated efforts of the American authorities to combat the Baratarians made Governor Claiborne a laughing-stock. In a proclamation dated November 24, 1813, Claiborne offered a five hundred dollar reward for the arrest of "John Lafitte." Three days later, Jean Laffite issued his own proclamation offering a five thousand dollar bounty for the governor, delivered to him at Cat Island on Mississippi Sound.³⁰

The last straw came in January 1814 when a party of customs officers was attacked by some of Laffite's men near the Temple. Revenue officer John B. Stout was killed and his companions were taken prisoner. This prompted Claiborne to request that the militia be called to federal service to suppress "those desperate men on Lake Barataria, whose piracies have rendered our shores a terror to neutral flags."³¹ The state assembly refused to call out the militia, but in July a federal grand jury indicted Pierre Laffite as an accessory to acts of piracy. Pierre, the self-styled "Emperor of Barataria," was arrested on the streets of New Orleans a few days later and locked up in the Cabildo, where he languished through the summer of 1814 awaiting trial.³²

At this critical moment the British made overtures to the Baratarians in preparation for their invasion of Louisiana. Lieutenant Colonel Edward Nicolls, commanding British forces in the Floridas, probably hatched the plot to enlist the Baratarians and prevailed upon the Royal Navy to send Captain Nicholas Lockyer in His Majesty's sloop-of-war *Sophie* to deliver written proposals to "Monsieur Lafite, or the Commandant at Barataria." Early on the morning of September 3, 1814, *Sophie* anchored off Grande Terre, where she remained for two days while Lockyer and Laffite parlayed. Laffite asked for a fortnight in which to make his decision—and as soon as the British were over the horizon, he communicated the British offer to Governor Claiborne through Jean Blaque, a member of the state legislature. In a letter dated September 10, Laffite tendered the services of the Baratarians in the defense of New Orleans in return for a pardon. Claiborne forwarded Laffite's offer to Major General Andrew Jackson, commanding United States forces at New Orleans, and recommended acceptance. Meanwhile, Pierre Laffite, who had escaped from the Cabildo during the night of September 5-6, rejoined his younger brother at one of their sanctuaries outside the city.³³

Ironically, on September 16, 1814 the privateers' rendezvous at Grande Terre was broken up by a joint U.S. Army-Navy expedition led by Master Commandant Patterson in the United States schooner *Carolina* and Colonel George T. Ross at the head of a detachment of regulars from the 44th Infantry. The Patterson-Ross task force encountered no resistance and was able to seize several privateers and their prizes, a considerable quantity of merchandise, and about eighty prisoners, including Captains Beluche and Dominique Youx.³⁴

Jackson had originally repudiated the Baratarians as "hellish banditti," but on the eve of the British invasion gave in to the sustained lobbying effort by several prominent Louisianians, including Governor Claiborne and the commander of the state militia, as well as members of the Committee for Public Safety. Edward Livingston, Jackson's volunteer aide-de-camp and a former legal consul

for the Baratarians, no doubt played a crucial role in these negotiations. On December 17, 1814 with the British invasion already underway, Claiborne issued a proclamation enjoining the Baratarians to enlist in the American cause.³⁵ Between three and four hundred Baratarian "marines" responded to the call and manned the forts at Petites Coquilles, St. Philip, and Bayou St. John. Others formed an artillery company under Captains Beluche and Youx which saw extensive action at Chalmette. The Laffite brothers themselves served on Jackson's volunteer staff as topographic advisors and guides, but did not see any combat. Contrary to the myth of the "privateer-patriot," Jean Laffite was not present at the Chalmette battlefield on the glorious Eighth of January: he was on the Left Bank, delivering a letter.³⁶

The Laffite brothers and an unspecified number of their associates were pardoned by President James Madison in a proclamation issued on February 6, 1815. The Baratarians promptly went into United States District Court to recover ships and property seized by Patterson and Ross. Several were successful and were soon back at sea.³⁷

During the winter of 1815-1816 Jean Laffite went to Washington and Philadelphia in an attempt to regain property lost in the Patterson-Ross raid. Laffite returned to New Orleans empty-handed in March 1816 to discover that during his absence his brother had secretly pledged their services to the Spanish government in return for a royal pardon and a reward "proportionate to the service that he should perform." Pierre Laffite was code-named Number 13; Jean Laffite entered the Spanish service in the spring of 1816 as secret agent Number 13-B.³⁸

While defying the United States' efforts to dislodge them from Louisiana, the Baratarians had become involved in various plots to invade Texas and Mexico. After the war, a group of New Orleans filibusters secured the services of a French corsair, Louis-Michel Aury, who had most recently sailed under Venezuelan colors in the service of Simon Bolivar.³⁹ Stepped up operations by the naval squadron at New Orleans made the former Barataria Bay rendezvous untenable, so the corsairs had to seek out a new base of operations. In July 1816 Aury proceeded to establish a stronghold on the Texas coast on uninhabited Galveston Island, where he was proclaimed governor of the new *puerto habilitado* of the Mexican Republic in early September.⁴⁰

Like Barataria, Galveston offered something approaching the ideal pirate habitat. Located approximately 350 miles west of the mouth of the Mississippi, Galveston Island is a sand barrier island at the mouth of Galveston Bay. The irregularly-shaped Galveston Bay extends nearly thirty miles from the Gulf and includes the estuaries of the Trinity and San Jacinto rivers, as well as several smaller bayous. In its natural state, the margins of the bay were low and marshy. Galveston Island, known to shipwrecked sixteenth century Spaniards as the "isle of doom" (Malhado), was uninhabited, except for the occasional band of Karankaws Indian foragers. An abundance of rattlesnakes led the Spanish to name the eastern tip of Galveston Island "Punta de Culebras." In spite of shifting sandbars and shoals, the bay afforded a sheltered anchorage for ships entering

through the Galveston Channel between the eastern tip of Galveston Island and the Bolivar Peninsula. Spanish occupation of the area dated from the establishment of the presidio and mission at El Orcoquisac in 1756; but by 1816 the Spanish military presence had lapsed, so that Colonel Henry Perry's little band of Anglo-American filibusters were able to occupy Bolivar Point unmolested over the winter of 1815-1816. ⁴¹

Aury's privateers were intended to be the naval escort for an invasion of Mexico led by the Spanish revolutionary General Francisco Xavier Mina, who arrived at Galveston in late November. ⁴² Meanwhile, back in New Orleans, Spanish secret agents led by the priest Antonio de Sedella, known to the Creoles as "Père Antoine" were active. Unknown to Louisianians, the priest was also the chief of the Spanish secret service in Louisiana. He pressed the Laffites to foil Mina's invasion and suppress Aury's establishment at Galveston. ⁴³

Jean Laffite hurried to Galveston and arrived on the scene a few days before Mina, convoyed by Aury's privateers, sortied on his ill-fated invasion of Mexico. During Aury's absence, Laffite seized control of the pirate stronghold in a *coup d'état* on April 8, 1817 and quickly organized a new provisional government, which was sworn into office on board Bathelome Lafon's schooner *Carmelita*. ⁴⁴ Leaving Mina to his fate at Soto la Marina, Aury returned to Galveston but was unable to dislodge the Laffite faction and shifted his base to Matagorda Bay. Mina's little army was subsequently annihilated by royalist forces and Aury quit the Texas coast to take part in MacGregor's "invasion" of Amelia Island in Spanish East Florida. ⁴⁵

Jean Laffite remained undisputed master of Galveston after September 1817, and the place quickly evolved into a major port for privateers as well as the hub of an extensive smuggling and slave trading network. While Jean played the familiar role of "front man" at Galveston, Pierre remained in New Orleans where he handled the business arrangements in support of the Galveston venture, managed the intrigues with Sedella and the Spanish consulate, and endeavored to hold the United States naval and customs authorities at bay. As at Barataria, the Laffite brothers had a major stake in the illicit slave trade, sending hijacked cargoes of African slaves across the border into Louisiana in collaboration with the Bowie brothers and others. ⁴⁶ Much of this contraband moved over land routes, following the old Indian trails between El Orcoquisac on the Trinity, across the Sabine, Calcasieu, and Mermentau rivers to Opelousas in Louisiana. Local tradition has it that pirates regularly touched at several points along the southwest Louisiana coast between the Atchafalaya and the Sabine.

After the departure of Mina and Aury, Jean Laffite played host to a string of French and Anglo-American filibusters. When Napoleonic refugees under Charles and Henri Lallemand disembarked at Galveston in January 1818 and ascended the Trinity River, where they established a military colony called Champ d'Asile (near present-day Wallisville, Texas), the Laffites plotted to betray the Frenchmen to Spain. The scheme failed, but the Lallemand expedition fell apart on its own and the remnants of the Champ d'Asile force drifted back to Laffite's

establishment at Galveston, which itself was nearly destroyed by a terrific hurricane on September 12, 1818.⁴⁷

While the Galveston pirates represented a serious threat to Spanish (and neutral) commerce in the Gulf, the political ramifications of the ex-Baratarians' Texas venture were even more pronounced. The Monroe Administration, as part of its policy of provocation and indirect aggression aimed at pressuring the Spanish into yielding territory, secretly encouraged the Mexican revolutionaries and their filibustering counterparts. In August 1818 Jean Laffite was visited by an American agent, Major George Graham, who had been sent by the State Department to investigate affairs in Texas and notify the occupants of Galveston that the United States claimed the territory between the Sabine and the Rio Grande. Graham proposed that the Laffites take possession of the entire Texas coast as far as the Rio Grande and then surrender the strategic points to the United States after faked attacks—the same *modus operandi* used to secure United States control of Spanish West Florida in 1810. Nothing came of this scheme, which apparently did not have official sanction.⁴⁸ Luis de Onís, Spain's minister to Washington, protested in vain against the American government's seeming indifference to the filibustering adventures of its own citizens, and, with negotiations at a crucial stage, the Spanish came to suspect the Laffites of playing both sides against the middle.⁴⁹

In the end diplomacy made covert action against Spain unnecessary. On February 22, 1819 the United States relinquished its claim to Texas in exchange for Spanish East Florida. Galveston's usefulness as a pawn in international power politics was over. Notwithstanding the Monroe Administration's use of Galveston as a bargaining chip in the negotiations with Spain over the western boundary of the Louisiana Purchase, privateers sailing under Mexican letters-of-marque infested the waters off western Louisiana. Some of these corsairs had committed outright acts of piracy against United States citizens and property. The ships of the New Orleans naval station kept close watch on Galveston and American warships and revenue cutters made prizes of pirates and smugglers operating illegally in the United States territorial waters.⁵⁰

In the fall of 1819, the United States schooner *Lynx* appeared off Galveston in hot pursuit of a band of smugglers who had turned to robbery in southwestern Louisiana. The culprits seized were on Laffite's orders and the ringleader was promptly hanged.⁵¹ The situation deteriorated rapidly after September 13, 1819, when the Mexican corsair *Le Brave* (or *Bravo*) commanded by Captain Jean Desfarges, in company with a Spanish prize, was captured after a brief fight off Bayou St. Jean by the revenue cutters *Alabama* and *Louisiana*. Among the *Le Brave's* papers were an undated Mexican commission signed by the notorious filibuster General Jean Joseph Amable Humbert as well as instructions to the privateer's captain signed by Jean Laffite as owner of the vessel.⁵² The United States Attorney charged Desfarges and his crew with piracy. Their trial, which commenced in October, was a public sensation, and triggered a backlash of public opinion against the Laffites, who found themselves tarred with the

brush of piracy. Desfarges and his crew were convicted and hung from the yardarm of a United States warship in New Orleans.⁵³

After the *Le Brave* debacle, the pirates at Galveston could see the writing on the wall. The Laffites dallied briefly with the unlucky filibuster James Long, whose invasion of Texas brought him to Bolivar Point in the summer of 1819. Betraying Long to the Spaniards, Jean Laffite was appointed governor of Galveston. Long returned to Galveston in April 1820 and once again tried to enlist the aid of the ex-Baratarian pirates under his lone-star flag.⁵⁴ But in March 1820 Jean Laffite informed the captain of the United States brig-of-war *Enterprise* that he was dismantling his shore establishment, and the pirate village was burned sometime in May.⁵⁵ Shortly after the capitulation of the Galveston pirates, the second Long filibuster collapsed and the erstwhile Mexican privateersmen dispersed. Some continued in the irregular navies of the Latin American revolutionary republics, but after 1821 the demand for their services declined steadily.

Leaving Pierre to attend to the brothers' affairs in the United States, Jean repaired to Isla Mujeres off the Yucatan peninsula, a convenient ambush along the Havana-Vera Cruz trade route. In the spring of 1821 he was run to ground and nearly captured by United States naval forces off Sugar Key in Cuban waters, and barely escaped capture.⁵⁶ The elder Laffite joined his brother in Yucatan but was killed in a skirmish near Cancun in November 1821. Reduced to the status of minor picaroon, Jean Laffite remained on the Yucatan coast until about 1826, when he appears to have succumbed to fever and died.⁵⁷

The date of Jean Laffite's demise in Yucatan conveniently marks the close of the so-called "age of piracy" in the Gulf of Mexico. After 1815 both Great Britain and the United States had stepped up their efforts to rid the seas of piracy, sending ever larger squadrons to convoy merchantmen and attack the pirates in their lairs.⁵⁸ By 1825 piracy had been all but eradicated throughout the region.

Notes

[The name Laffite has been spelled according to the form used in the *Dictionary of American Biography* except for variations which appear in quotations and titles of works cited below.—EDITOR]

¹ This essay is a by-product of the author's abiding interest in the historical geography of the Gulf Coast borderlands. During research directed to other ends, I have become increasingly aware of the seemingly strong attraction borderland regions held for pirates and filibusters—indeed, for adventurers and nonconformists of every stripe. This aspect of Gulf Coast history does not seem to have received the attention it deserves from students of the Spanish American Borderlands. The focus here is on piracy in Louisiana waters during the period from circa 1812 to 1820. The pirate colonies at Galveston and Isla Mujeres, which receive cursory treatment in these pages, will be the subject of a future paper.

² Few topics in American history have been the subject of as much controversy as the origins of Pierre and Jean Laffite. "The impression is that they came from Bayonne—some say Bordeaux," wrote Charles Gayarre in his "Historical Sketch of Pierre and Jean Laffite, the Famous Smugglers of Louisiana," *Magazine of American History* 10 (1883): 284; cf., Grace King, *New Orleans, The Place and the People* (New York, 1917), 190. Stanley Faye, relying upon Spanish sources, concluded that the Laffites were from the valley of Orduna, located ten leagues south of Bilbao in the Spanish Pyrenees; see "The Great Stroke of Pierre Laffite," *Louisiana Historical Quarterly* 23 (1940): 745. Less careful (but more imaginative) writers have placed the Laffite nativity in Marseilles, St. Malo, Brest, New Orleans and Long Island in New York State. The height of prevarication was reached by Stanley Clisby Arthur, whose *Jean Laffite, Gentleman Rover* (New Orleans, 1952), was based on an alleged "Laffite memoir" later published as *The Journal of Jean Laffite: The Privateer-Patriot's Own Story* (New York, 1958). In this version, Jean Laffite was of Spanish-French-Hebrew extraction, born in Port-au-Prince on April 22, 1782. The *Journal* has turned out to be the product of a clever hoax perpetrated by a retired Kansas City railroad engineer who claimed to be the pirate's great-grandson; see Charles Hamilton, *Great Forgers and Famous Fakes: The Manuscript Forgers of American & How They Duped the Experts* (New York, 1980), 121-29.

³ Gayarre, "Historical Sketch," 284-98; Faye, "Great Stroke," 746-48. A brief item in *Le Moniteur de la Louisiane* (New Orleans), September 18, 1802, announced the arrival in New Orleans of Herico and Laffite, blacksmiths and toolmakers, whose workshop was "au coin de la place d'armes." This is almost certainly the root of old tale that the Laffites operated a blacksmith shop on the north side of St. Philip Street between Bourbon and Dauphine. A title search of the "Laffite Blacksmith Shop" at 941 Bourbon Street reveals no connection with the Laffite brothers.

Several generations of historians and journalists, fascinated by the character of Jean Laffite, have enshrined him as the chief or "bos" of the Baratarians. Contemporary accounts and court records, however, strongly suggest that older brother Pierre was the prime mover behind the brothers' ventures; see Faye, "Great Stroke," *passim*.

⁴ George W. Cable, "Plotters and Pirates of Louisiana," *Century Magazine* 25 (1883): 860. For discussion of the French West Indian corsairs and their relocation to Louisiana, see René Guillemin, *Corsaires de la République et de l'Empire* (Paris, 1982), 291-343; and Stanley Faye, "Privateers of Guadeloupe and Their Establishment in Barataria," *Louisiana Historical Quarterly* 23 (1940): 1012-94.

⁵ The name Barataria appears on maps as early as 1729. The etymology of the place name is probably from the old French word *barateur*, (in Spanish, *barateria*, in English, *barratry*) which refers to fraudulence or dishonesty at sea. For background on the cultural and geographical diversity of the Barataria region, see Betsy Swanson, *Historic Jefferson Parish: From Shore to Shore* (Gretna, 1975), 134-68. See also Federal Writers Project, *Louisiana: A Guide to the State* (New York, 1941), 582-85.

⁶ The four principal smugglers' routes from Barataria Bay to New Orleans were: (1) the Bayou St. Denis (Grand Bayou) route from the northwestern arm of Barataria Bay through Lake Salvador to the Mississippi River at Carrollton; (2) the Wilkinson's Bayou route to the north and east; (3) the Big Bayou Barataria route; and (4) the Little Bayou Barataria route via the Bayou Rigolets. these routes can be clearly discerned on a number of

contemporary maps; see, e.g., the maps by New Orleans engineer-cartographer Bartelemy Lafon: "Plan réduit de Barataria," dated New Orleans, 1814, in the Library of Congress, Washington, DC; and *Carte Générale du Territoire d'Orleans* . . . (Paris, 1806).

⁷ Sally Evans, Fred Stielow and Betsy Swanson, *An Early History of Grand Isle* (Gretna, 1976). See also Frank E. Schoonover, "In the Haunts of Jean Lafitte," *Harper's Monthly Magazine* 124 (1911): 82-91.

⁸ The documents involving the libel of the French privateers *Duc de Montebello*, *L'Epine* and *Intrepide* are in the papers for case nos. 363, 379, 380, 381 and 401, Records of the United States District Court for the Eastern District of Louisiana, Federal Records Center, Ft. Worth, TX (hereafter cited as "USDC-LA"). These vessels arrived at the Balize in the spring of 1810, seeking "refreshment and repairs"—and an opportunity to dispose of booty taken during their late cruises in the Gulf—where they were seized as lawful prizes by the United States Navy; see Caspar F. Goodrich, "Our Navy and the West Indian Pirates: A Documentary History," *U.S. Naval Institute Proceedings* 42 (1916): 1463-68; and David D. Porter, *Memoir of Commodore David Porter of the United States Navy* (Albany, 1875), 79-81. Porter was station commander at New Orleans.

⁹ *Louisiana Gazette* (New Orleans), February 11 and July 11, 1812; John Shaw to the Secretary of the Navy, New Orleans, February 3, 1812, Captains' Letters, Naval Records, National Archives (hereafter cited as "Captains' Letters").

¹⁰ Thomas H. Williams to Secretary of the Treasury, New Orleans, July 20, 1813, Correspondence of the Secretary of the Treasury with Collectors of Customs, General Records of the Department of the Treasury, National Archives (hereafter cited as "Collectors of Customs Correspondence").

¹¹ Diego Morphy to Juan Ruiz de Apodaca, New Orleans, March 11, 1813, leg. 1828, Archivo General de Indias, Papeles Procedentes de Cuba, Seville (hereafter cited as AGI-PC).

¹² See the testimony of captured pirate John Oliver in district court (Case no. 746 USDC-LA); and the after action reports of Master Commandant Patterson and Colonel Ross (see note 34). According to Powell A. Casey, the U.S. 44th Infantry was sent to Grande Terre in April 1815 to erect fortifications there, and the ruins of their breastwork came to be called "Fort Laffite"; *Encyclopedia of Forts, Posts, Named Camps and Other Military Installations in Louisiana, 1700-1901* (Baton Rouge, 1983), 71, 101.

¹³ Lyle Saxon's historical novel *Lafitte the Pirate* (New York, 1930), makes good use of the local folklore about the pirate colony; see also Ray M. Thompson, *The Land of Lafitte the Pirate* (New Orleans, 1942).

¹⁴ Arsene L. Latour, *Historical Memoir of the War in West Florida and Louisiana, 1814-1815* (Philadelphia, 1816), 13.

¹⁵ The Spanish consul at New Orleans, reported that the Baratarians also occupied Cat Island (Chat-au-Tigre) off the Bayou Teche; see Morphy to Apodaca, leg. 1828, AGI-PC. The pirate stronghold on Cat Island is described in a letter from a United States revenue officer as having been fortified with shore batteries; see Walker Gilbert to Thomas Freeman, Donaldsonville, February 18, 1814, Letters from the Surveyors to the Surveyor General 1807-1824, State Land Office, Baton Rouge. See also Latour, *Historical Memoir*, 16-17; and Charles Gayarre, *History of Louisiana* (New York, 1854-1866), 4: 367.

¹⁶ Documents relating to the Laffite-owned *Diligente*, dated New Orleans, March 13, 1813, are in the Pierre and Jean Lafitte Collection, Historic New Orleans Collection, New Orleans. The source of these documents seems to be the office of the French consul at New Orleans.

¹⁷ Diego Morphy to José de Soto, New Orleans, March 26, 1812, leg. 1791, AGI-PC.

¹⁸ Jane Lucas DeGrummond, *Renato Beluche: Smuggler, Privateer, and Patriot* (Baton Rouge, 1983), 64-65.

¹⁹ See Stanley Faye, "Privateersmen of the Gulf and their Prizes," *Louisiana Historical Quarterly* 22 (1939): 1012-94; John R. Kendall, "Shadow Over the City," *Louisiana Historical Quarterly* 22 (1939): 146.

²⁰ Thomas H. Williams to Albert Gallatin, New Orleans, March 15, 1812 and July 20, 1813, Collectors of Customs Correspondence.

²¹ John Shaw to Paul Hamilton, New Orleans, October 27, 1812, Captains' Letters.

²² Daniel T. Patterson to Evan Jones, New Orleans, November 23, 1813, Master Commandants' Letters, Naval Records, National Archives (hereafter cited as "Master Commandants' Letters").

²³ Presentment of grand jury, January 31, 1812, USDC-LA.

²⁴ Latour, *Historical Memoir*, 15.

²⁵ June 11, 1814.

²⁶ Vincent Nolte, *Fifty Years in Both Hemispheres* (New York, 1854), 189.

²⁷ See Thomas H. Williams to Albert Gallatin, New Orleans, March 15, 1813 and July 20, 1813, Collectors of Customs Correspondence; *Louisiana Gazette*, February 11 and July 11, 1812; William Jones to William DuBourg, Washington, August 24, 1812, Secretary of the Navy Letters, Naval Records, National Archives.

²⁸ Case nos. 573 and 574, USDC-LA; Jane Lucas DeGrummond, *The Baratarians and the Battle of New Orleans* (Baton Rouge, 1961), 18-20.

²⁹ *National Intelligencer* (Washington), October 22, 1814; Gayarre, *History of Louisiana*, 4: 301; Faye, "Great Stroke," 749.

³⁰ The governor's proclamation offering a reward for Laffite's capture is printed in Dunbar Rowland, ed., *The Official Letter Books of W. C. C. Claiborne* (Jackson, MS, 1917), 6: 279-80. For Laffite's response, see: Gayarre, *History of Louisiana*, 4: 302-3; DeGrummond, *Baratarians*, 21, n. 13; cf., Everett S. Brown, ed., "Letters from Louisiana, 1813-1814," *Mississippi Valley Historical Review* 11 (1924-1925): 576.

³¹ Gayarre, "Historical Sketches," 286.

³² Case nos. 770 and 771, USDC-LA; cf., Gayarre, *History of Louisiana*, 4: 289-91. News of Laffite's arrest appeared in the *Louisiana Gazette*, July 12, 1814, under the title, "Another Emperor Fallen."

³³ The story of the British intrigue with Jean Lafitte has been told many times. Although one cannot be certain of what actually transpired on Grande Terre on September 3 and 4, 1814, stories of the offer of \$30,000 and the rank of post captain in the Royal Navy can be safely dismissed as legend. Simply put, the British summoned the Baratarians and told them to surrender their ships and shore establishments. In return, they would receive amnesty from prosecution for piracy as well as "lands . . . in proportion to your prospective ranks." Nicolls seems to have offered Lafitte a commission in the Royal Marines; the source for the \$30,000 bribe is Lafitte himself, and is not corroborated by British sources. The best discussion of the affair is in John Sugden, "Jean Lafitte and the British Offer of 1814," *Louisiana History* 20 (1979): 162-65. See also Latour, *Historical Memoir*, 15-19; and Frank Lawrence Owsley, Jr., *Struggle for the Borderlands: The Creek War and the Battle of New Orleans, 1812-1815* (Gainesville, 1981), 107-9. The packet of documents delivered to Lafitte by Captain Lockyer, as well as the Lafitte brothers' letters to Governor Claiborne, are preserved in the Bibliotheca Parsoniana at the University of Texas in Austin. Edward Alexander Parsons published these materials in, "Jean Lafitte in the War of 1812: A Narrative Based on the Original Documents," *Proceedings of the American Antiquarian Society* 50 (1940): 203-24; these documents were also published in translation by Latour in the appendices of his *Historical Memoir*, vii-xiv.

³⁴ George T. Ross to James Monroe, New Orleans, October 3, 1814, Letters Received by the Secretary of War, Old Military Records, National Archives; Daniel T. Patterson to William Jones, New Orleans, October 10, 1814, Master Commandants' Letters. Patterson's letter describing the raid on Barataria was widely reprinted; see, e.g., the *National Intelligencer* (Washington), November 15, 1814; and *Nile's Weekly Register* (Baltimore), November 19, 1814.

³⁵ Rowland, *Letter Books of W. C. C. Claiborne*, 6: 324; the governor's proclamation is also reproduced in Latour, *Historical Memoir*, 255, n. 1. The negotiations involving Jackson, Claiborne, and the Baratarians are described in [Bernard Marigny], "Reflections on the Campaign of General Andrew Jackson in Louisiana," Grace King, trans. and ed., *Louisiana Historical Quarterly* 6 (1923): 65-66; and in Latour, *Historical Memoir*, 72. Livingston's letter to the President suggesting a pardon for the Baratarians, dated New Orleans, October 24, 1814, is in the James Madison papers, Library of Congress. Vincent Nolte recorded the rumor that the Baratarians offered Livingston a \$15,000 bribe to secure the release of Dominique Youx; see *Fifty Years in Both Hemispheres*, 208.

³⁶ Parsons, "Jean Lafitte in the War of 1812," 218, 220. The extent of the Baratarians' material assistance to the United States has been the subject of heated debate among successive generations of historians. Years after the battle, General Jackson recollected that his army procured from the Baratarians "7500 flints for pistols and boarding pieces, which was solely the supply of flints for all of my militia"; see John S. Bassett, ed., *Correspondence of Andrew Jackson* (Washington, 1926-1935), 3: 339; cf. Wilburt S. Brown, *The Amphibious Campaign for West Florida and Louisiana, 1814-1815: A Critical Review of Strategy and Tactics at New Orleans* (University, AL, 1969), 173, 177-78; Owsley, *Struggle for the Gulf Borderlands*, 131, 152, 163; and Saxon, *Lafitte the Pirate*, 173-75. Jackson's oft-quoted commendation of the Baratarians was issued as part of his general orders of January 21, 1815; see Latour *Historical Memoir*, cxxxv-cxc; *L'Ami des lois* (New Orleans), January 24, 1815.

³⁷ James D. Richardson, ed., *A Compilation of the Messages and Papers of the Presidents, 1789-1897* (Washington, 1896-1899), 1: 558-60. Upon receipt of the presidential

pardon, the United States attorney entered pleas of *nolle prosequi* in the cases against individual Baratarians indicted for piracy in the federal district court. See case numbers 817, 821, 824 and 844, USDC-LA.

³⁸ Information about Jean Laffite's mission to Washington and Philadelphia is sketchy; his petition to the president, dated Washington, December 27, 1815, is in the James Madison Papers, Library of Congress. Harris Gaylord Warren, ed., "Documents Relating to Pierre Laffite's Entrance into the Service of Spain," *Southwestern Historical Quarterly* 44 (1940): 84; Faye, "Great Stroke," 740. Jean Laffite's first assignment as a Spanish spy was a reconnaissance of the Arkansas River in the company of Major Latour, Jackson's staff engineer during the Louisiana campaign; see Edwin H. Carpenter, ed., "Latour's Report on Spanish-American Relations in the southwest," *Louisiana Historical Quarterly* 30 (1947): 715-37.

³⁹ Harris Gaylord Warren, *The Sword Was Their Passport: A History of American Filibustering in the Mexican Revolution* (Baton Rouge, 1943), 139-40. For Aury's checkered career, see Stanley Faye, "Commodore Aury," *Louisiana Historical Quarterly* 24 (1941): 611-97.

⁴⁰ Harris Gaylord Warren, trans., "Documents Relating to the Establishment of Privateers at Galveston," *Louisiana Historical Quarterly* 21 (1838): 1056-1109; Faye, "Great Stroke," 768-80.

⁴¹ For background on the occupation of Galveston by pirates and filibusters see David G. McComb, *Galveston: A History* (Austin, 1986), 5-40; Charles W. Hayes, *Galveston: History of the Island and City* (Austin, 1974), 1: 16-90.

⁴² Harris Gaylord Warren, "The Origin of General Mina's Invasion of Mexico," *Southwestern Historical Quarterly*, 42 (1938-1939): 1-20; William Davis Robinson, *Memoirs of the Mexican Revolution: Including a Narrative of the Expedition of General Xavier Mina* (London, 1821), 1: 101-2.

⁴³ Faye, "Great Stroke," 762-80; Warren, *Sword*, 178-88.

⁴⁴ *American State Papers: Foreign Relations* 4: 136.

⁴⁵ T. Frederick Davis, "McGregor's Invasion of Florida, 1817," *Quarterly of the Florida Historical Society*, 7 (1928): 27-30.

⁴⁶ Eugene C. Barker, "The African Slave Trade in Texas," *Quarterly of the Texas State Historical Association*, 6 (1902): 146-48. The slave smuggling exploits of the Bowie brothers are related in "Early Life in the Southwest—The Bowies." *De Bow's Review* 13 (1852): 378-83; see also Randall Jones, "A Visit to Galveston Island in 1818," typescript of a lost manuscript in the archives of the Rosenberg Library, Galveston, TX.

⁴⁷ Warren, *Sword*, 210-32.

⁴⁸ The correspondence between Graham and Laffite is in Department of State Papers, Special Agents, Library of Congress. See also Charles Gayarre, "The Famous Lafittes at Galveston," *The Southern Bivouac* 2 (1886): 176-78; Walter Prichard, ed., "George Graham's Mission to Galveston in 1818: Two Important Documents Bearing Upon Louisiana History," *Louisiana Historical Quarterly* 20 (1937): 619-50; and Harris Gaylord Warren, ed., "Documents Relating to George Graham's Proposals to Jean Laffite for

the Occupation of the Texas Coast," *Louisiana Historical Quarterly* 21 (1938): 213-19.

⁴⁹ Luis Noeli to Felipe Fatio, New Orleans, July 3, 1818, AGI-PC. Toward the end of 1818 the Spanish authorities decided to sever relations with the Laffite brothers and refused to honor their request for reimbursement of about \$18,000 in expenses; see Onís to the Intendant, Washington, November 25, 1818, AGI-PC.

⁵⁰ Goodrich, "West Indian Pirates," 1477-83.

⁵¹ *Orleans Gazette*, November 24, 1819; *Niles' Weekly Register*, February 5, 1820. See William Bollaert, "Life of Jean Laffite," *Littell's Living Age*, 32 (1852): 443; Faye, "Great Stroke," 817.

⁵² Case no. 1440, USDC-LA. Desfarges and his crew were charged under the act of March 3, 1819 "to protect the commerce of the United States, and punish the Crime of piracy," which prescribed the death penalty for pirates and slavers. Jean Laffite's instructions to Captain Desfarges, dated Galveston, August 18, 1819, are included in the case papers of "United States vs the Armed Schooner Bravo" and are reproduced in facsimile with an accompanying translation in Arthur, *Gentleman Rover*, 194-201.

⁵³ Desfarges and his men were found guilty on November 22, 1819 and condemned to death. Desfarges was hanged on May 25 1820, but a presidential order stayed the execution of the other fifteen crew members until later in the year. One teenaged crewman was pardoned. See John Smith Kendall, "The Successors of Laffite," *Louisiana History* 24 (1941): 363-65.

⁵⁴ For background on the Long filibusters, see Faye, "Great Stroke," 812-23; Warren, *Sword*, 233-54.

⁵⁵ Lawrence Kearney to Daniel T. Patterson, March 7, 1820, Captains' Letters. An interesting account of the last days of Galveston is in T., "The Cruise of the Enterprise: A Day with La Feete," *The U.S. Magazine and Democratic Review* 6 (1839): 33-43; see also Saxon, *Laffite the Pirate*, 247-56.

⁵⁶ Laffite's near capture off Cuba was reported in the *Courier de la Louisiana* (New Orleans), May 22, 1821.

⁵⁷ J. Ignacio Rubio Mane, *Los Piratas Lafitte* (Mexico, 1938), 27-30; and "Los Lafitte, Famosos Piratas y sus Ultimas días en Yucatan," *Sociedad Mexicana de Geografía y Estadística* 54 (1940). As proof of Pierre Laffite's death in Yucatan, Mane cites documents in the Notarias Publicas, Archivo de la ciudad de Merida de Yucatan, Merida. An American traveler who visited the Yucatan in 1827 recorded that, according to a turtle fisherman named Gregorio on Isla Mujeres, Laffite died at Los Bocas around 1826 and was buried at Silan; see Rhoads Fisher to Mirabeau B. Lamar, Matagorda, TX, February 26, 1838, in Charles Adams Gulick, Jr. and Winnie Allen, eds., *The Papers of Mirabeau B. Lamar*, (Austin, 1924), 2: 152. John Lloyd Stephens, an American archaeologist, also collected some of the local lore about Jean Laffite's final days near Silan in the memoir of his 1841 Yucatan expedition; see *Incidents of Travel in Yucatan* (New York, 1843), 2: 283, 296.

⁵⁸ Carlos Gilman Calkins, "The Repression of Piracy in the West Indies, 1814-1825," *U.S. Naval Institute Proceedings* 37 (1911): 1197-1238.

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Detail of John Forbes & Co. map (n.d.)
showing site of the Negro Fort at Prospect Bluff

Florida Historical Society
University of South Florida

The Negro Fort

James W. Covington

This is the account of a fort situated on the banks of the Apalachicola River in Spanish Florida some fifteen miles from the Gulf of Mexico which American soldiers, sailors and friendly Indians attacked and destroyed in 1816.¹ The fort was built as a result of a British move to use the Creek Indians as auxiliaries in their campaign against the southern port cities of Mobile and New Orleans.² Responding to Upper Creek requests for military aid, the British landed at Saint Vincent Island in Apalachicola Bay in May 1814 and moved fifteen miles up the Apalachicola River to establish a fort and base at Prospect Bluff. The first Indians to contact the British were natives from Florida, but when news reached Pensacola that the British had arrived, the Red Sticks who had fled there after the Battle of Horseshoe Bend moved eastward on foot and by boat to the bluff.³ Military training was given to the Indians by two enlisted men in the Royal Marines and there was a plentiful supply of food, ammunition, and muskets. However, the subsequent combined British and Indian attack upon Fort Bowyer near Mobile was an absolute failure and within a short time Andrew Jackson captured Pensacola.

With the loss of Pensacola, the British paid more attention to Prospect Bluff for it was their major base from which to harass the American frontier with the help of the Indians. A six pound field piece was sent to fortify the fort at Prospect, now known as British Post, and the plans of Lieutenant Robert Christie of the Royal Artillery were followed in digging a four-foot deep and fourteen-foot wide ditch or moat about the planned fort. Pine wood was cut from the nearby forest to serve as a support for the fifteen-foot high and eighteen-foot thick earthen walls. In addition, a double row of logs served as a palisade. A beehive-shaped octagonal powder magazine, thirty feet on a side with a diameter of seventy-two feet, constructed of logs placed in a horizontal position covered with a thick layer of earth, was erected near the middle of the fort. Most of this construction work took place between September and December 1814.⁴

As the British fleet built up strength in the West for the proposed landing near New Orleans, Nicolls of the Royal Marines, operating from Prospect Bluff, raised a force that would collaborate with the fleet. Three companies of Negro Colonial Marines were recruited from the ranks of runaway slaves and slaves liberated in Pensacola during the British occupation.⁵ With the distribution of presents and the news that the invasion fleet was in the Gulf of Mexico, more than 1,100 warriors, 450 women and 755 children had come to Prospect Bluff. Of the total fighting force assembled, 40 percent were Alabama Creeks called Red Sticks, and 30 percent were Seminoles residing in southeastern Georgia and northern Florida. Some 170 blacks made up the remainder.⁶ Despite this large number, only a few were taken to New Orleans in the fleet where they witnessed the overwhelming British defeat.

The British commander Cochrane received news of the Ghent peace treaty in February but plans were not made for withdrawal from Prospect Bluff until the Indian land was restored as specified in Article Nine of the Treaty of Ghent and the treaty was ratified by the Senate. Following the Battle of New Orleans Cochrane ordered Nicolls to return to Prospect Bluff and be ready to continue the fight with several thousand Indians and several hundred blacks as allies. Yet, when it was obvious to all concerned that the British would leave Florida within a short time, Nicolls negotiated two agreements with the Creeks and admonished Indian agent Hawkins that Creek lands in Alabama should be vacated by the settlers.

Since the British did not want to continue the war, a decision was made to remove the troops as quickly as possible and to do little to support their former Indian allies. The British were faced with the prospect of deserting their Indian allies or resuming a long and costly war in order to support their rights as stipulated in the peace treaty. Not surprisingly, they made the decision to leave the Indians to the mercy of the white Americans and depart from Florida as quickly as possible. All that could be done for the Indians would be to leave behind some weapons so that they could defend themselves. Nicolls and Woodbine had great sympathy for the Indians but, being under military orders, were limited in what they could do.

Gradually the Creeks and Seminoles departed from Prospect Bluff leaving the large black population and some Choctaws in control of the area. The black people were mostly former slaves from Pensacola that had been trained for service in the Negro Colonial Marines. There were, in addition, some escaped slaves and their families from the American South. As many as two hundred blacks had been taken from Pensacola by the British and, in addition to this number, others had come from Louisiana and Alabama.⁷ In April, 1815, thinking it certain that the British would leave the Apalachicola River area, Admiral Cochrane sent Captain Richard P. Spencer to Pensacola to make arrangements for the restoration of the slaves at Prospect Bluff to their owners in Pensacola. Accordingly, Captain Vicente Pintado was appointed by the Spanish governor to represent him and the two men proceeded to Apalachicola to secure the return of the blacks. When Spencer's life was threatened by the slaves and Nicolls showed his displeasure at the venture, only those who volunteered to return to Pensacola were taken back.⁸

When the Indians had departed, the blacks, firmly in control, made full use of the nearby village which housed one hundred men and two hundred women and children. They also established a number of small farms mostly growing corn along the Apalachicola as far south as the Gulf of Mexico. Garcon (Garcia), acknowledged leader of the force in the fort after September 1815, maintained a disciplined guard and even a small armed fleet composed of a schooner and several other boats that was alleged to have preyed upon other vessels.⁹ At this time the outpost acquired its second name—Negro Fort. The Apalachicola, like all of the larger rivers in west Florida, rose in southern Alabama or Georgia and was formed by the confluence of the Chattahoochee and Flint

in the southwestern corner of Georgia.¹⁰ Due to the absence of proper roads in the region, the river served as a natural highway into the southern sections of Alabama and Georgia. The United States could not tolerate any blockage of the route.

The Negro Fort, was located on the eastern side of the Apalachicola on the top of a steep hill. To the rear a swamp protected the fort against a land attack and, since the river was only five feet deep near the fort, large vessels could not come in from the Gulf to bombard the place. The British left artillery including one thirty-two pounder, three twenty-four pounders, two nine pounders, two six pounders and one five and one half inch howitzer. This made the fort one of the more heavily fortified positions along a river route in the South.

Americans learned of the changed status of the fort within a short time. After the conclusion of the war, Andrew Jackson was placed in charge of the southern military portion of the country. He, in turn, appointed two brigadier generals to command the southern sector. Edmund Pendleton Gaines, one of the brigadiers, became a member of the three man commission that would survey the boundary lines of the lands surrendered by the Indians at the Treaty of Fort Jackson.¹¹ Finding that the Indians, encouraged by Woodbine and Nicolls, could not accept the terms of the treaty, Gaines came to the conclusion that if the Indians had collected arms in Florida for an attack in the United States, Spanish authorities should not object to Americans "visiting these depots."¹² In order to be ready for any type of trouble Gaines requested Governor Peter Early of South Carolina to keep two thousand militiamen on the alert and wrote to the Secretary of War that as many as six thousand men would be needed to maintain the terms of the treaty.¹³

Trouble seemed ready to develop when the team surveying the Indian cession reached the juncture of Flint and Chattahoochee Rivers. It was joined was threatened by Indians, but the hostiles withdrew when they saw the eight-hundred-man military force that had been assembled in the neighborhood. By December 1815 the boundary line running due east from the Chattahoochee had been marked but Gaines, convinced that conflict was sure to arise, wanted to keep a strong military force in southern Alabama and Georgia.¹⁴ Jackson, agreeing with Gaines, assigned one thousand men to him—a force that was powerful enough to counter any move from the Indians.

At this point, Andrew Jackson decided to take three steps that would lead to better control of the frontier. First, he suggested to Gaines that a fort might be built near the point where the Escambia River crossed the demarcation line. As he moved along the Chattahoochee trying to find a site for the proposed Fort Scott, Gaines visited various Indian villages where he informed the residents that he was ready either for peace or war. Second, Jackson instructed Gaines to check on the Negro Fort and to destroy it if it harbored runaway slaves or induced runaways. Finally, armed with the knowledge that the "marauders on our frontiers are acknowledged officially as rebels against the Government of Spain," Jackson felt free to make plans to destroy the fort and restore any fugitive slaves in the garrison and town to their former owners.¹⁵ Now that

possible problems with the Spanish authorities had been settled, Jackson was ready to move ahead in an operation that seemed relatively simple: "the 4th and 7th Infantry will be sufficient to destroy it [the Negro Fort]. A few troops from the 1st Infantry with a small naval force will prevent their escape." ¹⁶

There were other attempts afoot to determine what threat the Negro Fort constituted and what to do about it. Wanting to open the store at Prospect Bluff, Edmund Doyle, an employee of John Forbes, held two separate meetings with Indian leaders at Saint Marks. However, they gave him little assurance of help in taking the fort. Kinache and Peter McQueen who had learned of the building of Fort Scott near the mouth of the Flint River, regarded the garrison at the Negro Fort as an ally in any conflicts with the whites. Doyle's co-worker Hambly held a meeting with the Lower Creeks at Chiskatalofa where Hambly and Little Prince, the principal leader of the Lower Creeks, tried unsuccessfully to assemble a combined force to attack the Negro Fort. ¹⁷ In fact, the reaction of the pro-British Indians was so violent that both Hambly and Little Prince fled to Fort Gaines where soldiers protected them. Since a considerable number of former Pensacola slaves were at the Negro Fort, John Innerarity of the Forbes Company wanted the place captured and was willing to finance the operation. In addition, Spanish authorities planned to send two ships with forty men to blockade the Apalachicola and prevent supplies from reaching Prospect Bluff. ¹⁸ Too weak to take decisive action the Spanish hoped that either the Americans or the Indians would destroy the fort.

Little Prince visited the Seminoles living near the Apalachicola and came back in April 1816 with a plan to capture the Negro Fort. The Indian leader, using Hambly's letter writing ability to convey a message to Gaines, noted: "No one told us about the building of the fort (Scott). Friends do not take anything from another forcibly. Hawkins told us to go down to fort of blacks and take them out of it and give them back to masters which we will do." ¹⁹ Within a short time Little Prince had returned saying he did his best to get the help of the Seminoles but "they were crazy and would not listen to him." ²⁰ Although Gaines did not trust the Indian, he believed that Little Prince's desire to capture the Negro Fort was worth the issuance of three hundred bushels of corn to him and his men.

With the presence of hostiles along the frontier and the constant observation of the surveyors at work, Gaines ordered Clinch to move quickly on the construction of Fort Scott. Supplying of troops at Camp Crawford, or Fort Scott as it was subsequently known, was a difficult task. Captain Caswell from Fort Jackson found it impossible to furnish provisions for the proposed fort. Secretary of War George Crawford recommended that Gaines appoint a new commissary, possibly with the advice of David Mitchell Governor of Georgia and Bolling Hall, a member of the House of Representatives from Georgia. ²¹ Gaines concluded that it would be more advantageous to obtain supplies from New Orleans and Mobile rather than Georgia. As a result of that decision the use of the Apalachicola route was essential to keep Fort Scott open. Crawford, not knowing about Jackson's correspondence, instructed Gaines to check with Spanish authorities to see if

supplies could be carried along the Apalachicola and, if they did not protest, plans for an approach by the river should be developed.²² In the final plan thirty thousand rations for the men at Fort Scott were ordered at New Orleans and, if vessels carrying these supplies met with opposition by the garrison of the Negro Fort, Clinch was to destroy the fort.

When the surveyors of the Fort Jackson Treaty line became alarmed and refused to work unless guarded by at least one hundred soldiers, Gaines prepared for action.²³ He asked Governor Mitchell for three battalions of mounted men by June 15 for three month's service. He turned to Commodore Daniel Patterson at New Orleans to provide protection for the convoy carrying supplies from New Orleans to the Apalachicola River.²⁴ As the convoy sailed up the river, Clinch was to move by water from Fort Scott to a point near the Negro Fort. The plans for a possible attack on the Negro Fort were adequately prepared but not much was being done about the hostile Indians. No one really knew how many Indians were camped along the rivers or if they wanted to fight with the whites, but William Hambly, a reliable witness, estimated that five hundred were ready for war.

The Gulf and up-river side of the pincer movement against the Negro Fort proceeded very well. Under the command of Lieutenant Charles Crowley, Gunboat 149 left New Orleans on July 2, 1816, and at Pass Christian was joined by the schooner *Semillante* carrying two eighteen pounders, one five and one half inch howitzer and ordnance ammunition, the schooner *General Pike* carrying thirty thousand rations, and Gunboat 154 which was attached to the convoy at Bay St. Louis.²⁵ At this place Sailing Master Louis Jarius Loomis was placed in command of Gunboat 149 and Sailing Master James Bassett in command of 154. Under the command of Loomis the convoy moved towards Saint George's Sound which it reached on July 8, 1816. Commodore Daniel Patterson advised Gaines from New Orleans that the Navy would cooperate fully with the Army but, if it were not practicable to safely anchor the schooners, they would return to New Orleans.²⁶

The various gunboats which had been authorized by Congress in acts passed on April 21, 1806 and December 18, 1807 were soon recognized as being inadequate against a foe with a decent navy. Needing much repair because of rapid decay, they were all phased out of active service by 1820. Gunboats 149 and 154 had been built under direction of Theodore Armistead at Norfolk, Virginia and by 1816 had seen ten years of service.²⁷ Their armaments consisted of one twenty-four or thirty-two pound gun mounted in a pivot or ring allowing a full 360 degrees of movement. Small arms aboard included muskets, boarding axes, pikes, cutlasses, and pistols.²⁸ Despite their poor war record, the gunboats would prove to be the right type of vessel for use on the Apalachicola River.

When the New Orleans convoy arrived at the mouth of the Apalachicola on July 10 it encountered some trouble. John Blount, an Indian leader, was waiting in a canoe to give Loomis a message from Clinch. In the message the army officer requested that Loomis remain at Apalachicola Bay until men from Clinch's force arrived to assist in the movement up the river.²⁹ In addition,

he requested that the naval force block all "vessels and boats" that might attempt to enter the Gulf of Mexico from Apalachicola River. At this point Loomis and Clinch needed to be cautious for blacks and probably Choctaw Indians had concealed themselves near the mouth of the river. Once the convoy moved near the shoreline, only vessels drawing less than ten feet of water could move between Saint George's and Saint Vincent's bar.³⁰ Following Clinch's recommendation, Loomis ordered the ships to set their anchors and await word from the force moving southward along the river. When a boat was detected on the fifteenth moving from the river into the bay, Loomis sent a launch to contact the crew and ascertain if a safe passage up the river to the Negro Fort might be possible. When the launch came close to the approaching boat, the blacks aboard opened fire with their muskets driving the launch back to the anchored fleet where fire from a gunboat forced the blacks to make a quick withdrawal.

The long wait for Clinch to send further instructions caused the crews to use virtually all of the fresh water aboard. Despite the danger, it was necessary to send a party ashore into a dangerous area to refill the water casks.³¹ On July 17 Midshipman Luffborough, accompanied by four men armed with muskets, went to obtain the needed water. When a black was seen on the beach near a farm, Luffborough ordered the boat to swing near the shore but he had run into a trap where a hail of bullets from some forty blacks and Indians concealed in the undergrowth wiped out all resistance from the crew. Luffborough and two men were killed, one was captured, dying later under torture, and only one Able Seaman John Lopaz was able to save his life by diving from the boat and swimming to an island. After losing these men during the wait for Clinch's message, Loomis began to assert his authority as an equal and not as one acting under the orders of Clinch as he had previously done.

One hundred and twenty miles above the Negro Fort, Clinch made preparations for his part of the pincer movement. He prepared a small fleet composed of six flat-bottomed boats covered with clapboard roofs to protect the passengers and baggage from snipers' fire for the descent of the river. Just before leaving, Clinch sent John Blount with the letter of instructions to the New Orleans convoy described earlier. When Blount returned on the fifteenth of July with a letter from Loomis announcing his arrival and receipt of the message, Clinch left Camp Crawford (Fort Scott) with 116 men divided into two detachments—one boat company commanded by Major Peter Muhlenberg and another by Captain William Taylor.³² As pre-arranged on the first night of the trip Major William McIntosh with 150 Indians from Coweta, a Lower Creek town, joined Clinch's force.³³ On the morning of the next day, the eighteenth, Clinch was also joined by an old Indian leader called Captain Isaacs and Choctaw leader Koteha-haigo (Mad Tiger) with many followers but carrying few arms. He met these Indians by accident. They were on the prowl for runaway slaves that they could capture and restore to their owners for a reward.³⁴ Altogether perhaps five hundred Indians now accompanied Clinch. That night he held a council with them promising a share of any possible booty and a

reward for every black captured but warning them that advance scouts must be sent out to avoid an ambush. On the same night the Indians captured a black carrying a scalp taken from one of Luffborough's men which he was carrying to the Seminoles. The prisoner told Clinch that the black and Choctaw commanders of the fort had been at the mouth of the Apalachicola where their men had killed several whites and captured one boat in an engagement before returning to the fort.

Since the gunboats had not yet arrived and it seemed that the convoy was trouble, Clinch decided to attack the fort with the forces at his disposal. After sending Blount again to meet Bassett and tell him that his force had arrived at the fort, Clinch informed the Indian leaders about his plan of attack and directed McIntosh's men to surround the fort. Although the combined force of Indians and whites had a numerical superiority, the fifteen foot high earthen parapet and the forts eight pieces of artillery, proved to be an effective deterrent. As a result Clinton ordered McIntosh to keep one third of his men as close to the fort as possible and to maintain fire from hidden positions.

As the noise of the Lower Creek and Choctaw musket fire and the return volleys of cannon and muskets by the Choctaws and blacks was heard by blacks in nearby farms along the Apalachicola, they fled to other places for safety such as Bowleg's town on the Suwannee and as far south as Tampa Bay. One of the best known of these was Abraham. He had been recruited by Nicolls at Pensacola and taken to Prospect Bluff where he probably lived in a nearby village. Fleeing from the Apalachicola River, he reached Bowleg's village where he became a trusted advisor and interpreter.³⁵

Since the fort could not be captured by a surprise attack, Clinch decided to send some Indian leaders to negotiate a surrender. Surprisingly enough on the evening of July 23 a delegation of Indians was permitted to pass within the gates of the fort where they were verbally abused by Garcon and his men. Garcon told the Indians that he had been left in charge of the fort by the British and that he and his men would sink any vessel that tried to pass.³⁶ As the party was ushered from the fort they noted that the blacks had hoisted the red flag of no surrender and the British flag.

Garcon and his well trained men had demonstrated to the Creeks their determination to stay in the fort. Indeed Garcon had proved to be an able leader. The naval movement into Apalachicola Bay had been detected by his scouts and the ambush which followed was well executed. Not having artillery available in the lower river, Garcon and his men then moved back to the fort. When the Creeks attempted to capture the fort, they were forced back by heavy musket and artillery fire. Judging from results of these first two engagements, the blacks had bested a force that greatly outnumbered them.

At this point army and naval accounts of the episode began to differ. By ordering the Indian attack upon the fort, Clinch had been doing things on his own authority without consultation with Loomis. The original plan was to have the convoy be fired upon and the military, using the gunfire as an excuse, attack the fort. Artillery support for the Indians and soldiers would be the two eighteen

pounders brought to the area by the convoy and the guns of the gunboats anchored along side. Major Muhlenberg and Captain Taylor were instructed to cross the river and begin the construction of platforms where the artillery could be placed leaving Lieutenant McGavick and a smaller detachment of men with the Indians to guard the rear.³⁷ Plans were made for the transport *Similante* to land the eighteen pounders on Forbes Island during the night and the gun boats as ordered by Clinch would move into position along side the guns and a barrage directed against the Negro Fort would begin.³⁸

The navy account as submitted by Loomis, which seems more reliable than the one written by Clinch, presents a somewhat different picture. On the twentieth he received messages from Clinch carried by five Indians stating that he had arrived with his troops and Indians one mile north of the fort and requesting that Loomis join him. Two days later on the twenty-second Loomis and his men heard the musket fire and heavy cannonade from the fort in response to the Indian attack.³⁹ On the twenty-third he received a verbal message carried by two Indians and a white man requesting that Loomis and the convoy move up the river to Duelling Bluff where the naval force would await Clinch. Loomis did not obey this request for he did not trust a verbal message and the river being very narrow at that point made all boats easy targets.⁴⁰ One Indian and the white were kept as hostages and the other Indian was sent back with a message to Clinch stating that future communications should be in writing and carried by an officer. Lieutenant Wilson with thirteen men from Clinch's force arrived on the next day to assist the transports moving up the river.

Clinch and Loomis were able to confer on the 25th at Duelling Bluff four miles below the fort. Clinch told Loomis that when he attempted to pass the fort he was fired upon by the blacks and during the past four or five days whenever his soldiers showed themselves, they were met by gunfire. The two men walking around the outskirts of the fortification decided that the land forces should erect a small battery composed of the two eighteen pounders on Forbes Island to assist the gunboats forcing a passage of the river. According to the naval version, after Clinch's men had cleared the underbrush to place the guns, he confessed he knew little or nothing about artillery and that the distance from proposed gun positions to the fort was too great and the artillery would be of little help.⁴¹ After Clinch ordered his men to cease operations Loomis responded that he would ascend the river without military assistance.

Early in the morning of July 25, the two gunboats moved into position to begin the engagement but Garcon and his men opened fire first. Gunboat 154 after finding the correct distance with the firing of several rounds of cold shot, fired a ball that had been made red hot in the galley. It entered the largest powder magazine in the fort and instantly caused a terrible explosion and the fort was turned into ruins. Of the 334 men, women, and children within 207 were killed and the rest mortally wounded or terribly maimed. Some claimed that William Hambly guided the convoy to the fort and showed the sailors where to aim the cannon but Loomis gave no recognition of such services.⁴²

Within a short time the men from the convoy and besieging military force moved into the fort to render justice, minister to the wounded, and collect some booty. Of the sixty-four prisoners taken, only three were not wounded. Of these three, one was Garcon and the other a Choctaw chief. When the Americans learned that Edward Daniels, the captured seaman, had been tarred and burned alive, they gave the two to the Lower Creeks and friendly Choctaws who shot Garcon and scalped and stabbed to death the Choctaw leader. The Indians' allies searched for wounded Choctaws and killed any they found. Edmund Doyle, Forbes Company employee, was fourteen miles away on a Spanish schooner but was not permitted by its captain to go to the fort to treat the wounded and take them back to Pensacola. When he learned of this his boss, John Innerarity, became very upset about the lack of medical assistance available for the twenty wounded blacks.⁴³ Virtually all of the surviving blacks in the fort were given to William Hambly to deliver to the owners in Pensacola. Escaped slaves from American plantations, captured in the sweep through the area by the troops and Indians, were taken to Fort Scott to be returned to previous American owners.

Although the explosion blew up the principal powder magazine and killed over 80 percent of the people within the fort, many valuable items had been stored in the nearby village and as a result were not damaged. They became the objects of disputed claims between the army and navy. Since Clinch had made a prior agreement with the Indians, 163 barrels of gunpowder, clothing, and a considerable number of firearms were given to them. Loomis and Clinch had a prolonged discussion concerning what was to be done with the other captured articles—did they belong to the army or navy or both services?⁴⁴ Clinch, who apparently lost the argument, received the brass howitzer, 26 spades, 54 pick axes, 20 muskets and an assorted number of small items.⁴⁵

The remaining items were carried aboard the *General Pike* inventoried and taken to New Orleans. Included in the property valued at \$200,000 which taken from the fort and loaded aboard the schooner were four twenty-four pounder cannons, one four pounder, three ammunition wagons, 502 muskets, 1,200 bayonets and assorted belts, weapon containers, and the two flags that had been raised over the fort by the defenders.⁴⁶ Missing from the inventory were four six pounder cannons, and 762 barrels of cannon powder but they may have been damaged and subsequently destroyed. Patterson, the commander at New Orleans, wrote to Washington asserting that since the operation was strictly a naval one, the army should not have any of the booty.⁴⁷ In reply the Secretary of the Navy said that the matter brought up an interesting point in jurisdiction that would have to be resolved by the next Congress.⁴⁸ In the same letter the Secretary noted that the government may reward its naval or military officers according to importance of services by distributing among them the captured property in such proportions as may be deemed proper. At first, when the operation was planned the navy's role was "cooperation with the Army," but since the navy had destroyed the fort after the army and Indian allies had proved ineffective, Patterson and the Secretary of the Navy were eager to claim the guns and equipment as prizes to which they were fully entitled.

Having achieved their goal, the American forces prepared for a quick departure from the scene. Since the river was too shallow to permit passage of the schooners with heavy loads, all of the cargo of the *General Pike* and part of that of the *Semilante* were transferred to small boats and the *Semilante* and the small boats made the ascent to Fort Scott. Loomis, after setting fire to the ruins of the Negro Fort and its village, set sail down the river. At the mouth of the river he met an armed Spanish schooner whose commander, Don Benigno García Calderón, demanded the transfer of artillery and ammunition to his ship. Loomis refused his request.⁴⁹

The Negro Fort represented a haven for the escaped slaves that plantation owners could not tolerate. The Apalachicola River had to be a safe highway in order to construct and maintain forts to protect settlers in southern Georgia from the Indians. In support of the American action, Spanish Governor Zúñiga told others that obstructions to his authority had been removed at no expense to him. During the fall of 1816 Fort Scott was abandoned and given to the care of George Perryman, a white-Creek leader. He soon left the place when threatened by hostile Seminoles from Fowltown, a nearby village under the leadership of Neamathla, a Red Stick. It seems apparent that Fort Scott was not erected only to protect the settlers from the Indians but also to serve as a post from which needed supplies could be carried via the Apalachicola River. This would inevitably create a situation in which the blacks in the Negro Fort would fire upon the boats resulting in the subsequent retaliation and destruction of that fort. As a result, black people were denied a place in the Florida panhandle where they could live in freedom. There were other places in Florida where the Seminoles offered a safe haven for blacks where they could be secure—until the Second Seminole War which started in 1835.

Notes

¹ The attack and speedy withdrawal was one of three made into the peninsula from American territory during the period from 1812 to 1818. It was the only one that did not provoke angry protests or limited resistance on the part of the Spanish. Probably due to the success of this operation Andrew Jackson was encouraged to make another in March 1818.

² Earl Bathurst to Charles Cameron, March 30, 1814, folio 2328, National Library of Scotland, Edinburgh, cited hereafter as Cochrane Papers; John Mahon, *The War of 1812* (Gainesville, 1972), 341; Frank L. Owsley, Jr., *Struggle for the Gulf Borderlands: the Creek War and the Battle for New Orleans* (Gainesville, 1981), 96-100.

³ The nativistic or Red Stick faction of the Upper Creek Indians, influenced by the teachings of Tecumseh, took part in a civil war against the pro-American Lower Creeks in 1813. The conflict developed into a war with the white Americans which ended at the Battle of Horseshoe Bend in 1814. Only one half or less of the twenty-five to thirty thousand Creeks were considered members of the Red Stick faction. For details of the Creek War see H. S. Halbert and T. H. Ball, *The Creek War of 1813 and 1814* (University, AL, 1969); R. S. Cotterill, *The Southern Indians: The Story of the Civilized Tribes before Removal* (Norman, OK, 1954), 146-93; Thereon A. Nunez, "Creek Nativism and the

Creek War of 1813-14," *Ethnohistory* 5 (Winter, Spring, Summer, 1958): 1-47, 131-75, 292-301; Mahon, *The War of 1812*, 232-44 and Owsley, *Struggle for the Gulf*, 33-85.

⁴ Alexander Cochrane to Charles Cameron, July 4, 1814, Cochrane Papers; Nicolls to Cochrane, July 27, 1814, *ibid.* The figures for dimensions of the fort were taken from Stephen R. Poe, "Archaeological Excavations at Fort Gadsden, Florida," *Notes in Anthropology* 8 (1963): 4-8, Florida Anthropological Society. Lt. Robert Cristie Ambrister may have designed both the fort at Prospect Bluff and the one two miles below the juncture of the Chattahoochee and Flint rivers. Coker and Watson, *Indian Traders* (Pensacola, 1986), 289. The fort at Prospect Bluff was erected just north of Fort Gadsden Creek on the eastern half of southwestern quarter of Section 23, T 6 South, Range 8 West. Mark F. Boyd, "Events at Prospect Bluff on the Apalachicola River, 1808-1818," *Florida Historical Quarterly* 16 (October 1937): 63.

⁵ Nicolls to Cochrane, December 3, 1814, Cochrane Papers.

⁶ Boyd, "Events at Prospect Bluff," 72.

⁷ Kenneth W. Porter "The Negro Abraham," *Florida Historical Quarterly* 25 (July 1946): 7.

⁸ William S. Coker and Thomas D. Watson, *Indian Traders of the Southeastern Spanish Borderlands: Pantón, Leslie and Company and John Forbes and Company, 1783-1847* (Pensacola, 1986), 291. When the British departed, they took some two hundred blacks for settlement in Bermuda.

⁹ James Innerarity to John Forbes, August 12, 1815, "The Pantón, Leslie Papers," *Florida Historical Quarterly* 12 (July 1933): 128. After the blacks had taken control of the fort, a large number of them left in several vessels for the Savannah River in Georgia. Had they remained, Garçon would have possessed a strong naval force.

¹⁰ James W. Silver, *Edmund Pendleton Gaines: Frontier General* (Baton Rouge, 1949), 54; Crawford to Gaines, March 30, 1816, Microcopy Roll 414, Letters Received by Secretary of War Crawford, Registered Series, 1801-1816, December 1815-December 1816, D-L G-37(9), National Archives Microfilm Publications.

¹¹ Silver, *Gaines*, 56.

¹² *Ibid.*, 57.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 58.

¹⁴ Gaines to Secretary of War, April 6, 1816, Microcopy Roll 414.

¹⁵ Governor Mauricio Zúñiga to Andrew Jackson, May 25, 1816. *American State Papers: Foreign Relations* 4: 556-57; Jackson to Secretary of War, June 15, 1816, *ibid.*, 557.

¹⁶ *Ibid.* The reply of Zúñiga, commander of Pensacola, to Jackson's letter dated May 25, 1817, which was hand delivered by Captain Ferdinand Amelung, United States Army, might be interpreted as permission to intercede in Florida if authorities in Cuba did not provide additional protection. Edwin C. McReynolds, *The Seminoles* (Norman, 1957), 75-76.

¹⁷ Little Prince, a proposed successor to Alexander McGillivray as leader of the Creeks, had led an attack upon the Panton, Leslie store at St. Marks and been an ally of William Augustus Bowles. Coker and Watson, *Indian Traders*, 177, 239, 254.

¹⁸ Coker and Watson, *Indian Traders*, 305.

¹⁹ Tustanugge Hapoy (Little Prince) to Commander of U.S. forces in Indian Nation, April 26, 1816, Microcopy Roll 414.

²⁰ Silver, *Gaines*, 62.

²¹ Letters sent, Secretary of War Crawford to Gaines May 27, 1816, Microcopy Roll 414.

²² Crawford to Gaines July 4, 1816, *ibid*.

²³ Major Thomas Freeman to Gaines, May 22, 1816, *ibid*.

²⁴ Gaines to Commodore Daniel T. Patterson, May 22, 1816, *American State Papers: Foreign Relations* 4: 558-59. For details of Daniel Patterson's life see Wilburt S. Brown, *The Amphibious Campaign for West Florida and Louisiana, 1814-1815* (University, AL, 1969), 9-10.

²⁵ Loomis to Patterson, August 13, 1816, *American State Papers: Foreign Relations*, 4: 559-60.

²⁶ Captain Daniel Patterson to Gaines, June 17, 1816, G71-9 Microcopy Roll 414, January 1-December 31, 1816.

²⁷ Howard I. Chapelle, *The History of the American Sailing Navy* (New York, 1949), 335.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 240.

²⁹ Report of Operations of Loomis, August 15, 1816, Letters Received Secretary of Navy from Captains, 1805-1861, Roll 50, July 1-September 29, 1816, National Archives Microfilm Publications hereafter cited as Captain's Letters. Larfauka or John Blount was an Upper Creek leader who sided with the whites in the 1813-14 Creek war. After the Negro Fort was destroyed, Blount and his people moved into the area above Prospect Bluff and remained there until removed to the West. J. Leitch Wright, *Creeks and Seminoles: the Destruction and Regeneration of the Muscogulge People* (Lincoln, 1986), 209.

³⁰ Captain Vero Amelung to Jackson, June 4, 1816, *American State Papers: Foreign Relations* 4: 557.

³¹ Loomis Operations Report.

³² Clinch to Adjutant-General, August 2, 1816, Microcopy Roll 414.

³³ William McIntosh, a Lower Creek leader was the son of Captain William McIntosh, a British agent to the Indians, and a Coweta Creek mother. He was very wealthy, owning two large plantations and a tavern. Wright, *Creek and Seminoles*, 166-67.

³⁴ Clinch to Adjutant-General, August 2, 1816, Microcopy Roll 414.

- ³⁵ Kenneth Wiggins Porter, "The Negro Abraham" in *The Negro on the American Frontier* (New York, 1971), 301-4.
- ³⁶ Clinch to Adjutant-General, August 2, 1816, Microcopy Roll 414.
- ³⁷ Clinch to Secretary of War John C. Calhoun, October 29, 1819. Negro Fort, 1816-1819, Miscellaneous File, Envelope 218, E 287, BA 12, Secretary of War Records, National Archives. Although Loomis claimed that in the position Clinch selected the guns could be aimed point blank, A. W. Fanning measured the distance three years later and found the guns were three thousand yards away from the fort. Captain Alexander W. Fanning to Clinch, June 10, 1819, *ibid.* Both Clinch and Fanning claimed that the report written by Loomis contained numerous errors.
- ³⁸ Clinch to Adjutant-General, August 2, 1816, Microcopy Roll 414.
- ³⁹ Loomis Operations. Both the biography of Duncan Clinch by Rembert W. Patrick, *Aristocrat in Uniform: General Duncan L. Clinch* (Gainesville, FL, 1963) and the biography of Edmund Gaines by James W. Silver, *Edmund Pendleton Gaines: Frontier General* have virtually ignored the naval records of the brief engagement.
- ⁴⁰ *Ibid.*
- ⁴¹ Patterson to Secretary of Navy, August 15, 1816, Captain's Letters.
- ⁴² Coker and Watson, *Indian Traders of the Southeastern Spanish Borderlands*, 308.
- ⁴³ John Innerarity to James Innerarity, August 13, 1816, "The Panton, Leslie Papers," 37-39.
- ⁴⁴ Patterson to Secretary of Navy, August 15, 1816, Captain's Letters.
- ⁴⁵ Inventory of articles received by Clinch for use of command, *ibid.*
- ⁴⁶ Inventory of articles taken on board schooner *General Pike* now lying in Apalachicola River and bound for New Orleans by Loomis, *ibid.*
- ⁴⁷ Patterson to Secretary of Navy, August 15, 1816, *ibid.*
- ⁴⁸ Secretary of Navy to Patterson, October 5, 1816, *ibid.*
- ⁴⁹ Boyd, "Events at Prospect Bluff," 82.

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Charles E. Hawkins: Sailor of Three Republics

James M. Denham

In October 1835 Mexico's northern province of Texas was in revolt against authorities in Mexico City. A rebel army was being hastily organized and the rebellious Americans chose Sam Houston as their general. With volunteers flocking into Texas pledging to join the fight for independence, Houston wrote the Texas commissioners in support of one aspirant: "Gentlemen, With pleasure, I recommend . . . Major Chas. E. Hawkins who is anxious to embark in the Naval service of Texas. For several years I have been acquainted with the major." Hawkins, the general wrote, served "in the U. States Navy . . . as a brave and capable officer. In 1826 he left . . . the U. States, and entered the Mexican Navy, under Commodore [David] Porter." Hawkins was also "familiarily acquainted with the coast of the Gulph." Houston insisted that there was "not any other individual, whom I wou'd rather see interested in the Navy of Texas. . . . I believe him to be the most important acquisition which we can obtain to our service at this time." Houston's and other well placed recommendations had their desired effect. Within weeks Hawkins was named First Commodore of the Texas Navy.¹

By 1835 Charles Edward Hawkins's career as a naval officer in the Gulf of Mexico had spanned almost two decades. As an officer in the navies of the United States, the United Mexican States, and the Republic of Texas, Hawkins participated in the United States' campaign against piracy, the Mexican War of Independence, and the Texas War for Independence. The chronicle of his active life is instructive of maritime affairs in the Gulf of Mexico during the early national period.

A native of New York, Charles Hawkins began his career in the United States Navy in 1818 as an eighteen-year-old midshipman on board the United States frigate *Guerriere*.² At the time Hawkins joined the service, the United States Navy already had a distinguished past. The exploits of Commodore Edward Preble and Stephen Decatur in the Tripolitan Wars (1801-1805) were proudly noted by all Americans. Even more significant were American naval successes against the British navy in the War of 1812. American naval exploits in that conflict confirmed the reality of American independence. As one scholar has noted, America's victories at sea ushered in a "pantheon of heroes, helpful in creating a sense of nationality in a loosely united people."³ Moreover, United States naval power had helped win respect for America among other major powers. A new era of national patriotism had begun.

On July 24, 1818, Midshipman Charles Hawkins sailed from Boston Harbor toward Europe on board the USS *Guerriere*. In 1818 the United States Navy was still a navy of wood and sail. The emerging technology of steam, already in use on private vessels plying America's inland waterways and open ocean, was not employed until the late 1830s. As a midshipman in the United States Navy, Hawkins found discipline harsh and advancement uncertain. Flogging was common—at least until reforms mitigating corporal punishment were enacted

by Congress in the 1840s. In 1818 the United States Navy included 645 officers, a large majority of which were midshipmen. Locked in between large numbers of midshipmen and a few captains were huge ranks of junior class officers with little hope for promotion. The reality of this situation, as one scholar has noted, made "it commonplace to see thirty-year-old midshipmen and lieutenants of fifty." ⁴

On October 4, 1819, Hawkins sailed into Norfolk harbor on board the frigate *Guerriere* after a one-and-a-half-year-long Mediterranean cruise. For the next several years he remained attached to the *Guerriere* at the Norfolk Naval Yard. In 1821 he was transferred to the *Washington*, a seventy-four gun ship-of-the-line stationed in New York. The *Washington* remained in port for the next three years. ⁵ In 1823, upon request, Secretary of Navy Smith Thompson granted Hawkins a one year furlough without pay. With uninspiring assignments, and the prospects for promotion unlikely, Hawkins may have investigated the possibility of joining another navy. ⁶

At the same time the Monroe Administration faced a major crisis in the Gulf of Mexico. The outbreak of independence movements throughout Spain's crumbling New World empire put maritime stability in extreme peril. A number of the new emerging Latin-American republics began commissioning privateers to raid Spanish shipping. Prizes seized by privateers provided needy governments with cash and at the same time weakened Spain. Even Spain commissioned privateers to supplement its dwindling naval strength. Spanish authorities dispatched privateers from ports in Cuba and Puerto Rico to enforce blockades imposed on colonies held by patriot forces.

But privateers were difficult to control. They often raided all shipping indiscriminately. Such an unstable situation encouraged an even more dangerous problem—piracy. In fact, privateer commissions were so easy to obtain, supervision so lax, and seizures so indiscriminate, that some charged that the whole system amounted to a refined system of piracy. Several well-publicized piratical atrocities stimulated public demands for strong action. With American commerce threatened, something had to be done. The only solution was an expanded American naval presence in the Gulf of Mexico. In 1822 the West India Squadron, with its base in Key West, was created. With it began an intensive four-year-long campaign against piracy in the Caribbean directed by three of the United States Navy's most able commanders—James Biddle, David Porter, and Lewis Warrington. ⁷

In 1825 Hawkins found himself on board the United States frigate *Constellation*, the flagship of the West India Squadron. ⁸ The commander of the *Constellation* was Captain Lewis Warrington, who inherited this command from Captain David Porter. Porter was facing a court martial in Washington for his high-handed actions toward the mayor of Fajardo, Puerto Rico. Eventually reprimanded and given a six-month suspension, Porter refused to accept the verdict. He began investigating the prospect of offering his services to a foreign power.

Though Porter's efforts had made a major step toward clearing the Caribbean of pirates, the threat still existed. Warrington's vessels patrolled the coasts of Puerto Rico and Cuba where pirates still sought shelter. After transporting Joel

Poinsett, the American Minister to Mexico, to his post at Veracruz, the *Constellation*, rounded Cuba in search of Colombian privateers.

As a midshipman in Warrington's squadron, Charles Hawkins became acquainted with the Caribbean. Most of all, he familiarized himself with Key West. Porter had made this island location the base for the West India Squadron. Outbreaks of malaria and yellow fever proved the site extremely unhealthy. In June 1825 Captain Warrington received orders to "make at least a temporary removal" to Pensacola. Yet the strategic location of the base, plus the commercial activity of the area, dictated that it would be re-occupied at some future date. Nevertheless, Hawkins participated in the dismantling of the stores and buildings occupied by the war department.⁹

Late that summer, when the West India Squadron entered Pensacola, Hawkins received orders that he was again being transferred to New York. On arriving at his new port he learned that the United States Navy's most talented officer was about to enter the Mexican Navy.¹⁰ Ever since David Porter's court martial and suspension from the United States Navy, the captain had been negotiating in Washington with the Mexican minister to the United States to enter that country's navy as its ranking officer. A joint Mexican and Colombian fleet was contemplated and neither republic had an officer with the skill and experience needed to command such a force.¹¹ Talented American seamen were in great demand among the emerging Latin American republics engaged in wars of independence against Spain. Americans were trained in the complicated sciences of navigation and gunnery. Still more had extensive knowledge of the upper Caribbean—knowledge that was indispensable if they were to be able to harass Spanish shipping.

President John Quincy Adams was conscious of Captain Porter's negotiations with Mexico and was determined to thwart his plans to take other American officers with him. On February 10, 1826, Adams recorded in his diary that Porter "proposes to go to [Mexico] to ascertain whether it will be in his interest to enter the Mexican service. He wishes all his officers to go into that service with him." Adams ordered the Secretary of the Navy not to allow furloughs to any officers he suspected might join Porter. Adams was also concerned about growing diplomatic difficulties with Spain—especially since he was informed that Mexico was planning an invasion of Cuba. "This is the project which we ought by no means to encourage or countenance. If any officer is to be furloughed, let it be for avowed reasons of his own concerns, but not from any connection with Porter."¹²

Midshipmen were most attracted to serving in the navies of Latin-American republics. In the U.S. Navy they drew a paltry salary of \$319 a year.¹³ With pay low and promotion uncertain, service in the Mexican navy offered opportunities for enterprising officers to build reputations fighting the Spanish. Officers would also have a share in the prize money resulting from seizure of Spanish commercial vessels. However, only a handful of United States naval personnel joined Porter. But one of them was Charles Edward Hawkins.

On April 22, 1826, Porter and the other Americans embarked for Mexico on board the *Guerrero*, a warship constructed under contract by an American shipbuilder. About seventy men sailed on board the ship. Besides Porter and Hawkins, the other officers were Porter's nephew, Lieutenant David H. Porter, who commanded the vessel, Porter's two sons, a surgeon, and Porter's private secretary.¹⁴ The *Guerrero* reached Veracruz on May 15, 1826, and Porter immediately proceeded to Mexico City to finalize the terms of his contract. Hiring Porter and the other Americans was controversial. Many doubted their loyalty. Nevertheless, Porter finally accepted the Mexican terms and resigned his commission in the United States Navy effective July 1, 1826. He then proceeded at once to Veracruz and took command of the Mexican fleet. He made the frigate *Libertad* his flagship. Porter gave temporary command of the vessel to Hawkins while the commodore personally supervised the supplying and fitting out of the ships.

Porter inherited a Mexican navy composed of sailors of varying backgrounds. Some had even served as privateers or pirates. Morale was low, discipline lax, and the Mexican navy had none of the rules and regulations characteristic of the American or British service. Writing a number of years later, Porter's son recalled that shipmates and officers were accustomed to sleeping on their watches, leaving their vessels without an officer on board, playing cards and smoking cigars on the quarterdeck, and wearing night shirts on duty. Porter instituted harsh disciplinary measures and within several months the navy was ready for action.¹⁵

On December 5, 1826, the Mexican fleet sailed from Veracruz toward Cuba. The mission was to harass Spanish commerce around Cuba—so much so as to force Spanish recognition of Mexican independence. The tiny Mexican fleet leaving Veracruz consisted of four ships: the *Libertad*, thirty-two guns; the brig *Victoria*, twenty guns; the brig *Bravo*, eighteen guns; and the schooner *Hermon*, five guns. Once Spanish Admiral Angel LaBorde learned of Porter's presence in the area, he put out to sea from Havana to meet him. Confronted by two frigates and three brigs, Porter ordered the *Libertad* and the *Bravo* into Key West. The *Victoria* and the *Hermon*, now commanded by Hawkins, stayed out at sea and evaded the Spanish.

Porter knew that Key West was free of American naval vessels. The only American official which might protest to an extended presence there was Port Collector William Pinckney, the nephew of his close friend Captain John Rodgers. It is likely that Porter intended from the outset to use Key West as a base to harass Spanish shipping. Robert Bidwell, historian of the Mexican navy, speculates that the use of Key West was so crucial to Porter's campaign, that the captain had even discussed the use of the evacuated American base with his government before leaving Veracruz.¹⁶ The proximity of LaBorde's Spanish fleet offered a plausible excuse to stay there since Porter could always claim that he was merely being blockaded. At any rate, the port was open and Porter made use of it.

LaBorde's "blockade," if a blockade at all, was unsuccessful. By February 1827 Porter's vessels had captured a number of prizes and sent several back to Veracruz. For the next several months, the *Victoria* and Hawkins's *Hermón* slipped in and out of Key West, evading capture. With financial support for his operations lacking, Porter planned to use money from prizes to sustain his fleet. It was not long before Porter's actions drew criticism from Americans all along the Atlantic and Gulf coasts. On June 2, 1827, an angry commentator in *Niles Weekly Register* remarked that Captain Porter had made Key West a base "for carrying on a predatory and inglorious war against the coasters of Cuba. This must not be permitted." The writer expressed sympathy with Mexico's struggle against Spanish colonial oppression, but cautioned that Spain might act in the face of American inaction. Cuba was the largest importer of American goods, and Spain might shut her ports in retaliation. "Our territory," he asserted, "must not be used for hostile purposes. . . . We cannot allow any foreigner to involve us in his quarrel. It would be better for us that Key West was shoveled into the sea. Let Commodore Porter seek the open sea and there do what the law permits to *his* enemy—but not shelter himself under the flag which he has abandoned. . . . We hope that his vessels will no longer be permitted to go out and return" with their prizes.¹⁷

The Mexican fleet's activities in Key West represented a major crisis for the Adams administration. By February 1827 the Spanish minister in Washington had already lodged a series of protests against Porter's extended presence in Key West. Adams held cabinet meetings to consider what to do about Porter. Of particular concern was what the American response would be should LaBorde attack the Mexican fleet in United States territory. American neutrality laws made Porter's actions illegal.¹⁸ Above all, Adams was determined that Porter "should not be permitted to make our territory his lair for sallying forth upon his enemy." As architect of the Monroe Doctrine, Adams was particularly sensitive about Porter's activity. The President, through United States Minister to Mexico Joel Poinsett, lodged a series of complaints against Porter's long-term presence in Key West. Poinsett protested that Porter's activities were "totally incompatible with the state of neutrality in which the United States stands in relation to the existing war between Mexico and Spain." Moreover, Porter had increased "his force, and [sent] out cruisers to harass Spanish Commerce" from Key West. Later that year Porter even further aggravated Washington by issuing a statement that henceforth all carriers supplying Spain with "contraband" would be seized and re-routed to Veracruz for "release or condemnation."¹⁹ Key West Port Collector Charles Pinckney was specifically instructed not to "permit any violation of neutrality by the Commodore; particularly that he be not allowed to fit out his prizes there as privateers and then order them to return there with their prizes and that he should not be allowed to arm, or in any manner increase his force there." Finally, authorities in Washington also ordered West India squadron commander Charles Ridgely to visit Key West regularly to assist the collector in enforcing the neutrality laws.²⁰

Despite what appeared an obvious violation of American neutrality laws, Porter continued his reckless behavior. Leaving Hawkins and the other raiders behind in Key West, Porter used his popularity to mount a recruiting expedition along the upper Gulf Coast. From July to September 1827, he visited Pensacola, Mobile, and New Orleans. Issuing stirring calls to patriotism, and no doubt offers to share in prizes, he succeeded in attracting patriotic Americans to join the Mexicans in their "fight for liberty against the tyranny of Spain." Porter's efforts resulted in the recruitment of over one hundred naval volunteers. Though temporarily detained in New Orleans, the recruits shipped out of that city on board the *Guerrero*.

On August 31, 1827, Key West Port Collector Pinckney wrote Secretary of Treasury Richard Rush that the "Mexican fleet put to sea . . . this morning. The Spanish squadron has not been seen . . . for some time."²¹ The *Libertad*, and the *Bravo*, sailed north to join the *Guerrero* at Pensacola for a return voyage to Veracruz. But the *Hermon* continued to use the port as a base to harass Spanish shipping. As her captain, Hawkins habitually brought prizes into port and disposed of captured cargo. Over the next year-and-a-half, the raiding expeditions of the *Hermon* and the privateer *Molestradore*, commanded by Colombian national Charles Hopner, comprised the entire activities of the Mexican navy. Political confusion and the poverty of the crumbling Mexican regime kept Porter and the rest of his fleet in Veracruz. Hawkins operated essentially without the supervision of the Mexican authorities.²² The *Hermon* and its crew became well known in Key West. From this location Hawkins directed his raiding excursions against Cuba.

In Fall 1827 the *Hermon* and the *Molestradore* made a brief patrol of the Yucatan, and returned to Veracruz for a short stopover. On January 5, 1828, the *Hermon* left Veracruz and headed toward Cuba. On January 22, she attacked a Spanish schooner and chased it into a Cuban port. Without waiting for other Spanish vessels to arrive, Hawkins took his ship to within a few miles of Havana and captured three unguarded schooners and a barge. Sending the schooners to Key West, he returned the barge and prisoners to Havana. With the Spanish fleet alerted, he made for Key West, but he did not stay long. In early February he left port and took out two small Spanish vessels from a convoy.

Hawkins's flaunting of American neutrality laws so incensed Pinckney that he immediately issued a dispatch to American consul Thomas Rodney in Havana requesting help. "The Mexican brig *Hermon*, Captain Hawkins, has twice visited this port within three weeks past accompanied by prizes which have been ransomed or sold in this port contrary to the pledged word of the Mexican officer. I am without means," complained Pinckney, "to enforce respect to the sovereignty and neutral character of the United States and I request that you will communicate this letter to the commander of any United States vessel of war which may be in Havana in order that a recurrence of such mortifying circumstances may be prevented in the future."²³

The *Hermon*, joined by the *Bravo*, and Hopner's *Molestradore*, continued its raiding activities. Soon matters between Hawkins and Port Collector Pinckney

reached a crisis. On June 20, the *Hermon* arrived in Key West in a storm-wrecked condition. Captain George Budd of the United States frigate *Natchez* ordered Hawkins away. Hawkins left that morning but was put under arrest when he reappeared off shore a few days later. Meanwhile, Hopner and the crew of the *Molestradore* were also taken into custody. As Hopner and his crew were breaking down two prizes on the Tortugas, they were surprised by a force sent out by Budd. Hopner, his crew, and the *Molestradore* were seized and put under arrest. The next day authorities in Key West brought formal charges against Hawkins and Hopner for violating the neutrality laws. Released on \$1,000 bail, both men were permitted to sail for Veracruz.²⁴

Hawkins continually denied any wrongdoing with regard to his activities in Key West. In a statement issued from Key West on October 16, 1828, published in the Pensacola *Gazette*, Hawkins denied that he had conducted "illicit Commerce" in Key West. He also demanded that the *Gazette* correct "erroneous" charges which it had circulated about him.²⁵

By the time Hawkins and Hopner returned to Mexico, the country was entirely consumed with Santa Anna's attempt to take over the government. Also the threat of a Spanish invasion, the poverty of the government, and the distrust of Porter and his American officers, virtually destroyed the Mexican navy.²⁶ Realizing that his career there was over, Hawkins resigned his commission, returned to the United States, and worked for a time as a steamboat pilot on a passenger line.

In September 1835, he found himself in New Orleans. While in the Crescent City, he became involved with an old acquaintance, General José Antonio Mexia. The disaffected general and Hawkins hatched a scheme for a triumphal return to Mexico. The two began recruiting members to establish a settlement somewhere on the Texas coast. The 130 American, French, and German colonists embarked from New Orleans on November 6. However, the colonizers soon discovered that the true destination was Tampico. Once this city was sighted, Hawkins addressed the passengers and revealed that the expedition's real mission was to capture Tampico. Only about thirty or forty of the passengers had any enthusiasm for the venture. But once their vessel ran aground, they had little choice but to swim to the lightly-guarded fort with the others. Despite this inauspicious beginning, the filibusterers somehow managed to salvage their guns, ammunition, and supplies and proceeded to town. When fighting broke out, the invaders lost over twenty-five men either killed or captured. Mexia, Hawkins, and the others retreated to the fort and, their expedition failing, were rescued by a passing ship which spirited them to Brazoria, Texas. Those still in the hands of the Mexican authorities were executed before a firing squad.²⁷

Once in Brazoria, Hawkins offered his services to the Texas authorities. He was sent to New Orleans, where he presented himself to the Texas Commissioners, who were busy acquiring vessels for the newly formed Texas Navy. Upon Hawkins's recommendation, the commissioners purchased the United States revenue cutter *Ingham*, which the newly appointed captain informed them, "with some slight repairs . . . , would be as good as new." Fitted out and renamed

the *Independence*, the warship, with Hawkins in command, was ready to "sail in twelve days." ²⁸

By late March 1836 a copy of the Texas Declaration of Independence had reached New Orleans. The editor of the New Orleans *Bee* noted that the declaration was a well written document and predicted that victory would be swift. Moreover, the newly formed Texas Navy would make the Mexican blockade of Texas ports a "mere gasconade. Captain Hawkins and the other officers of the Texas Navy," the editor predicted, "will soon sweep the gulf of all Mexican ships that dare to pass Matagorda." ²⁹

The mission of the tiny Texas Navy was threefold: first, the ships transported men, supplies, and ammunition to Texas. Second, the navy guarded Texas ports of Galveston and Matagorda against the possibility of an amphibious invasion. Third, Texan vessels, in much the same fashion as Mexico had done against Spain a decade earlier, attacked Mexican vessels wherever they found them. In July and August 1836, three Texan vessels, the *Brutus*, *Terrible*, and *Invincible*, even blockaded Matamoros. ³⁰

Hawkins and the *Independence* spent a considerable portion of 1836 in New Orleans. He found himself in a situation similar to Key West nearly a decade before, except that now he threatened American neutrality by raiding the ships of his old employer. There was substantial commercial traffic between New Orleans and Mexico's coastal cities. New Orleans merchants, though generally sympathetic with fellow Americans' goals for independence from Mexico, castigated Hawkins and his raiders for their practice of search and seizure of American merchant vessels trading with Mexico. Commercial relations between Mexico and New Orleans was all but cut off.

Hawkins and other officials representing the government of Texas openly campaigned to raise men, money, and supplies. Their movement was popular among most Americans along the Gulf Coast. Despite admonitions from the Mexican government, American citizens enthusiastically supported the revolutionaries. ³¹ Coastal residents raised money and some even joined the fighting themselves. On January 19, 1836, a meeting in Mobile composed of those "friendly to the Texan Cause" was held. The gathering passed a series of resolutions in support of the independence movement. In the following months, a theatrical production, a circus, and a concert were held for the benefit of Texas. ³² An article in the Mobile *Commercial Register*, cast the struggle as one of religious and political freedom versus despotism. The link between American independence and Texas independence was unavoidable: Americans in Texas were

fighting for the same principles and rights which were maintained by their fathers in the American Revolution. Like them they have adopted the motto of liberty or death; and like them will never lay down their arms until they have established their freedom and independence. ³³

On October 4, 1836, President David Burnet in his message to Congress commended the activities of the Texas Navy, and especially its new commodore. "Charles E. Hawkins," he declared, was "a gentleman whose gallantry and nautical

science, would grace any service. The operations of the navy" under Hawkins's leadership had "been as efficient as could have been expected." The navy had not only protected the Texan coast from invasion, but had also, the President noted, "expelled the [enemy's] maritime forces from the gulf."³⁴ Though Texan independence was won on the battlefield at San Jacinto, the Texan navy had at least helped sustain that victory.

Within only three months, the valued commodore would be lost to the Republic. Late that year, the *Independence* came into New Orleans for reconditioning. While in residence at Madame Hale's boarding house on Canal Street, Hawkins contracted small pox and died suddenly on February 12, 1837. Eulogizing the loss of the esteemed commodore, the *Columbia Telegraph* noted that Hawkins had come to Texas' aid when the new nation had needed him most. "A more gentlemanly or chivalrous spirit never graced a quarterdeck and his loss will be deplored, and his memory respected by his gallant comrades of the navy so long as merit in the naval profession claim esteem."³⁵

Clearly a man of talent, Hawkins's career illustrates the limited opportunities for able seamen in America's peacetime navy during the early nineteenth century. Because he believed in the two causes for which he fought outside the United States, his decision to leave the American navy must not have been overly difficult. Service in the navies of Mexico and Texas offered talented, ambitious men opportunities the American service did not. Full of self confidence, Hawkins was unwilling to remain in a navy that held little chance for advancement—especially when opportunities elsewhere looked so bright.

Notes

¹ Sam Houston to Stephen F. Austin, Branch Archer, and William H. Wharton, December 19, 1835, in Eugene Barker and Amelia Williams, eds., *Writings of Sam Houston* (Austin, 1938), 1: 323. Ten days earlier Hawkins wrote Houston asking to be considered for a position in the "standing Army." Your army, he wrote, will be the "only really effective force of the country. I am desirous to receive some appointment under your command. I am Major here in this Battalion & led the attack upon Tampico. . . . We are 110 strong . . . excellent men." Charles E. Hawkins to Sam Houston, December 6, 1835, in John H. Jenkins, ed., *The Papers of the Texas Revolution, 1835-1836* (Austin, 1973), 3: 133. James Robinson noted that Hawkins was "a gentleman in every way qualified to serve us in the present crisis. . . . I have no doubt but he would be serviceable in the Navy of Texas." James W. Robinson to Archer et al., December 19, 1835, *Ibid.*, 262. Governor Henry Smith thought Hawkins was a "gentleman whose experience and ability in naval affairs would render his services acceptable in any govt—and more particularly ours, which is just emerging from chaos. The zeal and patriotism with which Major Hawkins has espoused our cause entitles him to the highest commendation." Henry Smith to Austin et al., December 20, 1835, *Ibid.*, 274.

² "Register for the Navy for the year 1819," January 5, 1819, *American State Papers: Naval Affairs* 1: 596.

³ Marshall Smelser, *The Democratic Republic 1801-1815* (New York, 1968), 274.

- ⁴ David F. Long, "The Navy Under the Board of Navy Commissioners, 1815-1842," in Kenneth J. Hagan, ed. *In Peace and War, Interpretations of American Naval History, 1775-1984* (Westport, CT, 1984), 65-66.
- ⁵ "Naval Register for the Year 1821, 1822, 1823, and 1824," in *American State Papers: Naval Affairs* 1: 706, 753, 860, 924.
- ⁶ Smith Thompson to Charles E. Hawkins, July 21, 1823, in Robert L. Bidwell, "The First Mexican Navy, 1821-1830," (Ph.D. diss., University of Virginia, 1960), 425. Bidwell, the historian of the First Mexican Navy, speculates that Hawkins may indeed have spent the year investigating the prospects of joining another service. See also "Register of the Navy for the Year 1825," in *American State Papers: Naval Affairs* 1: 1086.
- ⁷ "Statement of Captures of Piratical Vessels and Boats Made by Vessels of the United States Navy in the West Indies and the Condition of the Navy and its Operations," December 3, 1822, *American State Papers: Naval Affairs* 1: 804. For the United States campaign against the West Indian Pirates from 1818 to 1825 see Shroeder, *Shaping a Maritime Empire*, 13-15; David F. Long, "The Navy Under the Board of Navy Commissioners, 1815-1842," in Kenneth J. Hagan, ed. *In Peace and War*, 68-71; Edgar Maclay, *A History of the United States Navy From 1775-1898* (New York, 1898), 27-42; David Long, *Sailor Diplomat: Biography of Commodore James Biddle, 1783-1848* (Boston, 1983), 93-131; David Long, *Nothing Too Daring: A Biography of Commodore David Porter, 1780-1843* (Annapolis, 1970), 203-55; Allen Gardiner, *Our Navy and the West Indian Pirates* (Salem, MA, 1929); Leonard Gutteridge and Jay Smith, *The Commodores* (New York, 1969), 302-3. Robert Albion and Jeannie Pope, *Sea Lanes in Wartime: The American Experience, 1775-1945* (New York, 1968), 138-46; Dudley Knox, *A History of the United States Navy* (New York, 1936), 140-41; Maury Baker, "The United States and Piracy During the Spanish American Wars for Independence" (Ph.D. diss., Duke University, 1946), 107-28, 158-60, 203-35; Samuel Eliot Morison, *'Old Bruin': Commodore Matthew Calbraith Perry* (Boston, 1967), 77-84; David Dixon Porter, *Memoir of Commodore of David Porter of the United States Navy* (Albany, NY, 1875), 278-300.
- ⁸ "Naval Register for the Year 1825," March 4, 1825, *American State Papers: Naval Affairs* 1: 1086.
- ⁹ For the activities of the *Constellation* in 1825, see Lewis Warrington to the Secretary of the Navy, June 22, 1825 and July 7, 1825; "Annual Report of the Secretary of the Navy, With the Presidents Message Showing the Operations of the Department in 1825," December 6, 1825; Samuel Southard to Lewis Warrington, May 24, 1825, all in *American State Papers: Naval Affairs* 2: 98-99, 109-10.
- ¹⁰ "Naval Register for 1826," January 5, 1826, *American State Papers: Naval Affairs* 2: 451.
- ¹¹ For information regarding this joint Mexican and Colombian fleet see Robert Bidwell, "The First Mexican Navy," 373-74, 387, 394-403.
- ¹² Charles Adams, ed., *Memoirs of John Quincy Adams Comprising Portions of His Diary From 1795-1848* (Philadelphia, 1875), 7: 115.
- ¹³ "Statement of the Pay and Allowances of Officers of the Navy, February 13, 1826, *American State Papers: Naval Affairs* 2: 627.

¹⁴ Bidwell, "The First Mexican Navy," 418-26.

¹⁵ The *Libertad* was built in Denmark and equipped and armed in England. She carried up to 150 men and was reported as mounting between 24-44 guns. Ibid., 329-30, 434-37.

¹⁶ Ibid., 446-47.

¹⁷ *Niles Weekly Register*, June 2, 1827, quoted in Ibid., 450.

¹⁸ The Neutrality Act of 1818 prohibited a foreign state from "augmenting the force of their ships of war in the ports of the United States." The law also prohibited arming vessels for hostilities against a power with which the United States was at peace. Maury Baker, "The United States and Piracy," 78; Thomas Bailey, *A Diplomatic History of the American People* (New York, 1955), 167.

¹⁹ Joel R. Poinsett to Juan José Espinosa (enclosure), July 10, 1827, in Joel Poinsett to Henry Clay, October 16, 1827; Statement of Commodore Porter (enclosure), November 16, 1827, in Joel Poinsett to Henry Clay, December 6, 1827. For Captain Charles Ridgely's reaction to Porter's directive see Charles Ridgely to Joel Poinsett, May 12, 1828, (enclosure), in Joel Poinsett to Henry Clay, May 20, 1828, all in Dispatches from the United States Ministers in Mexico, 1823-1909, M97, Roll 4, vol. 3, National Archives.

²⁰ See John Adams Diary, February 17, 1827, 228; February 19, 1827, 229; May 10, 1827, 269; June 5, 1827, 289; June 7, 1827, 290, in Charles F. Adams, ed., *Memoirs of John Quincy Adams*, vol. 7.

²¹ William Pinckney to Richard Rush, August 31, 1827, General Letters of the Department of the Treasury, Miscellaneous Letter, RG 59, NA (Photostat copy of letter in P. K. Yonge Library of Florida History, University of Florida, Box 13).

²² Porter never sailed from Veracruz again. On December 6, 1827, Joel Poinsett reported to Secretary of State Clay that Mexico did not have the "money to get the fleet out to sea and he did not see how they would get them out." Joel Poinsett to Henry Clay, December 6, 1827, Dispatches from the United States Ministers in Mexico, 1823-1909, M97, Roll 4, vol. 3, NA.

²³ William Pinckney to Thomas Rodney, February 11, 1828, Consular Letters, Havana, quoted in Bidwell, "The First Mexican Navy," 487.

²⁴ Captain Charles Ridgely to the Secretary of the Navy, August 11, 1828, enclosures A-G, in *American State Papers: Naval Affairs* 3: 236-38. Enclosures A-G include correspondence of Ridgely, Budd, Hawkins, and Pinckney regarding these matters. The arrival the United States *Hornet* into Pensacola brought news of the seizure of Hawkins and Hopner and their subsequent release on bail. See Pensacola *Gazette*, August 5, and September 9, 1828; Pensacola *Florida Argus*, September 16, 1828.

²⁵ Statement of Charles E. Hawkins, October 16, 1828, in Pensacola *Gazette*, November 4, 1828.

²⁶ Bidwell, "The First Mexican Navy," 493-95.

²⁷ New Orleans *Bee*, November 23, December 5, 8, 15, 25, 1835.

²⁸ John A. Wharton to Henry Smith, January 26, 1836, in John Binkley, ed., *Official Correspondence of the Texas Revolution, 1835-1836* (New York, 1936), 1: 340; William Bryan to Henry Smith, January 28, 1836, *Ibid.*, 354; Stephen F. Austin and Branch Archer to Henry Smith, January 20, 1836, in George Garrison, ed., *Diplomatic Correspondence of the Republic of Texas* (Washington, 1908), 1: 59. The *Ingham* was purchased for \$5,000 from Gregory Byrne. See bill of sale in Gregory Byrne to William Bryan, January [?], 1836, in John Jenkins, ed., *The Papers of the Texas Revolution*, (Austin, 1973), 4: 210.

²⁹ *New Orleans Bee*, March 21, 1836.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, August 5, 1836; *Mobile Commercial Register*, July 22, August 8, 1836. The blockade was formally revoked by President Sam Houston on November 1, 1836. *Ibid.*, November 28, 1836.

³¹ Soon after the aborted Mexia expedition, the Mexican War and Navy Department published a circular warning Americans against participating in "meetings" for "getting up and fitting out expeditions against the Republic of Texas in order to send assistance to the rebels, foster the Civil War, and inflict upon our country all the calamities to which it is followed." See Circular of the Mexican War and Navy Department, December 30, 1835, published in the *New Orleans Bee* for most of 1836.

³² *Mobile Commerical Register*, January 16, 19, February 13, 17, April 8, 1936.

³³ *Ibid.*, February 13, 1836.

³⁴ David Burnet, Message to Congress, October 4, 1836, in Jenkins, *Papers of the Texas Revolution*, 9: 49.

³⁵ Columbia, Texas *Telegraph* quoted in Howard L. Stone, "A History of the Texas Navy, 1835-1846" (M.A. thesis, Stephen F. Austin State College, 1951), 34-35.

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The Roots of a Maritime Fortune: E. K. Collins and the New York—Gulf Coast Trade, 1821-1848

Edward W. Sloan

History, by and large, is the story of winners. Those who receive posterity's attention may be simply those who as winners were able to control or decide what posterity would know of the past. Or it may be the case that losers tend not to leave records, even if they have any choice in the matter; whereas winners often do, both through their own sense of historical importance and through the interest of others in preserving—if not embellishing—the record of individuals whose contemporary importance warrants such care. And it also appears to be the case that most of us prefer to read of successes rather than failures; accordingly, history obliges by focusing attention on those who succeed and by apportioning historical significance mainly on the basis of success.

Yet a lifetime of success may be overwhelmed by a final failure, so that historical attention eludes an individual whose career for many years previous had been that of a winner. It thus seems that historical winners are those whose successes persist to the end or whose period of success has not been subverted by subsequent failure. So it is with Edward Knight Collins, a remarkably successful shipping entrepreneur in ante-bellum America whose last and most ambitious business enterprise, a transatlantic steamship venture, ended in bankruptcy. This final failure, after many years of success, resulted in Collins's ignominy and historical neglect, so that except among a small number of historians—largely maritime—E. K. Collins at best is barely recognized and more often is ignored in historical accounts of the United States in the early and mid-nineteenth century.

Yet so long as he dealt with sailing-ships the maritime career of E. K. Collins was phenomenally successful, making him one of the most wealthy and respected businessmen of his era. And insofar as such success merits historical attention—so long, that is, as Collins remained a winner—we may look to the early years for the source, both financial and experiential, of his later and more celebrated success in seafaring.

Edward Knight Collins was born, early in 1802, in a New England maritime community on Cape Cod. His mother died shortly thereafter, and his father soon departed for New York City, where he would subsequently conduct his seagoing and trading business. Edward was left to be raised by Cape Cod relatives, including his father's much younger brother, John. With only eight years separating the two, Edward and John Collins grew up together and in later years became close business associates.¹

At age fifteen, at a time when American maritime activities were burgeoning, especially with the postwar resumption of trade with Great Britain, Edward was sent first to New Jersey for a brief period of formal schooling and then to New York City where for several years he learned the shipping business far more from the desks of a counting house than from the decks of a sailing ship.

Suitably trained in the intricacies of commerce and trade, in 1821 Edward joined his father, Israel Gross Collins, who by this time had retired from his primarily transatlantic seagoing career in order to become a shipowner and operator. Gradually shifting the focus of his enterprise from Europe to the Gulf Coast and Caribbean waters, Captain Collins, with Edward as assistant, began sending vessels to such ports as Matanzas, on the northern coast of Cuba, with an occasional vessel returning to New York with a cargo of sugar, molasses, honey, and coffee for the Collins firm. From Manzanillo, on Cuba's southern coast, a Collins vessel, battling early-spring gales, might take a full month to make its way back to New York with a load of fustic (dyewood), mahogany, hides, and cigars. ²

Still trading with Europe, Captain Collins would take one of his ships that had arrived from Cadiz and send her to New Orleans for cotton, a cargo that might be despatched directly to European markets or might travel to New York, where it was either shipped overseas or sold for domestic use. Another Collins vessel might sail from New York to Havana and return with sugar, cigars, and coffee—a cargo consigned not just to customers but also to Captain Collins himself, an indication of his developing activities as a New York merchant. Another of his ships, arriving from New Orleans with a cargo of cotton and other agricultural products, would be unloaded and then despatched to Cork, Ireland, then to St. Ubes, Portugal, and return to New York with a cargo of salt and lemons. ³

While Israel Collins remained in the counting house, his younger brother John usually was at sea in command of a Collins ship that would sail, for example, to Gibraltar and Leghorn and Tenerife before returning to New York with her cargo of Mediterranean products. ⁴ Young Edward, on the other hand, apparently spent little time at sea. For a period in the early 1820s he sailed on his father's Caribbean-bound vessels as supercargo (the firm's business agent with considerable discretion to arrange for both purchase and sale of cargoes), and briefly had command of a vessel trading in that region; but it soon became clear that this short, stocky man was better suited for managing operations from the New York office. Here, as "ship's husband," he could supervise the business record-keeping for each vessel and voyage, take care of vessels when in port, arrange for cargoes, select officers, and direct the despatch of brigs and schooners coastwise for Darien and Savannah, Charleston, and Gulf ports. At the same time Edward was busy managing the movements and cargoes of larger Collins vessels as they continued the firm's transoceanic trade with the British Isles, Northern Europe, and the Mediterranean. ⁵

By 1825 commercial notices in New York newspapers showed a relative increase in the number of Collins-owned and operated schooners, brigs, and even ships departing for the West Indies and the Gulf Coast. [In the days of sail a ship was a large vessel with three or more square rigged masts, as distinct from smaller and differently rigged schooners and brigs.—EDITOR] Their destinations were such ports as New Orleans, Port au Prince, Pernambuco, Alvarado, on the coast of El Salvador, and Tampico and Vera Cruz. ⁶

It was a risky time to be trading in the Caribbean. For years pirates had been a frequent and serious menace, and their threat to merchant trading finally required the two-year efforts of Commodore David Porter with his large squadron of American warships. By the end of 1825 he had brought Caribbean piracy under control. Even then, occasional piratical incidents occurred until 1831; and the Collins firm advertised their West Indies-bound vessels as "fast sailing and armed."⁷

Trade with newly-independent Latin American countries held the prospect of substantial profits, but the accompanying risks also were substantial. The infamous pestilential climate of the Mexican coast with its seasonal threat of "El Vomito" was scarcely more troubling and unpredictable in its impact than the frequently shifting political climate of the new Mexican Republic. Yet by the late summer of 1827 the firm of I. G. Collins & Son was advertising "a line of Mexican Packets to sail from New York the 1st and from Vera Cruz the 15th, every month." Moreover, these were not small vessels; the first three scheduled for departure from New York were good-sized ships, the largest of which was the 356-ton *Virginia*, commanded by John Collins.⁸

That the name of the business firm was now I. G. Collins & Son, as it was announced formally early in January 1824, suggests the growing importance of Edward's role in managing the extended operations. The shift in emphasis towards Latin-American trade, whether or not at Edward's initiative, was one that would persist. And by this time there had occurred another important development for his business career as well as his personal life.

On January 4, 1826 Edward Knight Collins married Mary Anne Woodruff, the thirteen-year-old daughter of Thomas T. Woodruff, a prominent and prosperous New York City building contractor who helped to found the firm that became the Chemical Bank and who later was involved in major construction projects—and major political activities—in and around the City. While there is no direct evidence available to confirm the financial details of Edward's association with the Woodruff family, it is highly likely that this marriage brought significant amounts of financial backing to the Collins shipping business, both initially and in subsequent years, since two of T.T. Woodruff's sons later would become partners with E. K. Collins, acting as his agents in New Orleans, and the father would invest in Collins's ill-fated steamship venture.⁹

The Mexican trade, notwithstanding its perilous elements, was profitable, and it served to establish the Collins firm as a leader in Gulf Coast commercial activity. When I. G. Collins & Son announced that they were inaugurating a Mexican packet service, they advertised "New York built ships of the first class, copper-fastened, coppered and armed, and very fast sailers" with "uncommonly extensive and commodious accommodations" and with insurance "effected on them at the lowest rates"; clearly, the Collins firm was bidding to become the major American shipping participant in the Mexican market. While there were vessel losses—a schooner in 1827, another in 1830, and two ships in 1831-32—even more vessels were added to the line: three ships in 1828, a schooner in 1830, a ship in 1831, and three more ships between 1832 and 1835. Edward

was listed briefly in 1827 as both owner and master of the *Virginia*, but if he were directly involved as a vessel captain such command was of brief duration; Uncle John soon replaced him as the listed master, and Edward henceforth appeared only as owning shares in one or another of the firm's vessels.¹⁰

The trade with politically-turbulent Mexico involved shipping large amounts of specie out of the country, along with political refugees and cochineal, the valuable source for crimson, purple, and violet dye. The Collins firm got into the specie trade at an optimal time, since the high point in its volume was the 1827-37 period—exactly the duration of the Collins liner service to Mexico. Hazarding the notoriously treacherous anchorage at Vera Cruz, especially from May to November when the ferocious “northers” blew in and scattered, or destroyed, all shipping in their path, Collins vessels brought in a variegated cargo of agricultural products, both raw and processed, and manufactures. Machinery, ironware, furniture, and vehicles shared the cargo hold with linens, woolens, silks, timber for house construction, medicines, harnesses, paper, marble and other stone, and even livestock. And to gain a competitive edge, the Collins vessels, by virtue of their regularly-scheduled sailing dates, were advertised as mail packets.¹¹

Then, on November 1, 1831, Israel Gross Collins died; and I. G. Collins & Son became E. K. Collins & Co. with a manager who, with thirteen years of experience in the business, was not yet thirty years old. Within months the firm once again shifted its emphasis, as Edward Knight Collins turned his attention to the New Orleans-New York trade.

In 1832 a major opportunity for Collins came when he replaced Thomas L. Servoss as general (or managing) agent for the Louisiana and New York Line of cotton packets, the “New Line” that had been established in 1823 and by this time was competing with indifferent success in a rapidly-growing area of domestic shipping and trade. Shouldering aside an unhappy Servoss, Collins sold much of his financial stake in the Vera Cruz Line and applied a substantial amount of investment capital, along with his own experience, talent, and energy, to operating a line of big, ocean-going square-riggers that soon would rival the transatlantic sailing packets in cargo capacity, speed, and elegance.¹²

Collins enjoyed a considerable advantage by having five large, new ships that had been put into service in late 1831. Specially designed to contend with the treacherous sandbars on the Mississippi River below New Orleans, these ships were distinguished both by size and by design. At over five hundred tons cargo capacity for each vessel, they were considerably larger than any others currently in the cotton trade; more remarkable, in the eyes of skeptical contemporaries, were their relatively flat bottoms and shallow draft, a design that promised greater likelihood of getting over the sandbar at the Balize (at least, with occasional assistance from steam tugs) without sacrificing cargo capacity. Yet, many experienced sailing men asked, wouldn't this sacrifice of the traditional V-shaped, deep-draft hull produce a loss of speed and greater difficulty in sailing to windward? To the surprise of many, the “flat-floored” design quickly proved its worth for speed and ship-handling, and soon it was being copied by those

shipbuilders turning out the fastest ocean-going sailing vessels, including not just the transatlantic packets but even the distinctive clippers of the later 1840s and the 1850s.¹³

As a result of this cotton-packet innovation, E. K. Collins so often was associated with such vessel design that he incorrectly has been given credit for both the concept and its introduction. It is more accurate to say that he quickly recognized the merits of an already existing design and swiftly moved to capitalize on its advantage; thus in 1833 he added three new vessels of such hull configuration to the Line, including two very large ships, *Yazoo* (678 tons) and *Mississippi* (648 tons). Two years later he added two more, and made Uncle John Collins captain of the splendid 748-ton *Shakspeare*, a vessel so large that later in the 1830s E. K. Collins would transfer her into his new transatlantic sailing packet service.¹⁴

Collins's management of the Louisiana and New York Line was brilliantly successful on all counts. An early rival, the New Orleans "Old" Line, soon collapsed, and by 1835 it was out of the business. With the line that Silas Holmes had established in 1824 remaining as his only major competitor, Collins expanded his enterprise aggressively at a time when profits from both freight revenues and commodity trading were unusually promising. Notwithstanding the highly-seasonal nature of the trade and the volatile movement of cotton prices in the international market, the increase of cotton production in response to growing markets both in England and in the northern states maintained Collins's operations at a high level of activity and profitability.¹⁵

Collins was not just a shipowner and operator; he was also a general merchant in New York City where he handled merchandise on both a wholesale and retail level. Cargoes destined to New Orleans as well as those from the Crescent City funneled through New York. Over the years while he conducted the New York-New Orleans trade, Collins expanded his mercantile role, as his newspaper advertisements and the cargo lists of his vessels both indicate. A typical cargo from New Orleans destined for northern and, by way of New York, European markets would include a wide variety of agricultural and other farm produce, such as wheat, rye, whiskey, beans, pork, bristles, beef, sugar, tobacco, deerskins, hams, lard, tallow, flour, hemp, dried fruit, and, of course, cotton. West Indian island products frequently came by way of New Orleans, so that sugar, molasses, and rum appeared frequently on cargo lists. New Orleans was also important as a major collecting point for inland products shipped down the Mississippi and its tributaries.¹⁶

Freight rates varied in accordance with seasonal supply, with cotton moving to New York for an average \$1.75 to \$2.00 per bale—although the late-winter and early-spring flood of shipments could drive rates up to \$3.00, while off-season summer rates found cotton down to \$1.00 a bale. Collins's ship *Yazoo*, built in 1833 and registered at 678 tons cargo capacity, could carry 2200 bales of compressed cotton; with a full cargo of cotton alone she thus could produce a gross revenue of over \$6000 for a single two to three-week run from the Gulf to New York at a time when seamen's wages on the coastwise trade between

New York and New Orleans averaged from \$12 to \$15 per month "with small stores," about the same as wages for the European trade. Even with a crew of thirty, and with expenditures for supplies for vessel and crew, insurance payments, port charges, and other direct operating expenses (including his own commission) subtracted from total revenues, Collins usually had a substantial profit to divide among the others, normally including the captain, who shared with him in the ownership of a vessel.¹⁷

Cargoes destined for New Orleans typically were manufactured goods and merchandise, both foreign and domestic in origin, including dry goods, wearing apparel, specialized foodstuffs, wines, tools, building materials, vehicles, and machinery. With the highly seasonal nature of this trade, a vessel might be crammed with passengers at one point in the year, while at another time it might carry none. Many southerners paid the one hundred dollar passage fare to come north, even to travel to Europe by way of New York, in the late spring to escape the heat and accompanying disease of the summer season. A comparably large number paid the peak-season fare when returning south late in the fall, so that for Collins the volume of passenger traffic between the Gulf region and New York crested just at the time when transatlantic passenger travel was at its ebb. This, as he clearly recognized, provided him with a promising business opportunity.¹⁸

In 1835 E. K. Collins called on the services of Captain Nat Palmer, and then of his Uncle John Collins, to explore the possibilities for a Collins-operated line of transatlantic sailing packets. Their reports were encouraging, and a celebrated—and very profitable—market-testing voyage of Collins's big cotton-packet *Shakspeare* to Liverpool further persuaded Edward Collins that circumstances were right for a new maritime venture.¹⁹

Accordingly, on September 16, 1836 advertisements appeared for the "New Line of Liverpool Packets" that would commence service on a monthly basis starting on October 30. Shifting his 748-ton *Shakspeare* to the Liverpool route and adding three larger, even more luxurious square-riggers to his transatlantic fleet, Collins directly challenged four well-established New York-owned and operated sailing packet lines to Liverpool. In addition, he managed to launch his venture and get it fully underway just in time for the Panic of 1837.²⁰

Yet Collins succeeded from the outset, notwithstanding an economic depression that extended across the Atlantic and persisted for half a dozen years. He succeeded despite the well-entrenched and highly-regarded service provided by his competitors, including the famous Black Ball Line that had initiated transatlantic packet service back at the beginning of 1818. He succeeded not by cheaper service, through price-cutting, but rather by better service. He succeeded in the face of British steam-packet competition, which began within a year of his sailing-packet enterprise. His four ships—*Garrick*, *Siddons*, *Sheridan*, *Shakspeare*—soon were to be joined by the first 1000-ton sailing packet on the Atlantic, the *Roscius*. Together they were celebrated from the outset as the most elegant vessels in the trade. Their accommodations, their food, their wines, their decor all surpassed what other lines were providing. And with all new vessels

of roughly similar size and appearance, the Collins fleet quickly became known (although not, in fact, advertised) as The Dramatic Line, a term appropriate not just because of the vessels' names but also because of their noteworthy speed and style.²¹

In light of its timing, of the already established competition, and of its distinctive quality of service and reputation for speed, Collins's Dramatic Line bears a deceptive resemblance to his later steamship enterprise. Yet there are fundamentally important differences; of these, perhaps the most important is that the Dramatic Line operation complemented Collins's well-established commerce and trade with the Gulf Coast, notably that of New Orleans. The highly seasonal nature of the New Orleans trade for both cargoes and passenger traffic meshed neatly with the fluctuating seasonal passenger trade across the Atlantic. Moreover, the eastbound cargoes to Liverpool overwhelmingly were agricultural products—above all, cotton—that flowed from the Mississippi Valley region through the Port of New Orleans, thence to New York. While Collins was committed to sailing his transatlantic packets “full or not full,” he could, and did, supplement their scheduled voyages with those of smaller vessels pulled off the coastwise run in the slack season. Increasingly, his business office and warehouse on New York's South Street advertised, on both a wholesale and retail basis, items of cargo brought to New York from Europe and from the Gulf Coast region. Much of his vessels' cargoes simply was transshipped, with New York serving as entrepôt between Liverpool and the Gulf Coast markets that both supplied, and received shipments from, that largest English and European port.

To understand the maritime success of Edward Knight Collins, then, is to recognize the formative role of Gulf Coast commerce and trade in his career. Well-calculated and skillfully-managed ventures along the Gulf Coast and in the Caribbean initiated Collins into the world of seafaring enterprise and then provided him with substantial foundations for his subsequent, more celebrated maritime exploits in transatlantic shipping and trade. His final failure, and thus the penalty of historical obscurity, came only after 1848 when Edward Knight Collins, having sold his coastal and transatlantic sailing-ship interests in order to launch a transatlantic steamship venture, willfully departed from the business policies and practices of his earlier and most successful period as maritime entrepreneur.

Notes

¹ Edward Knight Collins's early career is briefly summarized in R. G. Albion's biographical sketch in Allen Johnson and Dumas Malone, eds., *Dictionary of American Biography*, (New York, 1930), 4: 305; Collins's obituary in the *New York Herald*, January 23, 1878; G. W. Sheldon, “The Old Shipping Merchants of New York,” *Harper's Magazine* 84 (1892): 468-70; and R. G. Albion, *Square-Riggers on Schedule: The New York Sailing Packets to England, France, and the Cotton Ports* (Princeton, 1938), 43-44, 58-59, 61, 123-25, 136, 138, along with brief references to Collins in Albion's companion work, *The Rise of New York Port, 1815-1860* (New York, 1939). Brief considerations of Collins's career in sail may be found scattered through Carl Cutler, *Queens of the Western Ocean: The Story of America's Mail and Passenger Sailing Lines* (Annapolis, 1961)

and William Armstrong Fairburn, *Merchant Sail*, 6 vols. (Center Lovell, ME, 1945-1955), a highly-detailed, synthetical work that draws primarily on Albion and Cutler.

² *New York Shipping and Commercial List*, March 13, 1821; *New York Price-Current*, March 6 and 16, 1821; *New York Shipping and Commercial List*, September 7 and December 21, 1821; April 2, 1822 (all notices for brig *Bee*); November 30, 1825, and several days thereafter, for schooner *Ductile*; December 10, 1825, and for the next two weeks, schooner *Floss*; September 27 and November 11, 1826 for brigs *Conveyance* and *Zephyr*, to Vera Cruz and Tampico, respectively.

³ *New York Shipping and Commercial List*, January 4, February 5, June 28, July 7 and 12, November 22, 1822; and January 17, July 8, July 15 and 22, 1823, all for ship *Farmer*, commanded by John Collins.

⁴ *New York Shipping and Commercial List*, July 12, 1822 (ship *Farmer*) and July 23, 1822 (ship *Ontario*).

⁵ For brief accounts of Collins in the 1820s see G. W. Sheldon, "Old Shipping Merchants of New York" and Ralph Whitney, "The Unlucky Collins Line," *American Heritage* 8 (February 1957): 50. A dramatic, if highly derivative, version of E. K. Collins's career at this time appears in Richard C. McKay, *South Street: A Maritime History of New York* (New York, 1934), 197-201. An authoritative description of the duties of a ship's husband is in R. G. Albion, "Early Nineteenth-Century Shipowning—A Chapter in Business Enterprise," *The Journal of Economic History* 1 (May 1941): 1-11. See also R. G. Albion, "Within the Countinghouse," in *The Rise of New York Port*.

⁶ See above citations from *New York Shipping and Commercial List*.

⁷ David F. Long, *Nothing Too Daring: A Biography of Commodore David Porter, 1780-1843* (Annapolis, 1970), chapters 8-10; Richard Wheeler, *In Pirate Waters: Captain David Porter, USN, and America's War on Piracy in the West Indies* (New York, 1969); Fairburn, *Merchant Sail*, 2: 1151.

⁸ J. Smith Homans and J. Smith Homans, Jr., eds., *A Cyclopedia of Commerce and Commercial Navigation* (New York, 1858), 330, 1349-54, 1929. For the Collins advertisement, see the *Baltimore Patriot*, August 1, 1827. Brief accounts of the Mexican operation are in Cutler, *Queens of the Western Ocean*, 198, 401, and Fairburn, *Merchant Sail*, 2: 1151.

⁹ The late Ralph Whitney made an extensive investigation of Edward Collins's marriage and connection with the Woodruff family. In chapter 8 of one of his several extensive but unpublished studies on E. K. Collins, "Yankee Doodle's Notion," Whitney says that the Woodruff family Bible lists Mary Ann Woodruff, the eldest child in a large family, as having been born in 1813. In an early unpublished essay, "The Rise and Fall of the Collins Line" (1939), the historian Walter Lord suggests that E. K. Collins used money from his marriage and from an 1825 cotton-trading coup to support his entrepreneurial career.

Little information is available on Thomas Tyson Woodruff; his probated will (May 10, 1855; New York County, New York City, Liber 113, 277) specifies E. K. Collins as an executor. T. T. Woodruff's sons, James E. Woodruff and John Ogden Woodruff, were advertised at various times as New Orleans agents for Collins during the 1840s; in the late 1830s Aaron Cohen served as Collins's agent, but by 1841 James Woodruff

had replaced him. (See *New Orleans Commercial Bulletin*, May 2 and October 5, 1836, July 6 and November 9, 1841 for representative advertisements.) In 1845 Moses Yale Beach calculated Thomas T. Woodruff's wealth at \$250,000 and described him as "an architect, and while an Alderman, had several fat contracts of the corporation." In the same edition, E. K. Collins's wealth is rated at \$300,000, and Beach remarks that he had "married a daughter of Ald. Thomas T. Woodruff, an influential democrat." Moses Y. Beach, *Wealth and Biography of the Wealthy Citizens of New York City* (New York, 1845), 7, 32. T. T. Woodruff is listed as an early director in *History of the Chemical Bank* (New York, 1913).

¹⁰ *New York Daily Advertiser*, July 17, 1827; *Baltimore Patriot*, August 1, 1827; Cutler, *Queens of the Western Ocean*, 401.

¹¹ Homans, *Cyclopedia of Commerce*, 1354. For typical difficulties that E. K. Collins experienced with Mexican authorities, see "United States and Mexico," 25th Cong., 2d sess., House Executive Doc. 351, annex, 95, 476, 522, 763 (including claim no. 31: "E. K. Collins. Exaction of duties in contravention of the treaty"). For the general political and economic context of the Collins firm's Mexican activities, see David W. Walker, *Kinship, Business, and Politics: The Martinez del Rio Family in Mexico, 1824-1867* (Austin, 1986), especially chapter 4, "Commerce in Mexico: Dursina & Martinez, 1828-1837"; Stanley C. Green, *The Mexican Republic: The First Decade, 1823-1832* (Pittsburgh, 1987), especially chapter 5, "Earning a Living"; Barbara A. Tenenbaum, *The Politics of Penury: Debts and Taxes in Mexico, 1821-1856* (Albuquerque, 1986), 24-29; and John E. Baur, "The Evolution of Mexican Foreign Trade Policy, 1821-1828," *The Americas* (1963): 225-62.

¹² For a contemporary view of the Collins-Servoss situation, see *Letters from John Pintard to His Daughter, Eliza Noel Pintard Davidson, 1816-1833*, 4 vols. (New York, 1941). See also Albion, *Square-Riggers on Schedule*, 58-59 and chapter 3, "Enslaving the Cotton Ports."

¹³ Albion, *Square-Riggers on Schedule*, 88-91; Cutler, *Queens of the Western Ocean*, 208, 500-501; Alexander Laing, "The Origins of the Clippers" in *American Ships* (New York, 1971); John R. Spears, *Captain Nathaniel Brown Palmer: An Old-Time Sailor of the Sea* (New York, 1922), chapters 13, 14, and 15.

¹⁴ *Ship Registers and Enrollments of New Orleans, Louisiana* (University, LA, 1942), 3: 229; Carl Cutler Ship File, G. W. Blunt White Library, Mystic Seaport (entries for various ships); *New York Herald*, January 23, 1838 (advertisement for Louisiana and New York Line); Albion, *Square-Riggers on Schedule*, 58, 80.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 58-59; T. W. Van Metre, "Coastwise Trade," in Emory R. Johnson et al., *History of Domestic and Foreign Commerce of the United States* (1915; reprint, New York, 1971), 1: 338-41; David M. Williams, "Liverpool Merchants and the Cotton Trade, 1820-1850," in J. R. Harris, ed., *Liverpool and Merseyside: Essays in the Economic and Social History of the Port and Its Hinterland* (New York, 1969), 182-211.

¹⁶ For typical cargoes, see advertisements and itemized cargo lists for arriving vessels in *New York Herald*, August 15, 1837 and March 22, 1838 (ship *Huntsville*), February 2, 1838, June 13, 1839, and July 23, 1841 (ship *Mississippi*), February 14, 1838 and June 6, 1840 (ship *Yazoo*), June 6, 1843 (ship *H. Allen*), and September 8, 1846 (ship *Sartelle*). Collins placed a particularly large number of advertisements for New Orleans-

originated items in the June 7, 1844 issue of the *New York Herald*; the list includes 100 half barrels pork, "family mess," 110 barrels superfine flour, 50 hogsheads pickled hams, 30 tierces pickled hams, 100 barrels pickled hams, 20 hogsheads dry salted hams, 100 hogsheads dry salted shoulders, 100 barrels pickled shoulders "all well cured," 250 dry Southern hides, 50 barrels dried peaches, "a superior article, in fine order," and 50 barrels "superior quality" lard oil.

¹⁷ See Collins's advertisement for sale at auction of ship *Yazoo*, *New York Herald*, September 13, 1841. For freight rates, see *New York Herald*, July 31, 1843, when cotton was \$2.00 per bale, up from \$1.75 per bale reported by the *Herald* four days earlier. R. G. Albion examines cargoes and freight rates in *Square-Riggers on Schedule*, 70-74 and 304-5; he discusses the financial elements of a voyage in chapter 5, "Counting House Control." Albion provides additional information in his *Rise of New York Port*, chapter 4, "Dry Goods, Hardware, and Wet Goods," and chapter 6, "The Cotton Triangle." Seamen's wages were occasionally reported, and at times discussed, in the *New York Herald*; see November 20, 1842, March 12, 1843, July 24, 1843, February 4, 1844, and April 25, 1847 for examples both of fluctuations in wages and of the usual parity in wages between the coasting and the transatlantic sailing packet services.

¹⁸ In 1835 and 1836 Collins was advertising "fixed" passage to New Orleans at \$80, but by January 23, 1838 the *New York Herald* carried E. K. Collins's advertisement for the Louisiana and New York Line with passage set at \$100; this included "ample stores of the first quality." On March 15, 1839 the newspaper advertised the Line's passenger fares from New York to New Orleans at \$80, without liquors; for the New Orleans-New York voyage the fare, with the same exception, was \$90. "At all times" the sailing packets would be towed by steamboats both up and down the Mississippi River, in order to assure "strictest punctuality." By October 14, 1842, the *Herald* reported, a "first rate stateroom" in the packet from New York to New Orleans cost \$60, in contrast to the \$100 to \$200 expense of travelling overland.

A remarkably good account of a late-March through early-April 1835 voyage from New Orleans to New York in the ship *Shakspeare*, John Collins commanding, is by the British actor Tyrone Power, in *Impressions of America During the Years 1833, 1834, and 1835* (London, 1836), 2: 257-74.

¹⁹ Sheldon, "Old Shipping Merchants of New York," 470; Allan Nevins, *Sail On: The Story of the American Merchant Marine* (New York, 1946), 33-34; Albion, *Square-Riggers on Schedule*, 90, 167.

²⁰ *New York Daily Advertiser*, September 16, 1836; Albion *Square-Riggers on Schedule*, 43-44, 124; Cutler, *Queens of the Western Ocean*, 208-9, 210-11, 380.

²¹ For more-or-less rhapsodic accounts of Collins's new vessels, see *New York Daily Advertiser*, October 25, 1836, and *New York Courier & Enquirer*, October 25, 1836, on the *Garrick*; *New York Journal of Commerce*, February 1, 1837, on the *Sheridan*; *New York Herald*, December 30, 1837, on the *Siddons* [this article apparently was the first to refer to Collins's New York-Liverpool sailing-packet service as the "Dramatic" line]; and *New York Herald*, November 28, 1838, on the *Roscus*.

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From Old to New South Trade in Mobile, 1850-1900

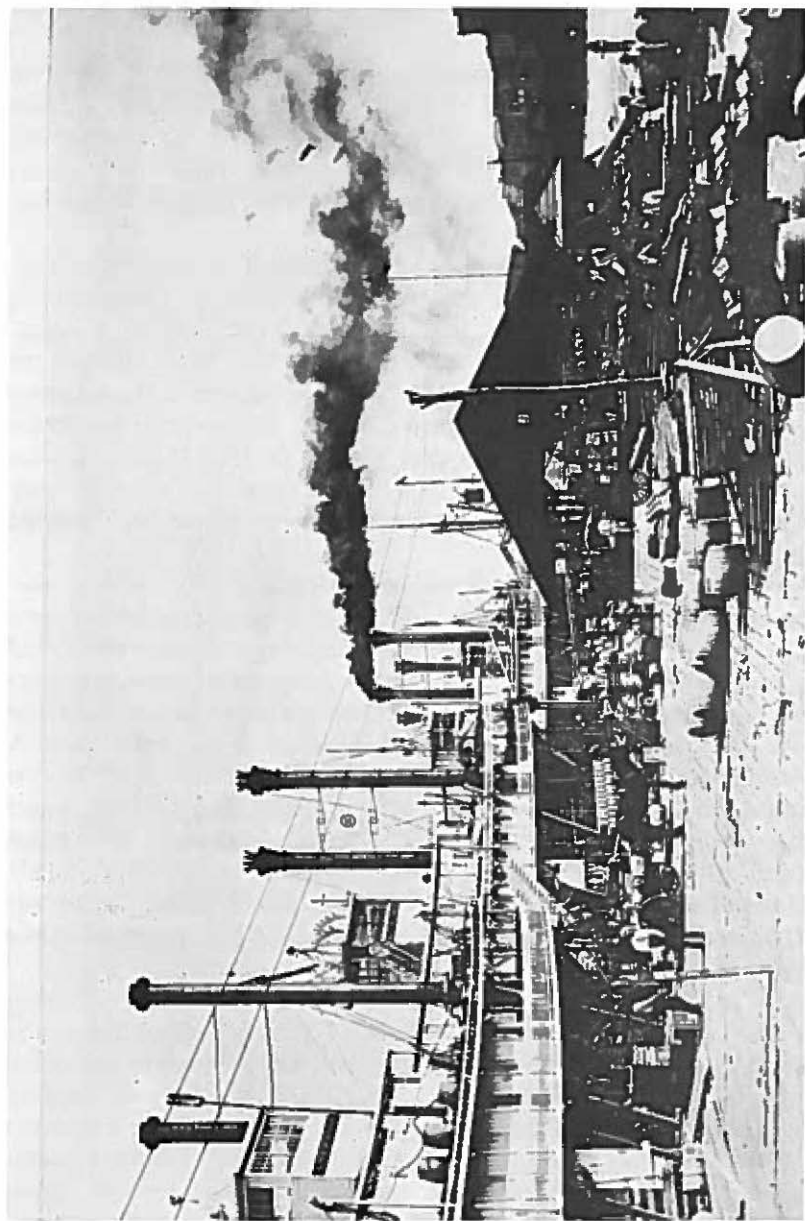
Harriet E. Amos

As historians of the New South examine the extent of its continuity and discontinuity with the Old South, they often ignore the subject of commerce. Instead they tend to focus on efforts to introduce political change, to promote industrialization, and to reorganize agriculture after emancipation.¹ Yet commerce had provided the economic base for antebellum urban development in the South. Nowhere was this more true than in Mobile where trade in cotton had made the Alabama Gulf port a major exporting center for the United States. Just as antebellum Mobile depended on the international cotton market for its growth and prosperity, so did the postbellum city.

Export trade provided the major economic endeavor of antebellum Mobile as it had since the town's colonial founding. Before the Civil War virtually all local commercial activities, from marketing cotton to obtaining goods for planters in the interior, served the cotton trade. Mobile's hinterland encompassed some of the richest cotton-producing areas in Alabama and Mississippi, which were known as the Black Belt. By 1850 Alabama surpassed Mississippi, formerly the leader among cotton-growing states, in cotton production. Alabama maintained its top rank as a cotton state throughout the 1850s. Planters in counties in both Alabama and Mississippi with access to the Alabama-Tombigbee River system that flowed into the Mobile River used Mobile as their cotton market.² Cotton exports from Mobile grew in proportion to the production of the staple in south Alabama. Increasing quantities of cotton shipments permitted Mobile to eclipse all other southern ports but New Orleans as a cotton exporter.

Cotton usually made up 99 percent of the total value of exports from antebellum Mobile. Lumber and lumber products, the export ranking second in value to cotton, accounted for only 1 percent of the total value of exports. During the summer, when cotton was not yet ready for market, the export trade virtually stopped.³ For most of its imports antebellum Mobile relied upon shipments through New York. Mobile maintained a closer trading relationship with New York than even with its neighboring Gulf port of New Orleans.⁴

Mobile's port and harbor facilities were adequate but less than ideal for a large export trade. The city is located on the southwestern side of the Mobile River on an extended plain fifteen feet above the highest tide. Major downriver traffic in agricultural produce from the interior reached Mobile through the Alabama and Tombigbee rivers, which form the Mobile River forty miles north of the city. This river enters Mobile Bay by two channels: a western, called the Mobile River; and an eastern, called the Tensaw River. Mobile Bay, about thirty miles long and twelve miles wide, connects the city with the Gulf of Mexico. Vessels enter the bay on either side of Dauphin Island, located at its mouth. The channel on the west side of the island was in the antebellum era five feet deep; the eastern one was twice that deep. In the 1840s the amount of water carried over the bar at the entrance to Mobile Bay increased from thirteen feet



Mobile's waterfront in the late 19th century

to twenty feet. While the depth of water in the lower part of the bay increased, the upper part of the bay remained eleven feet deep. Vessels drawing over eleven feet of water could not proceed directly to the city; they had to pass six miles up the Spanish River, around a marshy island into the Mobile River, and down to the wharves at the city. ⁵

Because it was virtually impossible for large ships to reach the wharves in Mobile, most of them anchored at Mobile Point in the lower bay. There they received and discharged cargoes. These were transferred from oceangoing ships with deep drafts anchored at Mobile Point to smaller, shallow draft vessels, called lighters. They then carried the cargoes thirty miles through Mobile Bay to the city wharves. ⁶

Local businessmen slowly provided facilities sufficient for receiving, storing, and compressing cotton bales before their sale and reshipment. Transactions in cotton demanded extensive credit and other financial services offered by banks. Close ties between banking and commerce meant that banks suffered the fluctuations of the cotton market as much as any other segment of the economy. The only local bank that successfully withstood all financial crises in the antebellum era was the Bank of Mobile, which opened in 1820. By 1860 Mobile had local banking capital of two million dollars to serve an export trade of nearly forty million dollars. Of all major American exporting centers, Mobile had the worst shortage of banking capital. ⁷

With cotton as the basis for its economy, Mobile, as much as any other southern port, remained essentially undiversified. Many people provided services directly related to the marketing of cotton or entertaining of planters who visited the city, while few entered other economic pursuits. As capital in plantation districts was tied up in land and slaves used to produce cotton, so capital in Mobile most likely supported business institutions that catered to the cotton trade. A substantial portion of profits from transactions in cotton undoubtedly left Mobile for northeastern American cities as well as for Liverpool and LeHavre, where international firms handled many of the transport, insurance, and market arrangements for Alabama cotton. The lingering effects of the Panic of 1837 and associated decline in worldwide cotton prices enabled Mobilians to see "the ruinous fluctuations to which the city is liable [because of] her total dependence for subsistence on influences over which [Mobilians] have no control." ⁸

In the 1850s to encourage the commercial independence and diversification of the local economy, civic boosters promoted railroads, direct trade, and manufacturing. Mobilians attempted to increase their share of trade by connecting the Alabama port with the mouth of the Ohio River by rail, thereby tapping both the trade of the West and the cotton districts of Mississippi that normally followed the Mississippi River to New Orleans. The preference for a north-to-south rail line reflected the promoters' conviction that a link between regions with different climates and therefore different products would make a better investment than an east-to-west connection within southern cotton districts. The north-to-south line would not so much supplement or replace river trade as it would open fresh commercial connections. ⁹ When constructed, the Mobile and

Ohio Railroad indeed carried large numbers of cotton bales to Mobile. But the rail line failed to present a serious threat to the trade of New Orleans because a competing railroad from the Crescent City to the northern destination of the Mobile and Ohio beat the line from Mobile to its target. Despite all of the investment in several railroad ventures, only one major line, the Mobile and Ohio, served the city. Certainly it expanded Mobile's hinterland, but it maintained the same function as other southern railroads, namely the transportation of staple crops to seaports.¹⁰ When the line was completed to its northern terminus in Mississippi in 1861, it faced stiff competition from a rival railroad from New Orleans. Intrastate railroad lines projected to sustain and to enhance Mobile's prosperity by connecting the city to trade inside and outside Alabama failed to materialize before 1860. Railroads failed to expand Mobile's trade significantly. For its major lines of commerce the port still depended on its river system or bay.¹¹

Northern shipping interests transported the bulk of imports into Mobile. As one resident complained, "Our state of dependence upon the North for our supplier of foreign goods, and even for almost every article that belongs to us in everyday use, is a crying shame to us, and cannot be too soon broken."¹² Only by arranging for the direct importation of their goods could local merchants free themselves of their virtual colonial dependence upon the North. Efforts to establish regular steamer service between Mobile and New York and between Mobile and Liverpool ultimately failed in the 1850s because Mobile lacked adequate exports year round for return cargoes.¹³ Attempts to provide direct steamer connections between Mobile and Central American ports also proved unsuccessful. Import trade remained minimal. By 1860 some 90 percent of the ten million dollars of foreign goods that entered Alabama annually came through ports in nonslaveholding states.¹⁴

The city's economy remained commercially oriented and essentially undiversified. Most of the major industries involved processing of agricultural products. Lumber, both sawed and planed, rosin oil, and turpentine accounted for nearly 44 percent of the industrial products of Mobile County. Almost half of the capital invested in manufacturing was committed to some aspect of the lumber industry.¹⁵ Mobile's rich timber resources provided ample raw materials for shipbuilding, yet that industry remained very limited. Shipbuilding suffered from the limited local supply of mechanics skilled in the work. More important, the industry suffered from having few orders and few substantial investors. Even promoters of direct trade purchased their steamers from northern shipbuilders. Entrepreneurs with investment capital often preferred to put their money into facilities for processing cotton, which yielded quicker and surer profits than industries like shipbuilding.¹⁶ The antebellum city remained devoted to commerce, especially in cotton, which sold well during peaks of international demand in the 1850s. In its concentration on the cotton trade, Mobile remained essentially in a colonial relationship with the North.¹⁷

When the Civil War began, the location of Mobile made it a prime target for Union blockaders. United States Secretary of the Navy Gideon Welles and

his aides included Mobile among the ten southern ports of utmost significance that required an immediate blockade.¹⁸ The blockade of the Mobile harbor began in the first weeks of the war. As the *Natchez Courier* reported, "Fort Morgan welcomed the blockading fleet by displaying the United States flag, with the Union down, from the same staff, and below the Confederate flag."¹⁹ The difficulties of the approaches to the city aided the blockaders. A few United States vessels remaining at sea could block the deepest channel to the city. Two shallower entrances to Mobile facilitated numerous blockade runners with small ships. The guns of Fort Morgan commanded one channel running eastward along the shore and terminating alongside the fort. Many blockade runners slipped through this passage at high tide. Ships of shallowest draft used a waterway through Grant's Pass west of the city.²⁰

At its outset the blockade proved ineffective. Federals only blockaded the main entrances to Mobile; the side entrances, coast and inlets remained unguarded. In early 1862 trade continued without interruption between New Orleans and Mobile and Havana by bayou and inland channels.²¹ Immediately after the capture of New Orleans in April 1862, blockade running decreased sharply. Blockade runners operated under increasing hardship from the fall of 1863 to the end of the war. Admiral David Farragut's capture of Mobile Bay in August 1864 essentially halted blockade running. The Confederate embargo and the Union blockade ended the trade in cotton through Mobile for the duration of the war. Disruption of foreign trade persisted after the war as Union occupying forces, which took the city of Mobile in April 1865 after Lee's surrender at Appomattox, closed the port to foreign trade until late in August 1865.²²

The warehouse district of Mobile survived the war intact only to face accidental destruction soon afterward. On May 25, 1865 the ordnance depot exploded, killing as many as three hundred people and destroying more than twenty blocks. Mobile lost more than four-fifths of its storage facilities in the explosion. A visitor who arrived shortly after the disaster described "a city of ruins." Yet by the fall of 1865 streets bustled with business activity and hotels overflowed with visitors, one of whom noted, "Warehouses were rising, torpedoes had been removed from the harbor, and a fleet of sail and steam vessels lined the repaired wharves." "The 'new blood of the South' was, of a truth," contended Whitelaw Reid, "leaping in right riotous pulsations through the veins of the last captured city of the coast."²³

Mobilians of the New South tried to revive the commerce in cotton that had made their city prosperous in the Old South. While agriculture adjusted to the changes brought about by war and emancipation, production of cotton in Mobile's hinterland declined. Throughout Alabama cotton production did not reach 1860 levels until the 1890s. Receipts of cotton in Mobile and exports through the port lagged far behind the boom years of the 1850s, averaging during Reconstruction about 60 percent of the average in the 1850s. One resident admitted in the *Mobile Daily Register*, "We have been always . . . dependent almost entirely for business upon the cotton trade." Observing the decrease in the amount of cotton handled by Mobile, he concluded, "so long . . . as the cotton crop is our only support it is evident that if more than half of that which formerly

came to us goes elsewhere business must languish and all classes of our people suffer the consequence." ²⁴

Changes in railroad networks accounted for much of the diversion of cotton away from Mobile. After the war arrangements for marketing, processing, and transporting cotton changed in such a way that planters no longer relied so much on factors in ports to handle their crops for them. Instead they might conduct business with country merchants, or even act as merchants themselves, and use northern railroads rather than southern rivers and harbors for shipping their cotton to market. Railroads could carry cotton to eastern ports for export abroad or to locations in the Northeast or Piedmont South for textile production. ²⁵

What happened to Mobile's trunk railroad, the Mobile and Ohio, illustrated the pattern of southern railroad development in the 1870s and 1880s. Wartime destruction of its rolling stock, trestles, stations, and repair shops had impeded the M&O's efforts to resume service in 1865. As the line from Mobile slowly recovered, railroad companies elsewhere started new projects. Aware of these new railroads, local merchants remarked in 1869 that "deflection into other channels of a part of our natural trade owing to . . . the opening up of new avenues of communication to the seaboard, have already had its effects in producing despondency." ²⁶

In the 1870s railroads transported an ever larger share of agricultural commodities that had once been shipped on rivers to port cities like Mobile. Mobilians initially thought that transportation costs would be reduced and commerce would be increased in their city when the longest railway line to Mobile, the Mobile and Ohio, was acquired in 1879 by the Louisville and Nashville, which shortly thereafter acquired the Mobile and Montgomery Railroad. Instead of cutting transportation costs, this combination of rail lines primarily deflected shipping away from Mobile to Pensacola or New Orleans, which then had harbor facilities superior to those of Mobile. Local merchants believed, "it is only by pushing new roads into productive territories hitherto unvisited by the iron horse, and thus obtaining a control and other country produce, of the return trade of agricultural supplies, that Mobile can hope to maintain its old place." ²⁷ Unfortunately their efforts to build such lines failed. Consequently Mobile, like other southern ports, lost exports. New Orleans, which in 1858 had controlled 50 percent of the American cotton crop, controlled only 36 percent in 1870 and 8 percent in 1898. Mobile, the Gulf Coast rival to New Orleans, handled even less of the cotton crop. ²⁸

While the postwar cotton trade failed to equal its prewar levels, the export trade in lumber grew markedly. According to *DeBow's Review*, "Since the surrender, no other employment of labor and capital has proven so certainly and largely remunerative." Numerous large orders for yellow pine reached southern ports before the war, and the five-year embargo further heightened demand. As demand increased for the export of Gulf Coast timber, enterprising businessmen erected sawmills in forests and shipped millions of feet of timber through Mobile. A. C. Danner & Co. conducted perhaps the largest lumber trade in the area. To secure plenty of timber for his sawmills, Danner reportedly purchased all

the pine lands belonging to the Mobile and Ohio Railroad Company in Alabama and Mississippi, a total of 750,000 acres running for about fifteen miles on either side of the rail line. From the mid-1870s through the early 1880s his company reputedly conducted the most extensive business in wood, lumber, timber, staves, and shingles in south Alabama, a business that served domestic as well as foreign customers.²⁹

Postwar commercial development required extensive harbor improvements, especially the deepening of the ship channel through the bay to the city docks. In that way Mobile might avoid the process of lightering cargoes between ocean-going steamships and the city wharves, thus placing it on a more competitive position with nearby deep water Gulf ports of New Orleans and Pensacola.³⁰ Harbor improvements required substantial federal aid. Before the Civil War the United States government had financed dredging of the channel through Choctaw Pass to ten feet, but this channel shoaled to seven and one-half feet by 1865. For several years after the war political circumstances did not support aid to the former Confederate port. In the 1870s native Mobilian Frederick S. Bromberg, a liberal Republican who enjoyed Democratic support, served the first district in Congress by promoting legislation for river and harbor improvements. From 1870 to 1876, with federal aid, the harbor channel to Mobile was dredged to thirteen feet. Between 1880 and 1886 more federal funds paid for deepening the channel to seventeen feet and widening it to two hundred feet. "Full rigged ships and ocean steamers now come sailing up the bay," observed one visitor, "and cast out their lines to the pier-heads." Congress approved a Rivers and Harbors Act in 1888 that authorized a project to make the harbor channel in Mobile twenty-three feet deep and two hundred eighty feet wide; appropriations through 1896 facilitated completion of the project.³¹ At last Mobile had a deep water port whose harbor could accommodate ocean-going ships, thus eliminating the need for lightering. Shippers then saved ten cents per bale of cotton on transfer fees and one-quarter of a cent per pound of cotton on freight rates to Liverpool and other foreign cotton markets.³² At the end of the century a joint committee from the Chamber of Commerce and the Cotton Exchange, which was founded in 1871, raised public subscriptions to send delegations to present Mobile's claim for further river and harbor improvements to Congress.³³

Along with improving the harbor, Mobilians also lobbied for improvements in the rivers that flowed into the port. Commercial conferences throughout the state promoted efforts to remove obstructions from the Alabama River. From 1878 to 1892 federal funds paid the cost of clearing the Alabama River of snags and shallows. Additional work on the Coosa River provided Mobile with access by water to Rome, Georgia by the end of the nineteenth century. Improvement of the Tombigbee-Black Warrior system by a series of locks proceeded in two phases. From the 1880s through 1896 federal engineers made the Black Warrior River accessible to steam-powered vessels, opening the way for their navigation between Tuscaloosa and Mobile. Later projects opened to way for a river connection between Birmingham and Mobile, which was completed by 1915.

Initial efforts at river and harbor improvements concentrated on channeling more cotton from the interior of Alabama to Mobile for export. As cotton shipments nevertheless declined due to changes in arrangements for marketing and transporting the staple, other commodities for export attracted fresh attention. Alabama coal assumed special importance as a commodity for export from Mobile. The postwar effort to promote Mobile as a major coal port built on antebellum antecedents, when two Mobilians had secured a contract to refuel ships of the Royal Mail Line with Alabama coal as they stopped at Mobile Point on their way from Southampton to Vera Cruz. Antebellum exports of coal remained small because of difficulties in transporting mineral resources from mines in north central Alabama to the port of Mobile. The absence of a rail line into the mining district particularly limited development of the industry.³⁵

After the war Mobilians participated in several efforts to provide rail connections for their port with north Alabama's essentially untapped mineral region. Chartered in 1866, the Alabama and Grand Trunk Railroad proposed to link Mobile with the mineral district of north Alabama. After laying fifty-nine miles of track to the southern bank of the Alabama River, the company halted construction when it ran out of funds. By the 1880s the Louisville and Nashville Railroad had acquired the Mobile and Montgomery Railroad, thus giving Mobile rail access to Birmingham, the New South city in the heart of the mineral district. The L&N later acquired other lines into Mobile. These railroads transported large coal shipments into the port. In 1886 the Mobile Coal Company began the export of Alabama coal to Cuba, and in 1887 it started supplying coal to ocean-going ships that docked in Mobile's newly improved harbor. Ownership of the railroads that transported coal from north Alabama to Mobile changed twice in the late nineteenth century, eventually going to a combination owned by J. P. Morgan.³⁶

Since the 1870s some residents had entertained the hope that Mobile might "become the coaling station for the steam navigation of the Gulf."³⁷ As the United States began efforts in the 1890s to build a canal across the isthmus of Panama, civic boosters promoted Mobile as the ideal main coal port for the Gulf of Mexico. A. C. Danner pointed out to the *Manufacturers' Record*, a New South paper that glorified accomplishments of southern capitalists, that Mobile had excellent coal resources available within the state of Alabama. The major coal field was less than 250 miles from Mobile, the shortest distance between a major coal field and tidewater of any place in the United States, he said. Once the trans-isthmus canal was completed, the country would need a large coal exporting port on the Gulf. Mobile would prove a better choice than New Orleans, according to Danner, because Mobile was located closer to its coal resources than New Orleans was to its supplies in Pittsburgh. With its deepened harbor channel and variety of rail connections, Mobile also offered more than Pensacola, which had very little water over its outer bar and only one rail line.³⁸ Exports of coal indeed increased considerably from Mobile, but it failed to become the main coal port for the Gulf of Mexico.

In addition to increasing and diversifying exports, commercial leaders in Mobile boosted imports. Their primary efforts in the postwar era focused first on coffee and later on fruit. In the 1860s and 1870s, as one visitor noted, Mobile "made active efforts to become one of the principal coffee markets of the Union, and claim[ed] that direct importation from Rio to Mobile [was] easier, less expensive, and more direct than to New Orleans." As a coffee importing center, Mobile might supply South American coffee to neighboring states and the Northwest. In the late 1860s and early 1870s importers in Mobile conducted a prosperous coffee import trade with dealers in Nashville, Atlanta, St. Louis, Chicago, and New Orleans.³⁹

In the 1890s local merchants promoted an import trade in fruit, mainly bananas, from Central America and Cuba. In 1892 the Chamber of Commerce raised \$2,500 to pay a bonus to the company that first established a steamship line with monthly sailings between fruit-producing regions and Mobile. After one year the Mobile Fruit and Trading Company claimed the bonus. From a modest start of one steamer per month in 1892, the fruit trade conducted by various companies increased to nearly one steamer per day in 1899. Mobile then ranked, as officers of the Chamber of Commerce boasted, "as the third largest fruit importing city in the United States." Dominating the banana trade, the United Fruit Company maintained its general offices in New Orleans but imported many of its cargoes through Mobile. At the docks stevedores unloaded bananas from the ships by hand, and, after weighing and marking, transferred them by hand to refrigerated rail cars for transportation to northern cities.⁴⁰

Industrialization, the way to progress touted by so many spokesmen for the New South, contributed to the diversification of commerce in Mobile. Lumber and timber products generally exceeded in value any other industrial product, and flour and grist mill products ranked second throughout the postwar years. These two industries continued the pattern associated with antebellum industrialization, namely the processing of agricultural commodities from the port's hinterland. Foundry and shipbuilding operations grew slowly in the late nineteenth century, especially in the last two decades.⁴¹ These two enterprises built upon foundations laid by antebellum entrepreneurs who had aimed for commercial independence for the South.

New South boosters spoke less of regional commercial independence from the North than southern economic progress with northern aid.⁴² That aid might come in the form of investment capital or northern-born industrial workers or managers. One large local company openly advertised for northern industrialists. Because it wanted to attract "men from the North" to put mills on their land, the Danner Land and Lumber Co. (formerly A. C. Danner & Co.) offered "very liberal terms" and promised to "furnish mill-sites and timber to responsible millowners." A. C. Danner, president of the company and also president briefly of the Bank of Mobile, was a Confederate veteran who had moved to Mobile in 1868. His firm, which sold lumber and lumber products in the United States, Europe, and the West Indies, provided "great benefit to the commercial and manufacturing interests of this part of the South."⁴³ Civic boosters praised the

contribution to local commerce and refrained from criticizing the company for trying to attract northern mill-owners.

One reason that businessmen welcomed investment capital from any source was the severe financial plight of the city. Postwar Mobile suffered not only from its trade problems but also from national financial panics, default on municipal debt, and epidemics of yellow fever. These same problems had plagued antebellum Mobile, which managed to weather them better than the postwar city that had no improvement in the cotton trade to benefit its economy. As trade stagnated during the Panic of 1873, a yellow fever epidemic completed the prostration of commerce. While the effects of the panic lingered, property values dropped and many residents owed back taxes. The city government faced default on its debt. To help the city deal with its default, in 1879 the state legislature reorganized its government, repealing its charter as the City of Mobile and establishing the Port of Mobile. Appointed commissioners assumed responsibility for collecting back taxes and applying monies to settle public liabilities. Port expenditures were limited to \$100,000 per year. Officials of the Port of Mobile government remained in control until 1887, when they were replaced by a mayor and council for the City of Mobile. As local government struggled to meet its financial obligations, the depression of 1884 caused numerous business failures. Most notably, the Bank of Mobile, the oldest in the city, and the A. C. Danner Lumber Company failed in 1884. Business and personal failures continued for the rest of the decade, as indicated by seventeen columns in the *Mobile Daily Register* in 1889 listing property to be sold at public auction for delinquent city taxes.⁴⁴

From 1850 to 1900 export trade remained the main commercial activity of the port of Mobile, but it changed in content. While almost all antebellum exports had been cotton, an ever smaller share of postbellum exports consisted of the staple. Lumber and lumber products, which had been a minuscule part of antebellum exports, occupied an increasingly larger proportion of postbellum exports, yet they never assumed the preeminence that had once been held by cotton. Exports of other Alabama resources, especially coal, provided commercial linkages for postwar Mobile that had been essentially impossible in the prewar era. Diversification of exports improved the commercial situation of the port by making it less vulnerable to changes in the market for any one product. Trade also benefited from the direct importation of agricultural products from Latin America, particularly coffee and bananas. Yet, as national trade patterns solidified toward the Northeast, southern ports handled declining shares of United States exports and imports in the postwar period. In 1888 New Orleans handled only 1.6 percent of U.S. imports, and no other southern port handled even one percent.⁴⁵

For the last half of the nineteenth century Mobile experienced as dramatic ups and downs in its trade volume as any southern port. Highs reached in the antebellum years could not be equalled again. As trade volume slowly increased after the war-caused embargo, it never increased enough to place Mobile again in the rank that it had enjoyed prior to the war as an exporter. While imports increased in value, they never amounted to a significant share of the nation's

total. Antebellum efforts at southern commercial independence, limited as they were, gave way in the postwar period to campaigns for investment capital from any source. Mobile began the antebellum period in a colonial economic relationship to the North and it ended the postbellum period the same way. Yet throughout the period from 1850 to 1900 Mobilians creatively utilized a variety of resources and approaches to promote the trade that sustained the port.

Notes

¹ For an excellent historiographical discussion of the pattern, see Harold D. Woodman, "Economic Reconstruction and the Rise of the New South, 1865-1900," in *Interpreting Southern History: Historiographical Essays in Honor of Sanford W. Higginbotham*, ed. John B. Boles and Evelyn Thomas (Baton Rouge, 1987), 254-307.

² Charles S. Davis, *The Cotton Kingdom in Alabama* (Montgomery, 1939), 42-43. Regarding economic developments in antebellum Mobile, see Harriet E. Amos, *Cotton City: Urban Development in Antebellum Mobile* (University, AL, 1985).

³ Amos, *Cotton City*, 22.

⁴ Allan R. Pred, *Urban Growth and the Circulation of Information: The United States System of Cities, 1790-1840* (Cambridge, MA, 1973), 119, 122-23; and *Urban Growth and City-Systems in the United States, 1840-1860* (Cambridge, MA, 1980), 115-16, 167.

⁵ Amos, *Cotton City*, 24. See also *Hunt's Merchants' Magazine* 13 (1845): 417-18, 19 (1848): 593.

⁶ Joseph Holt Ingraham, ed., *The Sunny South; or, The Southerner at Home, Embracing Five Years' Experience of a Northern Governess in the Land of the Sugar and the Cotton* (Philadelphia, 1860), 502; John W. Oldmixon, *Transatlantic Wanderings; or, A Last Look at the United States* (London, 1855), 152; J. W. Hengiston [Siras Redding], "Mobile, Pensacola, and the Floridas: Cotton Barque to Cape Cod, along the Gulf Stream," *New Monthly Magazine* 98 (1853): 366; and John S. C. Abbott, *South and North; or Impressions Received during a Trip to Cuba and the South* (New York, 1860), 91-92.

⁷ Amos, *Cotton City*, 38.

⁸ *Alabama Planter*, May 8, 1848. See also Grace Lewis Miller, "The Mobile and Ohio Railroad in Ante Bellum Times," *Alabama Historical Quarterly* 7 (1945): 38-39; and *Hunt's Merchants' Magazine* 19 (1848): 580.

⁹ Robert S. Cotterill, "Southern Railroads, 1850-1860," *Mississippi Valley Historical Review* 10 (1924): 396.

¹⁰ Clement Eaton, *The Growth of Southern Civilization, 1790-1860* (New York, 1961), 210; and Allan Pred, *Urban Growth and City-Systems*, 116, 45-47.

¹¹ Amos, *Cotton City*, 207.

¹² Peter Hamilton to Henry W. Collier, November 5, 1851, Governor's Correspondence: Collier, Alabama State Department of Archives and History, Montgomery.

¹³ Amos, *Cotton City*, 208-9.

¹⁴ *Mobile Register*, May 10, 1860.

¹⁵ Amos, *Cotton City*, 213.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Ibid., 221.

¹⁸ Hamilton Cochran, *Blockade Runners of the Confederacy* (Indianapolis, 1958), 16. Other ports were Norfolk, Beaufort, New Bern, Wilmington, Charleston, Savannah, Pensacola, New Orleans, and Galveston.

¹⁹ Quoted in *The Revellion Record: A Diary of American Events with Documents, Narratives, Illustrative Events, Poetry, etc.*, ed. Frank Moore (New York, 1981), 1: 82.

²⁰ Malcolm C. McMillan, *The Alabama Confederate Reader* (University, AL, 1963), 293-94.

²¹ Frank Lawrence Owsley, *King Cotton Diplomacy: Foreign Relations of the Confederate States of America* (Chicago, 1931), 259-60.

²² Frances Annette Isbell, "A Social and Economic History of Mobile, 1865-1875," (M.A. thesis, University of Alabama, 1951), 24.

²³ Ibid., 23; and Whitelaw Reid, *After the War: A Tour of the Southern States*, ed. C. Vann Woodward (New York, 1965), 402-3, 205.

²⁴ *Mobile Daily Register*, September 25, 1875, quoted in Isbell, "Social and Economic History of Mobile," 32.

²⁵ David R. Goldfield, *Cotton Fields and Skyscrapers: Southern City and Region, 1607-1980* (Baton Rouge, 1982), 86, 127; and Gilbert C. Fite, *Cotton Fields No More: Southern Agriculture, 1865-1980* (Lexington, 1984), 7, 14-15.

²⁶ Edward L. Ullman, "Mobile: Industrial Seaport and Trade Center," (M.A. thesis, University of Chicago, 1943), 20; and Isbell, "Social and Economic History of Mobile," 23-24, 38-40, 33. The quotation cited by Isbell comes from the *Mobile Daily Register*, December 12, 1869.

²⁷ Alma Esther Berkstresser, "Mobile, Alabama, in the 1880's," (M.A. thesis, University of Alabama, 1951), 122-24, 126-27; and Robert Somers, *The Southern States Since the War 1870-71*, Introduction by Malcolm C. McMillan (University, AL, 1965), 182. Somers visited Mobile in January 1871.

²⁸ Goldfield, *Cotton Fields and Skyscrapers*, 86, 127; and Peter J. Hamilton, *Mobile of the Five Flags* (Mobile, 1913), 371.

²⁹ "The Lumber Business of the South," *DeBow's Review* (August 1866): 201; and Scrapbook 1, Dorothy Danner Trabits Collection, Department of Archives and Manuscripts, Birmingham Public Library.

³⁰ Berkstresser, "Mobile, Alabama, in the 1880's," 129.

³¹ Ullman, "Mobile: Industrial Seaport and Trade Center," 22; *Annual Report of the War Department: Report of the Chief of Engineers*, 1891, pt. 3, 1771-73; Berkstresser, "Mobile, Alabama in the 1880's," 112, 53-54, 112-14, 116, 119; and John E. Land, *Mobile: Her Trade, Commerce and Industries, 1883-4* (Mobile, 1884), 20-21. Quotation comes from the last citation.

³² *Annual Reports of the War Department: Report of the Chief of Engineers*, 1887, 1299.

³³ Mobile Chamber of Commerce Minutes, April 15, 1898, January 9, 1899, Mobile Chamber of Commerce.

³⁴ Melton McLaurin and Michael Thomason, *Mobile: The Life and Times of a Great Southern City* (Woodland Hills, CA, 1981), 78-79.

³⁵ Mobile *Daily Register*, November 4, 1848; Jonathan M. Wiener, *Social Origins of the New South: Alabama, 1860-1885* (Baton Rouge, 1978), 162; and Virginia Estella Knapp, "William Phineas Browne, A Yankee Business Man of the South," (M.A. thesis, University of Texas, 1948), 19-21, 23-24, 29, 42-45, 53.

³⁶ McLaurin and Thomason, *Mobile*, 73, 78. For more information on the development of the mineral resources see Wiener, *Social Origins of the New South*, chs. 5-7.

³⁷ Edward King, *The Great South: A Record of Journeys . . .* (1875; reprint, New York, 1969), 325.

³⁸ Scrapbook 1, Trabits Collection, Birmingham Public Library.

³⁹ King, *Great South*, 325; and Isbell, "Social and Economic History of Mobile, 1865-1875," 35-36. Receipts of coffee in Mobile grew markedly until the mid-1870s when a railroad rate war in the North reduced freight charges so much that buyers in the interior elected to patronize Baltimore and New York rather than Mobile.

⁴⁰ Mobile Chamber of Commerce Minutes, January 9, 1899, January 10, 1900, and Mobile *Daily Register*, January 10, 1899, January 11, 1900, in minutes, 22, 36, Chamber of Commerce, Mobile; and McLaurin and Thomason, *Mobile*, 80.

⁴¹ *The Statistics of the Wealth and Industry of the United States. Compiled from the Original Returns of the Ninth Census* (Washington, 1872), 637; Department of the Interior, Census Office, *Report of the Manufactures of the United States at the Tenth Census* (Washington, 1883), 194; House of Representatives, 47th Cong., 2d sess., Misc. Doc. 42, pt. 2, vol. 13, pt. 2; Department of the Interior, Census Office, *Report on Manufacturing Industries in the United States at the Eleventh Census: 1890*, pt. 2, *Statistics of Cities* (Washington, 1895), 351; House of Representatives, 52d Cong., 1st sess., Misc. Doc. 340, pt. 22, vol. 50, pt. 12; and *Census Reports*, vol. 8, *Twelfth Census of the United States Taken in the Year 1900*, pt. 2, *States and Territories* (Washington, 1902), 12-15.

⁴² C. Vann Woodward, *Origins of the New South, 1877-1913* (1951; Baton Rouge, 1971), chs. 5, 11.

⁴³ Land, *Mobile: Her Trade . . . , 1883-4* (Mobile, 1884), 54.

⁴⁴ Isbell, "Social and Economic History of Mobile," 68, 97; and Berkstresser, "Mobile, Alabama, in the 1880's," 7, 17, 137-38.

⁴⁵ Goldfield, *Cotton Fields and Skyscrapers*, 126-27.

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*Local History and
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Mobile Public Library*

Pensacola, the Deep-Water Harbor of the Gulf: Its Development, 1825-1930

George F. Pearce

Pensacola's historic claim of having the finest natural deep-water harbor on the Gulf Coast was initially predicated on surveys of it dating, at least, from 1719. In that year, the master of the Marine Academy of Toulon, France, wrote that Pensacola "is the only road in the bay of Mexico in which ships can be safe from all winds. You will find," he continued, "not less than 21 feet on the bar which is at the entrance into the road, provided you keep in the deepest part of the channel."¹ Subsequent surveys of the harbor by British cartographer George Gauld in 1764, and by Maj. James Kearney of the U.S. Topographical Engineers in 1822 corroborated the French survey of 1719.²

Despite these favorable surveys, the port of Pensacola had two detrimental natural features: a bar which denied deep-draft vessels access from the deep water of the Gulf to the deep water of the bay, and the absence of a navigable river system connecting it with the fertile agricultural lands of its hinterland. By the time these obstacles were overcome or were no longer important, the nation's transportation system had created a marketing arrangement that was disadvantageous to old southern port cities which had served as transshipment ports for staple products or, as in the case of Pensacola, for an exhaustible commodity, timber. Consequently, late-nineteenth-century urbanization and industrialization, two important criteria for sustaining a flourishing port, bypassed Pensacola. After approximately four decades as a major seaport, the port of Pensacola was in serious decline by 1918.

Early in 1825, Congress authorized the construction of a navy yard at Pensacola. It took this action despite being informed by the Board of Navy Commissioners a year earlier that the channel into Pensacola Bay did not provide, "at all times, a sufficient depth of water for larger vessels than frigates of the first class." Therefore, the commissioners recommended that a further study of the advantages of the harbor be made by the Army Corps of Engineers, before the establishment of permanent facilities.³

As early as 1829, it became obvious to some observers that, to insure future development at the yard, dredging operations to deepen the channel over the bar were imperative. In that year Capt. William H. Chase of the Army Corps of Engineers proposed to the secretary of war that a channel be excavated over the bar to a depth of 27 1/2 feet at low tide.⁴ Four years later the commandant of the yard proposed that a channel be dredged to a depth of 30 feet at low tide. Both proposals erroneously concluded that, because the depth of water on the bar did not appear to have changed since the earlier surveys in 1764 and 1822, the bar was a permanent bank of sand not subject to shoaling. Thus a channel over the bar would remain at the depth excavated.⁵ However, they correctly recognized that the yard's success weighed heavily upon making the harbor accessible to the largest vessels in the fleet. Action in Washington on

such proposals for Pensacola harbor would not materialize for another half century. Thus, the bar was partially responsible for the agonizingly slow development of the yard which, many had predicted, would quickly bring economic prosperity to the port city.

Just as the bar was a detriment to the development of the navy yard, so the absence of a river system into the interior was a formidable obstacle to the development of commercial shipping. Three rivers empty into Pensacola Bay: the Blackwater and Yellow, in the northeastern arm of the bay, and the Escambia, in the northwestern arm of the bay. These rivers, however, were shallow and unnavigable for commercial purposes.

In 1836, Maj. J. D. Graham, U.S. Topographical Engineers, described the land in Pensacola's hinterland in Alabama, lying between the Chattahoochee River to the east and the Alabama River to the west, and 150 miles wide from north to south, as "generally of a rich soil, and admirably adopted to the cultivation of cotton. . . ." However, Graham stated that the inhabitants of the area were denied access to the most convenient place to market their produce, the port of Pensacola, because of an unsuitable river system. He noted that the Escambia-Conecuh river (They are the same river; the portion in Alabama being called the Conecuh River and the portion in Florida being called the Escambia River.) was the only stream upon which any navigation existed.⁶ In 1833 and again in 1836 the government appropriated five thousand dollars for the removal of snags, overhanging trees, and other obstructions from the Escambia and Conecuh rivers, but such small expenditures could do little to rectify the magnitude of the problem.⁷ Therefore, by the middle 1830s Pensacolians turned to the new steam railway as the best possible substitute for a navigable river.

The Alabama, Florida and Georgia Railroad Company was chartered in December 1834 for constructing 210 miles of railroad from Pensacola to Columbus, Georgia, with a branch line going into Montgomery. The railroad was designed to divert the cotton commerce of Montgomery on the Alabama River, and Columbus on the Chattahoochee River, to the port of Pensacola. After protracted negotiations, company officials agreed to abandon the plan for the Columbus line for a direct line to Montgomery. This action shortened the railroad to 156 miles. However, by that time the prospects for success had vanished. The railroad was heavily indebted to the Bank of Pensacola. When the Panic of 1837 closed the doors of the bank, it spelled the eventual doom of the railroad. The company had spent over a half million dollars for materials, surveys, grading, and machinery when the construction was discontinued in 1838, but no rails had yet been laid. This first attempt to offset the disadvantages of a poor river system, by connecting Pensacola to the cotton plantations of the Alabama-Georgia heartland by rail, was an expensive failure.⁸

Before railroad projects came to fruition in both Florida and Alabama, Mobile's hinterland included southern Alabama and southeastern Mississippi. The Alabama river systems emptying into the Mobile River were only navigable as far north as central Alabama. Consequently, Mobile was the seaport for many of the counties in southern Alabama with the exception of those counties on

the Alabama-Georgia border, which shipped their cotton to the port of Apalachicola by way of the Chattahoochee and Apalachicola rivers.⁹ In 1850 Mobile and Apalachicola were the second and third largest cotton ports on the Gulf of Mexico. New Orleans was the largest.¹⁰ Without a railroad into the interior, Pensacola was isolated from the valuable cotton-producing area to its north. As prosperity returned in the 1840s, Pensacolians began laying plans for a proposed Alabama and Florida Railroad connecting their city with Montgomery. When Alabama surpassed Mississippi as the leading cotton-growing state in 1850, the attraction of the line grew. By the late 1850s, construction on both the Alabama and Florida sections was in progress.

The prospects of luring cotton shipments from Montgomery to Pensacola by rail appeared encouraging. In 1858, the Mobile and Ohio Railroad transported "over 152,000 bales of cotton to the Alabama port." Since only a small portion of the line ran through Alabama before entering Mississippi, the cotton arriving in Mobile by rail before 1860 largely came from counties in Mississippi; that arriving from southern Alabama was transported on its river system.¹¹ Although the distance from Mobile to Montgomery was only 172 miles by land, it was approximately 500 miles on the meandering Alabama River. Thus the passage took several days by steamboat; this was in sharp contrast to traveling the 159 rail miles from Montgomery to Pensacola in less than twelve hours.

As war clouds gathered, crews on both the Alabama and Florida sections worked at a feverish pace to complete the line. The last spikes were driven in early May 1861, just as the first guns of the Civil War thundered. Pensacola was now connected by rail with Montgomery and by way of the Montgomery and West Point Railroad to West Point, Georgia, thirty miles north of Columbus on the Chattahoochee River. Both of these river cities were important commercial centers of the Georgia-Alabama cotton belt.¹² The jubilation in Pensacola over ending its isolation from the productive cotton lands of southern Alabama and Georgia was to be short lived. The Alabama and Florida Railroad became a victim of the Civil War.

Almost unnoticed amidst the fever of antebellum railroad building efforts, was the beginning of a substantial timber and lumber industry at Bagdad on the Blackwater River near where it empties into Pensacola Bay.¹³ In time this industry, as it spread through northwest Florida and southern Alabama, would bring unimagined, although short-lived, activity to the port of Pensacola.

Unlike New Orleans and Mobile, where decades went by before their port trade again approached the 1860 figure, the port of Pensacola surged from practical obscurity in that year to national prominence by the 1880s. A number of men would apply their skills and capital to create a lumber boom that would turn the port of Pensacola into a veritable beehive of activity. Rapid urban growth, both here and abroad, created an unprecedented demand for timber and lumber. West Florida, with its vast prime timberlands, capitalized on this demand.¹⁴

In 1877, as Reconstruction ended, a dozen or more saw mills in areas contiguous to Pensacola had an aggregate cutting capacity of over two hundred million feet of lumber. Also thousands of logs were rafted down the rivers and

bay to Pensacola harbor. To transport this timber, valued at \$2,291,822, to both domestic and foreign markets, 590 vessels entered the harbor that year.¹⁵ The Pensacola and Atlantic Railroad connected the city with the rest of the nation in 1883; this development was expected to make the port of Pensacola competitive for cotton and other agricultural products.¹⁶ Since the line ran through, or was in close proximity to, the pinelands of West Florida it also greatly facilitated the development of the timber industry. To exploit the port's new-found position, however, accessibility to the harbor was imperative.

When loaded, the larger ships coming into the harbor were frequently detained for many days waiting for a sufficient depth of water on the bar for safe passage across it. Others were forced to leave with less than full cargoes for the same reason. This situation augured ill for local commerce unless dredging operations were begun. In a speech in the U.S. Senate in June 1882, Senator C. W. Jones of Florida pointed out that generous appropriations for eastern ports to open their harbors had been approved by that body, but that little had been done for Pensacola.¹⁷

Undoubtedly the bar at Pensacola was a problem but it was not unique on the Gulf Coast. The water in upper Mobile Bay was so shallow that deep-draft ships anchored at Mobile Point where their cargoes were transferred to shallow-draft vessels for the thirty miles through the bay to the city's wharves.¹⁸ Ocean-going vessels also had to anchor outside the Galveston bar to load and unload.¹⁹ The bar at the mouth of the Mississippi River also prevented large vessels from reaching New Orleans. Eastern ship builders came forth with the "New Orleans packet," a shallow-draft vessel, to navigate the bar. However, much of the port's "ocean cargo was . . . carried in bottoms that were second and third class in capacity and speed."²⁰

States and cities instinctively turned to the federal government for aid in river and harbor control. However, the federal responsibility in this realm had not been fully determined. Improvements to river systems and harbors stirred the imaginations of far fewer people than railroads, which were liberally subsidized by both state and federal governments. In 1882 President Chester A. Arthur vetoed a river and harbors bill, only to have Congress pass it over his veto. At that time, there was a hundred million dollar surplus in the U.S. Treasury from tariff revenues, and Congress' solution to the problem was to spend the surplus in lavish appropriations for river and harbor improvements and pork-barrel handouts.

Dredging operations in Pensacola commenced under the supervision of the Army Engineers in 1883 and continued intermittently during the rest of the century. These dredging operations maintained a channel depth of between twenty-three and twenty-four feet at low tide, but in the years dredging was suspended for lack of funds the channel would quickly shoal to a depth of nineteen feet.²¹ In 1888, the Chief of Engineers predicted that permanent improvements at Pensacola "may require the expenditure of several millions of dollars."²²

Between 1878 and 1896, total congressional appropriations to maintain navigation at Pensacola harbor amounted to \$650,000.²³ This expenditure is

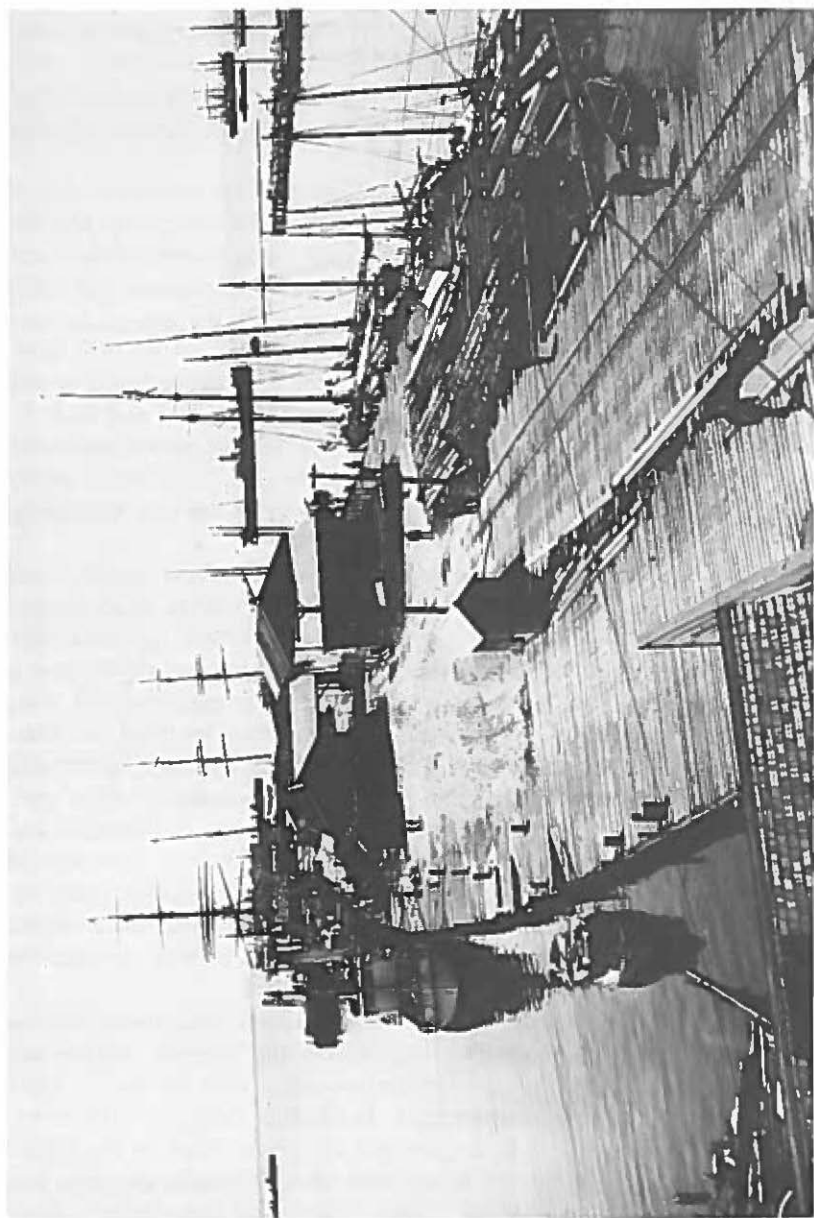
in sharp contrast to the \$6,200,000 Congress authorized in 1890 for the completion of the Galveston jetties, which made it a deep-water port by 1896. Of course, before Houston became a deep-water port in 1914, the Galveston project had a significant impact on the economy of the Trans-Mississippi West.²⁴ Deep-water conventions held in Fort Worth, Denver, and Topeka, where delegates from nine western states adopted a resolution for a first-class harbor on the Texas coast, worked in Galveston's favor.²⁵ In 1896, Pensacola's export tonnage was 380,091 with a dollar value of \$6,615,635.²⁶ Nevertheless, it did not have the political clout with Congress comparable to the western states clamoring for a deep-water port.

Jetties were also constructed in the Pensacola channel but they met with little success.²⁷ The problem of the bar was resolved in 1905 when the dredge *Caucus* was turned over to the Pensacola district by the Army Engineers. Continuous dredging soon provided a channel with a depth of thirty feet at low tide.²⁸

Government expenditures were also required for improvements on the Escambia and Conecuh rivers. Reports of the Army Engineers indicate that most of the operations occurred on the hundred miles of the Escambia in Florida and on approximately seventy-one miles of the Conecuh in Alabama.²⁹ By removing overhanging trees, logs, snags, and rocks, and by dredging the bar at the mouth of the river the depth of the water was sufficient to raft logs downstream to the bay where tugs secured the rafts and towed them to Pensacola. The value of the timber arriving by this stream was valued at two million dollars in 1905.³⁰

At the turn of the century Pensacola was enjoying a degree of prosperity. In three of the four closing months of 1899, exports were substantially above the million dollar level. At times cotton exports were even rivaling those of timber. For example, in January 1900 their value was \$829,749. By 1900 other commodities, such as tobacco, naval stores, pig iron, and grain were regularly appearing on the list of exports.³¹ Export tonnage continued to climb during the first decade of the twentieth century, reaching an all time high in 1913 with a tonnage of 1,475,051, with an approximate value of \$25,000,000.³²

In the meantime, some Pensacolians argued that planning was urgently needed to offset the adverse effect that dwindling timber resources would have on the city's commerce. In 1877, one writer extolling economic opportunities in Pensacola and its surroundings, predicted that "the busy whirl of the saw will be heard for at least a quarter of a century before existing forests are gone, and as one growth is cut away another will spring up where the plow of the farmer does not prevent."³³ This statement reflects prescience about stripping the forests of their growth, but not concerning converting the land to agricultural pursuits. Moreover, since scant attention was given to reforestation, there would be no second growth of trees. Promotional literature by investment companies, lumber companies, and the Chamber of Commerce, pointing out the opportunities for small family farms on cutover timber land produced few tangible results. In any event, "farming hardly proved a substitute for the area's waning production of timber and naval stores."³⁴



Palafax St. docks, c. 1900

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In January 1914 a Liverpool brokerage firm, which handled a sizeable amount of Pensacola's timber exports, reported that it was insolvent. The First National Bank of Pensacola had extended loans totalling close to a half million dollars to the firm. Rumors spread quickly that the bank was overextended, and a run by its depositors closed its doors. This unfortunate action drove several other Pensacola businessmen, who were large stockholders in the bank, into bankruptcy. Among them were prominent families in the timber industry. The bank's failure sapped energy from the city's commercial interests that were already tottering on decline.³⁵

In August 1914 the outbreak of war in Europe soon suspended almost all of the commercial activity at the port. The lumber era was ending and the European markets dried up. After 1917 ships plying the Atlantic carried government cargo to sustain American and allied military forces, but Pensacola and other ports on the Gulf Coast did not produce such cargo. By the end of the war in 1918, export tonnage from the port was about one-fifth of its 1913 level. The cargo records of one Pensacola steamship agent firm shows that it served thirty-one steamships in 1913, compared to only four each in 1917 and 1918.³⁶ The establishment of the Pensacola Naval Air Station in 1914 helped somewhat to soften the economic adversity the war brought to the port.³⁷ In time it would become a mainstay in the city's economy, but it contributed only marginally to its commercial development.

The massive timber exports from the port during the period roughly from 1877 to 1914 had blinded Pensacolians to the need for adjusting to rapid changes occurring in the nation. Local promoters continued to believe that once they had a railroad running to the north, the port of Pensacola would become a major outlet for products of the Midwest. But during and after the Civil War, many railroads were built in the Midwest. These railways north of the Ohio River running east to west siphoned off the produce of that area to the east by way of the Great Lakes and the Erie Canal; while those south of the river carried the produce of that area to the bustling Atlantic ports of Baltimore and Norfolk. By the time Pensacola had a rail line into the interior, "the bulk of the Midwest trade was not going to follow in a southerly direction, either by rail or by water."³⁸ Despite the boosterism of the Louisville and Nashville Railroad and the Chamber of Commerce, the prospects of Pensacola tapping new markets to the north proved an empty hope; they never materialized.

Pensacola continued dependent upon timber exports while many sections of the nation industrialized. Boosters of the New South tirelessly championed the cause of industrial growth, but the city's leaders placed their greatest emphasis on improving commercial rather than industrial facilities. However, industrialization was imperative if the port was to remain viable as the timber industry declined. Naval stores and fishing were other Pensacola industries but they, too, were in decline and, like the timber industry, did not generate a large urban labor force. In 1909, there were 961 workers engaged in manufacturing activities in Pensacola. The value of the products manufactured in that year was \$1,962,661. However, the city did not make the transition to industry, and it

became even less important than those cities which were able to exploit changing conditions.³⁹

Admittedly, Pensacola's leaders were faced with almost insurmountable obstacles in making this transition. Largely because of geography and the shift in the national economy away from agriculture, Pensacola, much like Mobile, New Orleans, and Galveston, was unable to exploit railroad connections as effectively as inland cities. It was in the southern inland cities, such as Dallas, Houston, Birmingham, Atlanta, and Durham, where southern industrialization and urbanization occurred most rapidly.⁴⁰ The dynamics that control urban growth destined that Pensacola attain only the level of a small city. This coupled with its sparsely settled hinterland also precluded the development of a valuable import trade, which is a necessary counterpart to exports in a successful port. When it was one of the nation's leading timber-exporting cities, Pensacola was actually a transshipment center. Ships coming there for cargoes of timber came in ballast rather than laden with cargo for consumption in the locality or in the interior.⁴¹

In the first six years of the 1920s, Pensacola's port made a modest recovery. Articles appeared in such publications as the *World's Markets*, *Gulf Ports Magazine*, and the *Nautical Gazette* describing the port's location, its alleged modern wharves and cargo-handling equipment, and rail facilities. These were probably partially responsible for cargo reaching a respectable 750,000 tons in 1925.⁴² That same year marked the arrival in Pensacola of another railway line. The St. Louis-San Francisco Railway gave the port new access to the northwest. This welcomed event, along with the recent increases in exports, buoyed optimism among city officials that the past fortunes of the port would return.

This optimism was seriously dampened in 1926 when a severe hurricane struck the city. Most of the sixteen wharves suffered various degrees of damage, and the Louisville and Nashville grain elevator was completely destroyed. The disaster prompted the Chamber of Commerce to engage the consulting firm of Parks, Kapp, Bincherhoff, and Douglas to assess the port's future. Released in 1927, the voluminous report described the functions of the wharves and their various stages of disrepair. The condition of the piers, and "the port's primitive cargo handling equipment were two of the report's major concerns." In addition to suggested improvements to the foregoing, other recommendations for upgrading the port were:

building a grain elevator, development of a fruit import and storage business, constructing a cold and dry storage warehouse, large enough to make ice for icing rail cars, and a publicly owned and operated cotton warehouse and press . . . near dockside.⁴³

In 1929 two years after the Parks report, the Army Corps of Engineers released another study. It dwelt upon the need for adequate facilities to handle commodities which it could likely attract to the port; for adequate terminals to provide rapid loading of vessels; and ample railroad trackage between the railroads and the docks. However, of at least equal importance was the point

that "the success or failure of the port community to attract and hold business . . ." was port coordination and management. It declared that, if possible,

the control of all deep-water frontage by the public, . . . including the ownership and operation of a belt-line railroad connecting all rail lines and all terminals, . . . (would be) a practical solution of the coordination problem and . . . an effective remedy for many of the ills that now exist.

In concluding, it stated that "ports should not have to depend upon the good will or selfish interests of either railroads or steamship lines to develop business." The development of traffic, it stressed, is the primary function of the port itself.⁴⁴

As these reports indicate public control of facilities and management was essential to coordinate port activities and to generate traffic. However, all the main wharves in Pensacola, engaged in imports and exports, were privately owned, most by railroads. There is no indication that either city or state officials seriously attempted to get control of this waterfront land. The Louisville and Nashville Railroad deserved credit for much of the port's success, but some charged that it hurt Pensacola's imports by refusing to service independents at its wharves.⁴⁵ (In 1912, Pensacolians had voted favorably for a bond issue to build municipal wharves, but they were not built nor a port authority established until 1943.) Neither the Parks nor the Engineers reports suggested who should assume the responsibility for getting their recommendations accomplished. Before an answer was found to this perplexing problem, the community was in the throes of economic depression and the recommendations were ignored. As the Depression worsened during the 1930s, one-by-one several of the wharves rotted away and the port became a mere shadow of its once bustling past.

Notes

¹ Cass to Van Buren, January 18, 1836, 24th Cong., 1st sess., S. Doc. 67 (Serial 280), 3-7.

² John D. Ware (revised and completed by Robert R. Rea), *George Gauld: Surveyor and Cartographer of the Gulf Coast* (Gainesville, 1982) 28-31. Cass to Polk March 17, 1836, 24th Cong., 1st sess., H. Doc. 176 (Serial 289), 2-5. Cass to Van Buren, January 20, 1836, 24th Cong., 1st sess., S. Doc. 70 (Serial 280), 2-5.

³ Rodgers to Southard, April 15, 1824, *American State Papers: Naval Affairs* 1: 951-52. See George F. Pearce, *The U.S. Navy in Pensacola: From Sailing Ships to Naval Aviation, 1825, 1930* (Gainesville, 1980) 1-5.

⁴ Chase to Eaton, February 5, 1836, *American State Papers: Naval Affairs* 4: 372-74.

⁵ Cass to Van Buren, January 18, 1836, 24th Cong., 1st sess., S. Doc. 67 (Serial 280), 3-7.

⁶ Cass to Polk, March 17, 1836, 24th Cong., 1st sess., H. Doc. 176 (Serial 289), 2-5.

⁷ U.S. Engineers Department, *Annual Report, 1895*, 2: 1662.

⁸ Charles H. Hildreth, "Railroads Out of Pensacola, 1833-1883," *Florida Historical Quarterly* 37, nos. 3 and 4, (January-April 1959): 403-5. See Dorothy Dodd, "Railroad Projects in Territorial Florida" (M.A. thesis, Florida State College for Women, 1929) 45-55. See also Jesse Earle Bowden, "Canal Dreams and Railroad Reality" in *Iron Horse in the Pinelands* (Pensacola, 1982), 8-9. New Orleans, however, had an almost identical experience at the same time, in attempting the construction of the New Orleans and Nashville Railroad. See Harold Sinclair, *The Port of New Orleans* (New York, 1942), 190.

⁹ Harriet E. Amos, *Cotton City: Urban Development In Antebellum Mobile* (Tuscaloosa, 1985), 20. "Planters in northern Alabama sent their cotton via the Tennessee and Mississippi rivers 1,500 miles to New Orleans." Ibid.

¹⁰ William Warren Rogers, *Outposts of the Gulf: Saint George Island and Apalachicola from Early Exploration to World War II* (Gainesville, 1986), 44.

¹¹ Amos, *Cotton City*, 202-4.

¹² Hildreth, "Railroads Out of Pensacola," 404-8. The Mobile and Great Northern Railroad was also completed in 1861. This fifty-mile line ran from Tensas, Alabama, on the Tensas River east to Pollard, Alabama, where it intersected with the Alabama and Florida Railroad. Pensacolians were confident, however, that their port would receive the bulk of the cotton coming south by rail from Montgomery. The tracks of the Alabama and Florida Railroad within the city of Pensacola extended to the foot of Tarragona Street where new wharves had been built. The cotton going to Tensas on the Mobile and Great Northern line would have to be off-loaded on barges for the remainder of the passage to Mobile's wharves.

¹³ See Brian Rucker, "Arcadia and Bagdad: Industrial Parks of Antebellum Florida," *Florida Historical Quarterly* 67 (October 1988): 148-65.

¹⁴ John Appleyard, *Four Centuries . . . A Saga of Pensacola Port in Action* (Pensacola, 1980), 8.

¹⁵ W. D. Chipley, *Pensacola (The Naples of America) and its Surroundings Illustrated* (Louisville, 1877), 6, 20.

¹⁶ See Howard N. Rabinowitz, "Continuity and Change: Southern Urban Development, 1860-1900," in *The City in Southern History: The Growth of Urban Civilization in the South*, ed. Blaine Brownell and David Goldfield, (Port Washington, NY, 1977), 95. In 1881, the Louisville and Nashville Railroad was operating the original Alabama and Florida line, and, in the same year, it subscribed to the controlling portion of the capital stock issued by the proposed Pensacola and Atlantic Railroad. L&N officials also held management positions in the P&A. The P&A line eastward from Pensacola to Chattahoochee, was completed in 1883. It connected at Chattahoochee with the Florida Central & Western Railroad Company that extended eastward to Jacksonville. On January 1, 1885, the P&A was incorporated into the L&N system. The L&N had also gained control of the Mobile and Great Northern system; thus, the L&N system had lines running out of Pensacola to the west, north and east. (See Jesse Earle Bowden, "Colonial Chipley Builds a Railroad," in *Iron Horse in the Pinelands* (Pensacola, 1982) 22-38.

¹⁷ *The Harbors of Fernandina and Pensacola: Speeches of Hon. C. W. Jones and Hon. Wilkinson Call in Senate of the United States, June 15, 1882, upon a bill in reference to same* (Washington, 1882), 3-10.

¹⁸ Amos, *Cotton City*, 26.

¹⁹ Marilyn McAdams Sibley, *The Port of Houston, A History* (Austin, 1968), 114.

²⁰ Sinclair, *The Port of New Orleans*, 173-74.

²¹ Lincoln to Reed, February 13, 1885, 48th Cong., 2d sess., H. Ex. Doc. 224 (Serial 2303), 3.

²² S. V. Benet to Reed, March 17, 1888, 50th Cong., 1st sess., H. Ex. Doc. 226 (Serial 2560), 1-2.

²³ U.S. Engineers Department, *Annual Report, 1896*, 3: 1374.

²⁴ Sibley, *The Port of Houston*, 114.

²⁵ David G. McComb, *Galveston, A History* (Austin, 1986), 60. With completion of the jetties and with frequent dredging, the depth of the channel at Galveston was twenty-five feet, or approximately the same as the depth of the channel at Pensacola.

²⁶ Appleyard, *Four Centuries*, 16.

²⁷ U.S. Engineers Department, *Annual Report, 1896*, 3: 1375-76.

²⁸ U.S. Engineers Department, *Annual Report, 1906*, 1257.

²⁹ U.S. Engineers Department, *Annual Report, 1896*, 3: 1394.

³⁰ U.S. Engineers Department, *Annual Report, 1906*, Appendix Q, 1259.

³¹ Fred O. Howe, *Gulf Ports Special Freight Circular* (Pensacola, 1891).

³² Appleyard, *Four Centuries*, 16.

³³ Chipley, *Pensacola (The Naples of America)*, 20.

³⁴ James R. McGovern, *The Emergence of a City in the Modern South: Pensacola 1900-1945* (De Leon Springs, FL, 1976), 25. A basic tenet of the New South creed regarding agriculture was crop diversification. However, all efforts to break the sharecropping and crop-lien systems, largely failed. Henry Grady's dream that industrialization and urbanization would bring "farm husbandry in its true sense of the South" did not materialize. Lawrence H. Larsen, *The Rise of the Urban South* (Lexington, 1985), 78-79.

³⁵ McGovern, *Emergence of a City*, 26-27. See Thomas Muir, Jr., "William Alexander Blount, Defender of the Old South and Advocate of a New South" (M.A. thesis, University of West Florida, 1988), 50-52.

³⁶ Frank J. Oaks, "The Port of Pensacola, 1877-1920," 1970, 19, Pensacola Historical Museum. With the opening of the Panama Canal to traffic in August 1914, Pensacola and other Gulf ports expected to handle an enormous increase in tonnage the canal would generate. However, this expectation was never realized. See Leland J. Henderson, "Pensacola and Panama," *Pan American Magazine* 15, no. 1 (November 1912): 27-39.

³⁷ Pearce, *The U.S. Navy in Pensacola*, 148-62.

³⁸ Larsen, *The Rise of the Urban South*, 74-77.

³⁹ McGovern, *The Emergence of a City*, 26. Mobile's experience with the exportation of the staple cotton, created a similar situation: "It had fewer workers and half the industrial capital in 1880 than twenty years earlier." Larsen, *The Rise of the Urban South*, 82.

⁴⁰ Rabinowitz, "Continuity and Change," 95-96. Lacking industrial know-how and little access to capital, the post-war South's manufacturing base remained weak in comparison to the Northeast and Midwest.

⁴¹ In 1885, the value of Pensacola's exports was \$1,967,950; whereas the value of its imports was \$48,499. "Quantities and values of merchandise imported into, and exported from, the custom districts of Florida during the years ending June 30, 1860, 1870, 1880, and 1885." *U.S. Bureau of Statistics*, 49th Cong., 2d sess., H. Doc. 7 (Serial 2476), 2: 429-30.

⁴² J. V. Price, "The Port of Pensacola," *The World's Markets* (December 1920): 19-21. J. B. Morrow, "Pensacola, the Natural Deep Water Harbor of the Gulf," *Gulf Ports Magazine* (December 1921): 11-13. J. B. Morrow, Pensacola, "Nature's Deep Water Harbor," *The Nautical Magazine* (November 24, 1923): 563, 588.

⁴³ Quoted in Appleyard, *Four Centuries*, 19-21.

⁴⁴ War Department, Corps of Engineers, United States Army and United States Shipping Board, *The Port of Pensacola, FL* (Washington, 1929), vols. 7-8. It was becoming increasingly more difficult to get government appropriations for harbor projects "without promises of local contributions and assurances that the waterfront would not be privately controlled." Quoted in Sibley, *Port of Houston*, 136.

⁴⁵ McGovern, *The Emergence of a City*, 20-21. As early as 1885, a local editor complained that discriminatory rates of the L&N "keep Pensacola at a standstill, and a competing line . . . is . . . the only thing that will enable us to take our rightful place in the commercial world." *The Pensacolian*, June 20, 1885.

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Tarpon Springs diver, November 1936

*Burgert Brothers photo,
Special Collections,
Tampa-Hillsborough County Public Library*

Gulf Coast Gold: The Natural Sponge

Robert E. Snyder

The natural sponge is a hydrous animal which attaches itself to rocks, shells, seaweed, and rough objects along the ocean floor. The cellular tissue creates an intricate system of pores and tunnels through which water is channeled and released. The natural sponge varies in size from less than an inch to over three feet in diameter. Since the sponge can absorb from twenty-five to thirty-one times its weight in liquid, the animal skeleton has widespread commercial applications ranging all the way from household cleaning to delicate surgery.¹ Although marine biologists have identified more than three thousand varieties of sponges around the world, only fourteen have any real consumer value and use. These sponges are found in the tropical and semi-tropical seas of the Mediterranean, Caribbean, and Gulf of Mexico, and to a lesser extent in the West Indies, Sea of Japan, Philippines, and adjacent waters. The Gulf of Mexico is noted for producing chiefly sheep's wool, yellow, grass, and wire sponges.²

The natural sponge has been known to man since antiquity. The first sponge used by humans was probably ripped from the ocean floor by some violent storm and washed ashore. The Egyptians and Phoenicians knew about sponges. Classical literature contains many references to them.³ Homer indicates in *The Iliad* that Hapaetus used a sponge to wipe perspiration off the body of the blacksmith of Olympus, and refers in *The Odyssey* to the housemaids of Penelope and Odysseus cleaning dining tables with sponges. Aristotle mentions how Greek soldiers cleaned and padded their helmets and greaves with sponges. In ancient Rome soldiers carried a sponge rather than a cup for drinking, and the empresses Messolima and Cleopatra used sponges in their baths. Many divers drowned securing sponges for the Roman aristocracy.⁴ The Holy Bible indicates that as Christ lay dying on the cross soldiers filled a sponge with vinegar and pressed it to His lips. Since then spongers have considered their occupation to be a miserable and cursed trade, filled with hard labor, dangers, tragedy, and sudden death.⁵

Over the centuries the sea has induced fishermen to devise and refine a variety of methods to gather sponges. At first sponges were collected by simply wading in shallow water and pulling them loose by hand. The depletion of shallow wading beds pushed sponge operations into progressively deeper water. For hundreds of years naked divers weighted down with rocks, and equipped with knives, scoured offshore locations. The perpetual search for bigger and better sponges caused fishermen to invent the hook technique. A sharp three-pronged hook was attached to a pole fifteen to forty feet in length and 1 1/2 inches in diameter. Fishermen set out to sea in dinghies, and schooners towed several row boats behind. As one fisherman rowed, another leaned over the side exploring the ocean for sponges, pulling them loose by the hook, and hauling them up on deck. The spongers commonly spread olive or whale oil over rough water to diminish surface ripples and improve visibility. In the 1870s these mariners

introduced the "glass bucket," a pail with a glass bottom that was lowered to depths of fifty feet to examine the ocean floor. These methods of operation required a minimal investment in manpower and equipment. ⁶

The earliest commercial sponge fisheries in the Western hemisphere were in the Bahamas and Cuba. In the 1840s, a French merchant, who had been shipwrecked in the Caribbean, introduced sponges from the Bahamas to the international trade. Sponge markets were established in Nassau and Batabano. Some of the fishermen from the Bahamas and Cuba migrated to the Florida Keys and joined other early settlers of Key West, "the Conchs," in establishing a sponge market. The relatively warm and placid water, and the many keys and reefs, of the Gulf of Mexico provided an ideal habitat for sponges. Extending from a depth of 3 feet to approximately 150 feet, and stretching from Key West north to around John's Pass, the sponge yielding areas on the west coast of Florida covered an estimated 9,300 square miles. In 1849 the first shipment of sponges was dispatched from Key West to New York City, where they sold for ten cents per pound and brought in ten thousand dollars during the first year. The Civil War temporarily disrupted fledgling sponge operations in the Gulf. The wharf at Key West remained the principal sponge exchange in the United States until the rise of Tarpon Springs. ⁷

John K. Cheyney started Tarpon Springs on its way to becoming the sponge capital of the United States. A wealthy Philadelphia banker and associate of land speculator Hamilton Disston, Cheyney noted that America imported most sponges from the islands of the Mediterranean, and schooners from the Bahamas and Cuba carried catches as far north as Appalachicola. In 1886 after studying the sponge operations of Key West, Cheyney began financing hook sponge boats in hopes of making the Gulf of Mexico rather than the Aegean Sea the center of the world's sponge business. In 1891 he advanced this dream another step by establishing the Anclote & Rock Island Sponge Company to store and trade sponges. In 1897 John Cheyney hired an enterprising Greek buyer John Cocoris to recruit young spongers from the Mediterranean and provide technical expertise to his expanding operation. ⁸

Along the Anclote River and bayous of Tarpon Springs spongers constructed boat docks, crawls, warehouses, and packing plants. The crawls (kraals) were designed to store and clean the day's catch. They were circular and rectangular cage-like enclosures made by driving poles and stakes into the river bottom. The water currents and tides would pass through the slats to help cleanse a black membrane from the outside and a milky juice called "gurry" from the inside of sponges. Union Crawl, Cabbage Crawl, and other crawls proliferated along the shoreline around Tarpon Springs. The sponges would then be trimmed with shears, and stored until auction. Dealers would bleach the sponges still further for commercial use with a solution of permanganate of potash. ⁹

At the turn of the century, the natural sponge was considered "Gulf Coast gold." In 1895 sponges were the most valuable fishing business in Florida. The state valued all such activity at \$1,209,725. At \$368,871 sponges accounted for

one-third of the total. They were followed by mullet, red snapper, oysters, and sea trout.¹⁰

The fishermen of Key West laid claim to all the sponge beds in the Gulf of Mexico. As more and more boats put out to sea from Tarpon Springs, the Conchs resorted to attacking the Greek sailors and burning their boats. Cheyney tried to convince the Key West hookers that the Gulf had enough sponges for all. The Greeks were nevertheless seen as intruders. Should rough seas or boat damage force them to seek refuge in strange ports, they ran the risk of being mistreated and overcharged.¹¹ When the Spanish American War broke out in 1898, sponge boats sought refuge in Tarpon Springs from Spanish ships prowling the Gulf, and hostilities between the competing communities temporarily subsided. At the conclusion of the war, the Conchs returned to Key West, and resumed their attacks.¹² Despite the harassment, Tarpon Springs passed Key West in sponge sales for the first time in 1895, and the sponge business grew to over a million dollars annually in the Greek community after the turn of the century.¹³

The development of the deep sea diving suit revolutionized sponging. In 1885 a Frenchman devised a rubberized diving suit with a pumped-in air supply. Introduced in the Mediterranean, the diving suit enabled spongers to go into even deeper waters, and harvest sponge beds never before disturbed by human hand.¹⁴ In 1905 Cocoris imported from the Dodecanese Islands the first crew of Greek sponge divers and sent out boats equipped with primitive hand-cranked air pumps and life lines. The diving expanded sponging in the Gulf to depths of 150 feet and opened up virgin beds. Early divers likened the new fields of sponges to unpicked gardens of flowers and orchards of fruit.¹⁵

Diving for sponges was physically demanding and highly dangerous. The diver started his day at sunrise with nothing more than black coffee until the evening meal of roasted lamb or beef. He descended into the water dressed in two hundred pounds of equipment that made him look like a knight from the Middle Ages—a double canvas outersuit with a lining of rubber, a large glass-windowed bronze and copper helmet, a substantial shoulder and breast plate, lead weights, iron shoes, a three-pronged hook, and nets made of rope. Depending on depths that ranged from 30 to 150 feet, the diver worked shifts of up to two hours, alternating with a counterpart on deck. In the course of a day he might walk as much as eight to ten miles along the ocean floor, struggling against the currents and tides. He had to constantly be on guard for man-eating sharks, giant turtles, octopuses, sharp objects, and ships' propeller blades. Sponge fishermen developed the custom of raising their flags to half-mast to warn other crews of dangers lurking below. A cut, kink, or tear in the equipment posed the threat of suffocation and drowning. Upon ascending the driver had to be careful not to contract the life-threatening "bends," for there were no decompression chambers aboard sponge boats.¹⁶

As deep sea sponging took hold, advertisements were placed overseas in Greek language newspapers recruiting divers. The dream of making a fortune in the new world attracted men from Kolymnos, Symi, Halki, and other islands of the Aegean. The summer of 1905 alone witnessed some five hundred Greek

divers making their way to Tarpon Springs. In addition to the divers came skilled boat builders who constructed some fifty diving boats based on ancient blueprints out of Florida cypress within a year. Another thirty-five boats were produced and awaited crews from Greece.¹⁷ The Greeks drew upon their heritage in naming the boats, and the vessels carried Greek culture to many ports. From classical times came the names Poseidon and Socrates, from the church St. Nicholas and St. George, from old world ports Kolymaros and Hydra, and from families Angeliki and Katina.¹⁸

Hook spongers protested that the heavy metal shoes worn by divers would damage fragile sponge beds and reefs, and ruin the propagation of sponges. The divers attempted to diffuse hostilities by moving further out. This only aggravated matters because the divers brought back larger, better quality, and more desirable species.¹⁹ Some specimens had been growing, the divers liked to point out, when Napoleon was on the fields of Waterloo.²⁰ The dispute between hookers and divers made its way into legislative halls and court chambers. As a result sponge diving was prohibited in waters less than fifty feet deep and less than three miles from shore. The State of Florida applied the prohibition to its territorial limit which extended twelve miles into the Gulf. In 1914 it also became illegal to capture wet sponges less than five inches in diameter in territorial waters. Immigration laws limited, moreover, the number of divers admitted into the country.²¹ Despite the higher costs and various restrictions, diving generated the volume and revenue that made it the superior method of gathering sponges, and Tarpon Springs came to dominate the domestic sponge trade.²²

In 1908 fifty local spongers joined together to found the Tarpon Springs Sponge Exchange. Previously sponges had been stored and sold at the scattered crawls. Since it became increasingly inconvenient for dealers to travel from crawl to crawl, a central exchange was built along the docks on the Anclote River. The Sponge Exchange was a roofed structure composed of a series of individual lockers or stalls that opened onto a common courtyard for the display and auctioning of sponges. The Sponge Exchange provided members with good facilities, locked storage space, and a central location for auctioning sponges on Tuesday and Friday mornings.²³

Packers purchased the sponges for wholesale distributors in New York, Chicago, St. Louis, and other metropolitan centers. Until 1951 sponges were sold by weight. Shipments were frequently loaded with foreign materials like shells, coral, and pebbles to artificially increase their weight. To eliminate this unethical practice, which had also come under the scrutiny of the Federal Trade Commission, spongers resolved to sell by the piece. Henceforth sponges were strung together on lines five feet in length.²⁴

The Sponge Exchange was maintained by a 2 percent service charge, the seller and buyer each paying half. If the boat captain was a member of the local Greek Orthodox Church, another .5 percent was deducted and donated to support St. Nicholas parish. The introduction of deep sea diving, and the creation of the Sponge Exchange, transformed Tarpon Springs into the sponge capital of the United States. Over the years competitors tried to apply the Sherman

Anti-Trust Act to the Sponge Exchange, but the Tarpon Springs collective has survived charges of monopoly. Today the Tarpon Springs Sponge Exchange is on the National Parks Service Register of Historic Sites. ²⁵

The natural sponge industry in the United States enjoyed prosperity through World War II. In the 1930s, between four and six hundred million pounds of sponge were gathered annually in Florida. Tarpon Springs was home port to 150-200 graceful boats, hundreds of skilled divers, and thousands of other residents dependent in one way or another on the Gulf of Mexico for a living. The sponge brought in three and a half to four million dollars annually to Tarpon Springs alone. ²⁶

During the heyday of sponging, the Tarpon Springs fleet made two long trips a year, from August until Christmas, and from the feast of Epiphany, January 6, to June. A priest from the Greek Orthodox Church always performed the sacramental rite of "sanctification of the waters" before the fleet left port. With the advent of diesel engines, the trips were shortened to a few days, and the boats came in for religious holidays. ²⁷ During the long stints at sea, divers ran the risk of storms smashing boats and fires breaking out on board. It was not until the 1930s that the Coast Guard implemented its "voice from the sky" program, which broadcast storm warnings and emergency messages to boats at sea. In 1938 Tampa radio station WDAE commenced broadcasting daily weather reports in Greek. Sponge crews were paid on the basis of shares rather than hourly wages. There was incentive to work long and hard. For running these risks skillful divers might earn nine thousand dollars in a good year. For the unfortunate twenty-plus divers who lost their lives at sea over the years, the sponge industry maintained a small fund for widows and orphans. ²⁸

Beginning in the 1930s, the sponge industry experienced a series of debilitating shocks that revealed the vulnerability of maritime enterprises. In 1938 a highly virulent fungus infected sponge beds, spreading from the Bahamas and Cuba along principal water currents through Key West up the West Coast of Florida to Cedar Key. The marine fungus almost wiped out the entire species of velvet sponge. The "rotting disease," as the fungus was called because it caused sponges to break apart and disintegrate, inflicted a 70 to 90 percent mortality rate among the best sheep's wool sponges. The microorganism virtually decimated sponge beds in the Gulf of Mexico. ²⁹

During World War II, sponge fishing in the Mediterranean was disrupted, and imports from foreign suppliers were closed down. To meet market demands, spongers in the western hemisphere overpicked fragile and recovering beds. The United States exacerbated matters by purchasing practically all the domestic sponge landings. Large federal purchases sent sponge prices skyrocketing from \$2.49 per pound in 1939 to \$15.99 a pound in 1946, and frayed trade relationships with established buyers internationally. ³⁰

In 1947 a devastating "red tide" dealt another crippling blow to already exhausted and delicate beds. A rapidly multiplying unicellular dinoflagellate turned Gulf Coast waters a mottled brownish red. The marine organism, which acts as a nerve poison, killed an estimated five million fish, polluting the Gulf of

Mexico so extensively that sponging was impossible. A nine-day trip by the boat *Dolphin* in the aftermath of the red tide epidemic reaped less than one hundred pounds of sponge. Scientists were helpless to combat the ravaging epidemic.³¹

Distributors turned to imports as the domestic sponge industry grappled with these calamities. Dealers increased purchases of natural sponges from overseas for several reasons. Foreign countries appeared to be more reliable sources of supply, the cleaning and washing of imported sponges was negligible, their price was lower, and users could not tell the difference between natural sponges from Florida and foreign nations.³²

War and nature set the stage for the coup de grace of man-made synthetics. In 1932 a synthetic sponge was developed in France, and introduced thereafter abroad. With the blight of 1937, the disruption of diving operations in the Mediterranean during World War II, and the red tide epidemic of 1947, both civilian and military customers turned to the synthetic sponge. Artificial sponges in vinyl, urethane, and cellulose increasingly displaced the natural sponge by offering customers a more stable supply, lower price, and perpetual product research and development. Manufacturers were highly innovative over the decades in refining desirable qualities: molded sizes and shapes; different colors and odors; variable absorption rates and weights; degrees of durability; allied product lines such as dish clothes and wash clothes; flexibility in storage and distribution; and attractive marketing displays and advertisements for service stations, department stores, and supermarkets. Synthetics cut so dramatically into sponge sales that by the 1960s the man-made product captured better than 90 per cent of the market.³³

As the natural sponge lost ground to imports, disease, and synthetics, many spongers went through the wrenching process of finding stable, higher paying, and less dangerous jobs on land. Some seafarers remained in touch with the rhythms of the ocean by converting their vessels to commercial fishing and shrimping, hiring out to sportsmen for a day of angling, conducting sightseeing excursions, and drawing on their knowledge to operate marinas, build boats, and provide various services to pleasure boaters. Still others persevered with sponging, lobbying legislators for tariff protection, support prices, and relaxed immigration standards on middle-aged divers.³⁴

Communities turned to tourism to augment lost sponge revenue. The sun, sand, and water were powerful magnets for tourism along Florida's coasts. Taking a cue from the successful maritime restoration and revitalization projects at Mystic Seaport, and the inner harbor of Baltimore, in Tarpon Springs the sponge docks and exchange have been refurbished, boats take sightseers on diving demonstrations, restaurants serve ethnic fare, and shops sell everything from sponges to antiques and designer clothes. Tarpon Springs has made a concerted effort to teach tourists the story of the natural sponge to develop product identity and loyalty.³⁵

While sponging declined in the Gulf, a romantic revival took place on the silver screen. In 1947 the Monogram Company refilmed *Sixteen Fathoms Deep*. Local townspeople secured roles as extras, and the mob scene was shot in front of the Sponge Exchange. In 1953 Twentieth Century Fox filmed *The Twelve*

Mile Reef, which was based on the rivalry between the Greek sponge divers and Key West hookmen. About four hundred extras were hired at ten dollars a day.³⁶

In recent years the natural sponge has been staging an ecological and sales comeback in the United States. Many Americans have become more conscious, and conscientious, about the environment and natural products. Spokesmen for the natural sponge proclaim that man has not improved on what nature created. Natural sponges are supposed to have the virtues of picking up more dirt, absorbing more fluid, and releasing these substances more easily. The natural sponge continues to be used extensively in household and automobile cleaning, the trades of painting, pottery, ceramics, leather, and jewelry, and by hatters, lithographers, brick layers, tile setters, and janitors. Natural sponges have proved to be desirable in hygienic and medical fields because they can withstand the high temperatures required for sterilization. The industry continues to look for new uses and applications such as laying a thin bed of sponge beneath turf for a beautiful lawn.³⁷

George Billiris, a fourth generation Greek sponger whose family owns the St. Nicholas boatline, recently returned from a sponge selling mission to Spain, Denmark, France and Germany with more orders than he could fill. Billiris secured firm orders for \$500,000 worth of natural sponges, plus "blank-check" commitments to buy still more. He even received inquiries from the Soviet Union and Yugoslavia.³⁸

While the natural sponge appears poised for a revival, storm clouds spell trouble on the horizon. Natural sponges can be gathered commercially in only a few locations around the world. In recent years these bodies of water have witnessed disasters that the Gulf of Mexico experienced earlier. In the Mediterranean Sea sponge infertility has been blamed on blights, pollution, and the Soviet nuclear accident at Chernobyl. With diminishing and disrupted foreign supplies, distributors have returned to the United States, Cuba, and the Bahamas.³⁹

However, the Gulf's natural sponge industry cannot revive overnight. Today there is a serious shortage of boats and crews. Spongers operate vessels that are essentially the same design as those used by the ancient Greeks. Although diesel engines and air pumps are among the few modern modifications, sponge captains cannot secure enough experienced divers. While the influx of Cuban and Vietnamese refugees has provided some relief along the Florida Keys and Biscayne Bay, these new immigrants are skilled fishermen rather than deep sea divers. Sponging does not lend itself, moreover, to automation. In the past spongers have experimented to no avail with a submarine designed to skim over the ocean floor and retrieve sponges by suction, a diving bell with jointed arms and claws to pick sponges, and an all-terrain vehicle similar to an army tank for mining sponges. Likewise, the methods employed by other fishermen, such as trawling and netting, are impractical for spongers because of damage to both the ocean floor and product.⁴⁰

The Greeks who migrated from the Dodecanese Islands carried along a rich heritage that sustained them during hard times and added to the variegated culture of the Gulf Coast. Preferring small businesses and private enterprise to

the mass production industries, the Greeks established little restaurants, food stores, specialty shops, and other independent ventures. The spongers introduced exotic food, drink, games, dances, music, and a language to the region. Tarpon Springs still prides itself on succulent salads and tangy cheeses; roast lamb and robust tasting coffee; honey-dripping nut-strewn pastries such as baklava; sweet purple maurodaphne wine and amber resin-flavored retsina; and bouzouski music. Even today the most cherished event in the sponge community is the annual Greek Orthodox Church's celebration of Epiphany. While the natural sponge may never again achieve the status of gold from the sea, the customs and traditions of the spongers will remain intimate features of the maritime history of the Gulf of Mexico.⁴¹

Notes

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¹¹ Frantzis, *Strangers at Ithaca*, 58, 75-78.

¹² Frantzis, *Strangers at Ithaca*, 45, 58, 75-78; Stoughton, *Tarpon Springs Florida*, 42-43; "The Tarpon Springs Sponge Industry," *Literary Florida* (April 1952): 16.

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²¹ Ellis, "Sponge Fishing," 48; Harris, "Sponge Fishermen," 123; Stoughton, *Tarpon Springs Florida*, 48; Petrof, "The Florida Natural Sponge," 180.

²² *Ibid.*, 33.

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²⁴ Petrof, "The Florida Natural Sponge," 113-15, 193.

²⁵ Ibid., 27-28, 83, 107-9; Stoughton, *Tarpon Springs Florida*, 50.

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³² Petrof, "The Florida Natural Sponge," 132, 135, 145.

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³⁴ Stoughton, *Tarpon Springs Florida*, 56; Pent, *Tarpon Springs*, 72; Petrof, "The Florida Natural Sponge," iii.

³⁵ Petrof, "The Florida Natural Sponge," 80, 205; Pent, *Tarpon Springs*, 103; Copeland, "Tarpon Ready"; Klinkenberg, "Spongers."

³⁶ Stoughton, *Tarpon Springs Florida*, 79.

³⁷ Frantzis, *Strangers at Ithaca*, 125; Petrof, "The Florida Natural Sponge," 2; Stoughton, *Tarpon Springs Florida*, 39; Lynn Afendoulis, "Under Slimy Flesh Is a Very Useful Skeleton," *Tampa Tribune*, January 25, 1988; Curtis Krueger, "Tarpon Springs Soaks Up Demand for Sponges"; Dianne Stallings, "Spongers Find Good Fortune In The Gulf," *St. Petersburg Times*, November 2, 1988.

³⁸ Copeland, "Tarpon Ready"; Krueger, "Tarpon Springs."

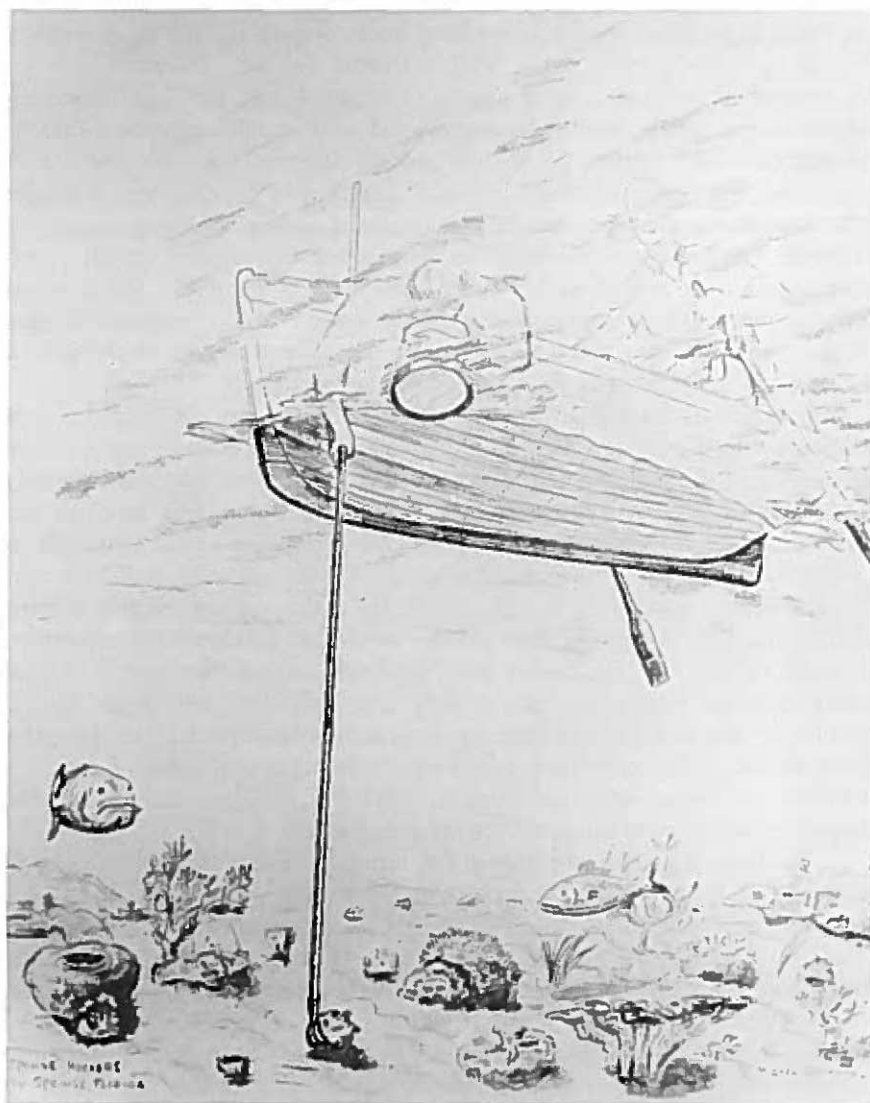
³⁹ Afendoulis and Copeland, "Soaking Up the Sponge Business," *Tampa Tribune*, January 25, 1988; Copeland, "Tarpon Ready"; Klinkenberg, "Spongers"; Krueger, "Tarpon Springs"; Stallings, "Spongers Find Good Fortune."

⁴⁰ Galtsoff, *Sponges*, 7; Afendoulis and Copeland, "Harvesting Methods," *Tampa Tribune*, January 25, 1988; Afendoulis and Copeland, "Soaking Up"; Klinkenberg, "Spongers"; Stoughton, *Tarpon Springs Florida*, 77.

⁴¹ Ellis, "Sponge Fishing," 48, 76, 78; Harris, "Sponge Fishermen," 120-21, 131-36; "Tarpon Springs," 124-25; Krueger, "Tarpon Springs"; Klinkenberg, "Spongers"; Stoughton, *Tarpon Springs Florida*, 46, 56.

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Sponge Hookers

*Michael Emmanuel,
Tarpon Springs Sketch Book
(Tampa, 1974)*

Demagogue and Industrialist: Andrew Jackson Higgins and Higgins Industries

John A. Heitmann

Perhaps no other event in history has been studied with such intensity and detail as World War II, and this massive body of scholarship is reflected in the racks of works on display at any local bookstore and the shelves of volumes housed in virtually every public library. Despite this fact, historians have yet to explore curious and significant gaps in terms of both new knowledge and interpretation, and the mercurial emergence and subsequent decline of New Orleans boatbuilder and entrepreneur Andrew Jackson Higgins clearly fits into one of these voids.¹ Higgins Industries-built landing craft and PT boats played a decisive role in resolving a conflict that ultimately hinged upon amphibious operations. And the significance of "the Boss," as Higgins was affectionately called by his employees, to the war effort was clearly recognized by the public, the common fighting man, and higher-ups like General Eisenhower, who once referred to Higgins as the "man who won the war."² Indeed, this relative neglect on the part of historians is rather puzzling given Higgins's accomplishments.

In large part this scholarly oversight is the consequence of historians continual emphasis upon military and political leaders and operations rather than businessmen, although it could be argued that the defeat of the Axis ultimately lay not so much in pivotal battles like Midway, Stalingrad, and the Coral Sea as much as in corporate America's phenomenal response to the challenges of global war. Further, wartime industrialists like Higgins and his erstwhile partner Preston Tucker experienced reverses and decline in the post-war era, thus proving their critics right concerning their abilities to succeed in deregulated economies. Perhaps because Higgins, Tucker and many others ended their careers on sour notes, potential biographers have avoided these individuals who made "history in a hurry" only to experience failure once economic controls and artificial markets were altered.³ Ironically then, this situation has made a prophet of one New Orleans blue-blood who remarked in 1943 that "Higgins is profane and opportunistic, no good can come from writing on him."⁴

But there is much to be learned from a careful examination of the careers of men like Higgins, not only concerning the wartime experience but also the post-war era. For example, Higgins's success in transforming his *Eureka* service boats to landing craft provides a case study of the application of peacetime technology for military purposes, the reverse of the more familiar "spinoff" process that is often characterized in the literature.⁵ And "the Boss's" subsequent tribulations after 1945 illustrate the fact that visionary ideas are not enough in a competitive economy, that organization as well as innovation are crucial to the fortunes of any businessman.

Higgins was born in 1886 in Columbus, Nebraska, the son of a state judge and ardent supporter of the Democratic Party (hence the name Andrew Jackson), the youngest of ten children. As a child Andy had little interest in school, graduating

from Creighton University High School in 1904 after a lackluster academic career. But even at an early age he had an interest in boats, building at age twelve a sailboat so large that it required knocking out a basement wall to get it out of the house. Just like contemporary World War II entrepreneur and businessman Henry Kaiser, Higgins started work as a trucker, but later he migrated to Alabama where he learned the lumber business. From Alabama he moved to New Orleans, where he worked for a lumber firm until 1915 and then formed his own business that gradually expanded during the immediate post World War I period. Despite temporary reverses experienced during the recession of 1921-22 Higgins forged a rather extensive and far-flung operation based on the export of southern pine and cypress and the import of hardwoods such as mahogany and teak, and by the late 1920s his fleet of schooners and brigantines carrying this lumber was the third largest under American registry. During the late 1920s Higgins developed interests in speedboats, perhaps because of the exploits of famed racer Gar Wood, and in 1930 his sixteen-foot craft *Anne Howe III* set a record time of eighty-seven hours from New Orleans to St. Louis, a time that his *Dixie Greyhound* eclipsed the next year.⁶ During this time Higgins began building a small pleasure craft at a facility that once had served as a repair station for his lumber fleet, and in 1932 he organized Higgins Industries to manufacture various types of boats for trappers, oilmen and lumbermen.

While the economy in the early 1930s languished in depression, in South Louisiana a bonanza of sulfur and oil had just been discovered in the Grande Eclair Dome south of New Orleans, and a real demand existed for shallow draught vessels to traverse the bayous and narrow channels of the region. In response to the opportunity, Higgins, a consummate boatbuilder driven by ambition and guided by intuitive design concepts, came up with a full tunnel stern craft named the *Wonderboat*, the precursor to his well-known *Eureka* craft of the late 1930s that served as the basis for the landing craft of World War II. Unlike the *Wonderboat*, the *Eureka*, introduced in 1936, employed a semi-tunnel rather than a full tunnel design, and its strong "spoonbill" bow enabled the craft to run full speed onto river banks, sandbars and over floating obstacles.

But perhaps the most innovative feature of the *Eureka* was not its sturdy bow or semi-tunnel drive but its unique hull.⁷ The *Eureka's* hull featured a vee section amidship and a reverse curve aft. In combination these two shapes trapped aerated water under the craft's forefoot, thus creating a roller bearing effect that greatly enhanced the vessel's maneuverability and speed. In addition, debris and other floating objects like the water hyacinths of South Louisiana tended to be pushed towards the outside of the hull, while clean water was drawn up from below into the propeller.

Higgins worked out the *Eureka* design intuitively and empirically from 1932 to 1937.⁸ Almost daily he made wide pencil sketches of his hull designs that George O. Huet, chief engineer and naval architect, would subsequently translate into engineering drawings. These preliminary plans formed the bases of further calculations using Thatcher squirrel cage slide rules or Monroe calculators. With an engineering group that almost equalled the production department, hull designs

would be tested in trial and error fashion until an optional set of parameters was finally attained. Later Higgins said of the development process that

we realized that the boatbuilder should know more about the building of boats than the purchaser. So instead of letting the purchaser tell us what kind of boat he thought he wanted, we tried to design and build a boat that would satisfy his needs. ⁹

While Higgins aggressively marketed the *Eureka* to commercial interests in Louisiana as well as Central and South America, he also negotiated sales of the *Eureka* to the Army Corps of Engineers and the U.S. Biological Survey in 1936. In addition, as early as 1934 he approached the military with hopes of gaining lucrative defense contracts, and while he met strong initial resistance from the tradition-bound Navy, he also received a sympathetic ear from the Marine Corps. Indeed, whether Higgins realized it or not, he had designed the best boat in the world for the amphibious war of the next decade, at a time when the technologically conservative military was only gradually beginning to realize the significance of landing operations in modern warfare.

With its invasion of Manchuria in 1931, Japan served notice of its aggressive intentions in Asia, and by 1934 the U.S. Marine Corps planned for an amphibious war with the preparation of a *Tentative Landing Manual*. ¹⁰ Yearly training exercises ensued the next year, and it became clear that the existing debarkation equipment was inadequate. And while the Navy's Bureau of Ships designed various landing craft, in trials conducted in 1940 the Higgins *Eureka* craft emerged as the most suitable. By April of 1941 the designers modified the *Eureka* with the inclusion of a ramp that allowed troops to debark easily, and this design served as the template for all LCPs made during World War II. In addition, Higgins also worked with Marine Corps officials in 1941 in the design of tank lighters, or LCMs, medium landing craft that carried small tanks and trucks directly to the beaches. ¹¹

Throughout the coming war Higgins Industries produced not only large quantities of LCPs and LCMs but also about one-half of the Allies' Patrol Torpedo or PT boats employed during the conflict. ¹² The effectiveness of a fast and maneuverable torpedo boat that could attack in darkness, release its torpedoes when in range and then leave under the cover of a smoke screen was first demonstrated in 1918 by the Italians against Austrian capital ships. The design of such a vessel and tactical concepts associated with it were subsequently ignored by the military until 1937, when Douglas MacArthur campaigned for a fleet of torpedo boats to protect the Philippine Islands from a possible Japanese invasion. In 1938 Congress, heeding MacArthur's warnings appropriated five million dollars for an experimental program, and in subsequent contract bidding a Higgins Industries boat won approval. Although the eighty-foot Higgins PT-5, based on a design by Sparkman and Stevens, never attained the desired top speed of forty knots, its modified successor, the PT-6 was received enthusiastically by the Navy. Made of plywood at one-fourth the cost of the U.S. Bureau of Ships aluminum fabricated PT-8, the PT-6 was powered by three 1200 HP Packard engines, had

two 21-inch stern-launched torpedo tubes and .50 caliber machine guns, and reached a top speed of forty knots. This vessel served as the bases of 199 Higgins-built PT boats that were sold to the U.S. Navy, Great Britain and Russia, and chiefly saw action in the Mediterranean and English Channel.

To overcome the inherent obstacles of the entrenched naval bureaucracy during the late 1930s and early 1940s took a special kind of man, and that was most certainly Andrew Jackson Higgins.¹³ One British visitor described him as

the most outstanding figure I met in America. He was not tall—perhaps five foot nine inches—his body was hard and thick-set, his face rubicand, his eyes bright but not hard. He stood there unblinking and silent, without a smile, but with an expression of intentness upon his face. For him, evidently, the conventional grimaces of welcome were superfluous. There was, however, nothing repellent in his attitude. Far from it. I can best describe him by recourse to a well-worn but in this instance accurate cliché: he “radiated energy.” It was apparent in all his bearing, in every glance, in every gesture.¹⁴

Above all, he was a gifted entrepreneur with a great sensitivity to the market. Higgins once said, “I don’t wait for opportunity to knock. I send out a welcoming committee to drag the old harlot in.”¹⁵ And he especially exhibited this characteristic impatience, irreverence for authority, and fearlessness in his dealings with government officials, from the military to the president. When Franklin Delano Roosevelt told Higgins he wanted to talk with him, Higgins shot back, “that won’t do at all, Mr. President, I want to talk to you.” And he had a temper, not merely confined to his subordinates on the job. In the midst of a dispute with a journalist in 1942, Higgins recalled that while six months earlier he had injured a hand broken previously in a fight with a New York taxicab driver, he said, “I would not give a damn whether I broke one bone or two bones, and I would not care how much I suffered, and I would not care whether this bastard dropped or not, I want to punch this s.o.b. in the nose if I don’t bring suit against him.”¹⁶

And his workers, who swelled to more than twenty thousand by 1943, loved his style and performed extraordinary feats to meet corporate goals. One aide remarked that labor responded to Higgins like the “word from Sinai.” And a wartime visitor recounted that during a lunch break address Higgins

was brutal, frank, encouraging. His mouth was full of homely phrases and slogans—“Only fools say ‘it can’t be done’—As soon as a man realizes that he is unafraid, things begin to happen—Don’t make the same mistake twice”—but there was a note of urgency and purpose which sang through his speech like the voice of hidden trumpets . . . An hour [later] . . . their leaders approached Mr. Higgins and on behalf of more than five thousand of them refused payment for the half hour they had spent listening . . . , and not content with this, offered to work half an hour extra for the rest of the war, the money earned to be given to some Service cause.¹⁷

In personality and style "the Boss" bore a strong resemblance to "the Kingfish" who had captivated many Louisianans less than a decade before.

And although many felt that Higgins had hidden political ambitions, his fundamental strength was as a manufacturer. While Henry Kaiser has often received credit for mass production shipbuilding during World War II, Higgins first took Henry Ford's assembly line techniques and applied them to shipyard production.¹⁸ During March 1942 Frank Higgins, Graham Haddock, and consulting engineer Walter Moses, Jr. visited the Bethlehem Fairfield Yard in Baltimore, the Kaiser Yards in Portland and Richmond, California, and Terminal Island in Los Angeles. At the conclusion of the trip the group designed a four line, forty-four way yard where large ships were constructed from the keel to upper deck from eight prefabricated units. As each vessel moved along its track sectional units were welded in place in discrete stages until the complete boat reached the water's edge. Indeed, this production scheme was widely adapted after the war, as evidenced in the similar methods recently used by the Electric Boat Company to construct Trident-class submarines.¹⁹ The labor force for this modern facility was to consist of 80 percent women and 40 percent Negro, with separate training facilities and equal pay for equal work.²⁰ Further, Higgins envisioned competing assembly lines of black and white workers, hoping that a healthy and patriotic competition would surface. And although Higgins's novel shipyard and labor plan was never fully realized because of the 1942 cancellation of his Liberty ship contract, his bold ideas threatened the traditional elements of the New Orleans business community who were firmly committed to maintaining low wages and a segregated workplace and community.

Innovative in his views concerning black labor, Higgins was also among the first to realize that combat boats were total weapons systems. Thus Higgins integrated backward, manufacturing such products as pumps, engine controls, marine engines, radio crystals, and torpedo tubes. New innovations, including work involving the Manhattan Project, came from a large but decentralized research and development staff that numbered about one hundred with an annual budget of one million dollars. In his typical half humorous, half profane manner Higgins described his researchers as "nuts [and] geniuses," adding that he would "hire a gorilla if I could squeeze an idea out of him."²¹

In early 1945, as it became apparent that the Axis was headed for a certain defeat, "the Boss" had every reason to believe that his fortunes would continue to wax with the conclusion of the conflict. As early as 1943, he had optimistically proclaimed that "it is my obligation, and my particular pleasure, to see that these vast plants do not become barracks for bats."²² Higgins had a vision for peacetime, one in which consumers would purchase his pleasure boats, helicopters, and prefabricated homes, and his aircraft and containerized cargo systems would quicken the pace of the national and international economy.²³ And he reiterated this commitment to the future in publications like Higgins Industries' in-house history, entitled *History in a Hurry*, where it was stated that:

The Higgins Industries are not just "Defense Plants." They are permanent American institutions, designed in every detail to serve the wants of a world at peace, when the job of meeting the needs of a nation at war is finished. When victory is won, our really important work will begin—building for a better tomorrow. ²⁴

Nevertheless, Higgins's dreams never materialized, and his peacetime failures were prophetically predicted in 1943 by business analysts close to the scene at Higgins Industries. ²⁵ They asked, could Higgins make the transition from the artificial war economy to a competitive deregulated environment given the firm's low administrative and sales expenses? Could he transform a production department into a corporation? Could he surrender some of the very power that had elevated him to the status of a demagogue, and thus create an organization dependent upon delegated authority, and more conventional research methods? The answer was no, and in the case of Higgins, the source of his failure can be in part traced to his personal style. But to be fair, however, Higgins was one of only a handful of wartime entrepreneurs who were committed after 1945 to operate within the uncertainties of the peacetime economy. Unlike Consolidated Aircraft's Reuben Fleet, who got out by the war's conclusion, Higgins was willing to take a step into the unknown and to confront the challenges of a new economic order. And although the post-war Higgins Industries never attained its wartime production and employment levels, its continued existence was a stark contrast to the many industrial and government ventures located in New Orleans that quickly closed, including Consolidated Vultee Aircraft, Delta Shipyard, U.S. Army Port of Embarkation, Camp Leroy Johnson, and U.S. Army and Navy Hospitals on the Lakefront.

At the heart of Higgins's peacetime problems was labor, as by 1945 his once blissful relationship with workers rapidly deteriorated. ²⁶ One incident proved pivotal in this regard. In November 1944 the U.S. Maritime Commission asked Higgins Industries to take on the job of completing a number of urgently needed cargo vessels which were built originally at shipyards on the Great Lakes, and then brought down the Mississippi River for completion in the ice-free ports of the Gulf area. But the American Federation of Labor union representatives claimed this new construction was "repair work," demanded double time for overtime instead of the usual time and one-half. Higgins stuck by the time and one-half rate and as a result union business agents labeled these vessels "hot ships," and they refused to allow their members to keep working.

Then and there Higgins became determined to oppose the union, and in early 1945 contract renewal negotiations became deadlocked. A work stoppage took place in June and on November 1, 1945 Higgins announced the closing of his plants and the liquidation of Higgins Industries, citing intimidation and violence directed towards loyal employees. He remarked, "But we have lost our appetite to continue these works and create new and larger ones." First union reaction came from William L. Donnels, publicity chairman, who said, "I think Higgins is still playing to the galleries. He has the idea of striking a mortal blow at labor and making himself a martyr and hero overnight." ²⁷

Indeed, Higgins was probably grandstanding, and perhaps he could not stand to be out of the public limelight now that the war was over. But he was also groping to maintain his entrepreneurial autonomy within a new economic order in which business was deregulated but labor, under the protection of the Wagner Act, was not. In a pamphlet published in December 1945 Higgins argued for equal justice for both capital and labor, and he maintained that an open shop and control of foremen were absolutely crucial to the viability of his operations.

Within two months of closing Higgins Industries, "the Boss" organized a new public corporation, a move that caused additional problems that undermined his position. To begin with, the Securities and Exchange Commission charged Higgins and his brokerage house with improper conduct in issuing the stock, a scandal that shook Wall Street, and tarnished Higgins's reputation.²⁸ Secondly, Higgins and his associates were accused in August 1946 of fraud and improper conduct during the war in making false statements, bills, receipts, vouchers, and certificates. Although eventually vindicated in court, Higgins and his company were never the same.²⁹ He began to look upon the federal government and its bureaucrats as mortal enemies, attacking the leadership of the Reconstruction Finance Company during delicate negotiations related to a loan for his venture to construct prefabricated homes for veterans. And in 1947 he became involved in a fruitless controversy with the State Department over his support for Argentine dictator Juan Peron.³⁰

Concurrent to these external troubles Higgins Industries was hemorrhaging internally due to the lack of proper accounting controls, management, and market forecasting. "The Boss" was unwilling to head a company responsible to shareholders and to proceed cautiously, and his dismissal of financial comptroller Morris Gottesman led to a marked decline in the organization's fortunes.³¹ And the big post-war market for pleasure boats proved to be far more sluggish than Higgins had predicted, even though his firm made a complete line of vessels to meet every purse and purpose. Higgins had made his mark in manufacturing standardized products for the military, but in the deregulated economy and complex markets that followed World War II he could not keep his supply lines open and outdistance his competitors.³² To make matters worse, a 1947 hurricane caused more than one million dollars of damage, siphoning away much of the firm's available capital. Despite these adversities, Higgins Industries experienced a decided upturn at the onset of the Korean War as new orders flowed in.³³ But with Higgins's death in 1952 the company's fate was sealed, and the firm was gradually dismembered, its decline perhaps as dramatic as its rise. The finishing touch came in 1957, when Andrew Jackson Higgins, Jr., now in control, borrowed two million dollars to purchase steel and shortly thereafter lost two of his biggest customers as a result of the Venezuelan nationalization of its petroleum industry and the U.S. offshore tidelands dispute. Shut off from what was thought of as certain revenue, Higgins Industries could not pay its notes to the Whitney Bank of New Orleans and was sold to New York Shipbuilding in July 1959.

In conclusion, the story of Higgins and his company is more than a history of a company that ultimately failed. It is also a story of a region dominated

by strong individuals rather than by dynamic organizations and an infrastructure of institutions that possess the inherent ability to sustain economic growth from generation to generation. South Louisiana remains an economy dominated by mercantile and outside interests, and perhaps this structural characteristic is one important reason why the state has failed to keep pace economically during the decline in the offshore oil industry between 1982 and the present. Although the region experienced boom times between 1973 and 1981, economic development was illusory and fleeting, since South Louisiana's facilities were used only for staging and final assembly, as integral components like steel, pipe, machinery, pressure vessels, instruments and controls were shipped in from other states. In short, this recent expansion did not bring with it pipe mills, foundries, forges, or machinery manufacturers, and as a result a considerable percentage of the profits flowed elsewhere. Thus, while much has changed in Louisiana since the time of Huey Long and Andrew Jackson Higgins, much has remained the same, explaining in part the failure of Louisiana's economy to modernize and become competitive during the second half of the twentieth century.

Notes

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¹ There exists no full length biography of Andrew Jackson Higgins. The best work to date is Jerry Eugene Strahan's unpublished "Higgins: The Man, the Boat, the Industry" (M.A. thesis, University of New Orleans, 1976), a study that covers Higgins's career to 1942. In addition, Conrad Louis Rein's "The Failure of Industrial Development in New Orleans" (M.A. thesis, University of New Orleans), 1981, discusses Higgins wartime plans for the Michoud Facility and the property's subsequent fate on 43-63. Other biographical material includes "Higgins, Andrew Jackson," *The National Cyclopedia of American Biography* (1956), 40-41; "Andy Higgins Dies; Built Boats in War," *New York Times*, August 2, 1952; Jack B. McGuire, "Andrew Higgins Plays Presidential Politics," *Louisiana History* 15 (1974): 273-84; John W. Mountcastle, "From Bayou to Beachhead: The Marines and Mr. Higgins," *Military Review* 60 (1980): 20-29; William Garrett Piston, "Maritime Shipbuilding and Related Activities in Louisiana," *Louisiana History* 29 (1988): 163-75.

² Conversation with Stephen Ambrose, University of New Orleans, October 1988.

³ On World War II shipbuilders and industrialists, see James R. Chiles, "The Ships that Broke the Blockade," *American Heritage of Invention and Technology* 4 (Winter 1988): 27-31, 42; W. A. Beck and S. T. Gaskins, "Henry J. Kaiser: Entrepreneur of the American West," *Journal of the West* 25 (1986): 64-72; Mark S. Foster, "Giant of the West: Henry J. Kaiser and Regional Industrialization, 1930-1950," *Business History Review* 59 (1985): 1-23. Recent work on Preston Tucker includes Mike Mueller, "Tucker:

A Man and His Car," *American History Illustrated* 23 (1989): 36-41. The career of Robert Ingalls is discussed in Hodding Carter and Anthony Ragusin, *Gulf Coast Country* (New York, 1951); for background on developments in Mississippi, see William L. Ziglar, "Shipbuilding on the Pascagoula River," *Journal of Mississippi History* 36 (1974): 1-15.

4 "The Boss," *Fortune* (July 1943): 216.

5 The interactive relationship between war and industrial development is traced in several case studies, including Clive Trebilcock, "Spin-off in British Economic History: Armaments and Industry, 1760-1914," *Economic History Review* 22 (1969): 477; Alan Birch, *The Economic History of the British Iron and Steel Industry, 1784-1879: Essays in Industrial and Economic History with Special Reference to the Development of Technology* (London, 1967), 47-56.

6 On motorboat racing during the early 1930s, see "Motoring and Aviation," *Literary Digest* (May 17, 1930): 48-49; James Devine, "Good By, Records!" *Country Life* 59 (1930): 80; James Devine, "The Gold Cup Again," *Country Life* 56 (1929): 102. See also Time-Life Books, *Racing* (New York, 1976).

7 The definitive work on the evaluation of the *Eureka* is Jerry Strahan's "Higgins: The Man, the Boat, the Industry," 14-22.

8 Remarkable insight into Higgins creativity is contained in George W. Rappleyea, "Of the Higgins Landing Boats," *The Eureka News Bulletin* 3 (1944): 84-92.

9 "Radio Script," *The Eureka News Bulletin* 1 (1942): 12.

10 On Higgins and the U.S. Marine Corps, see Mountcastle, "From Bayou to Beachhead," 20-29. See also Jeter A. Isely and Philip A. Crowl, *The U.S. Marines and the Amphibious War* (Princeton, NJ, 1951), 46-71, and Holland M. Smith and Percy Finch, *Coral and Brass* (New York, 1949) 89-97.

11 The standard work on shipbuilding during World War II remains Frederic C. Lane, *Ships for Victory: A History of Shipbuilding Under the U.S. Maritime Commission in World War II* (Baltimore, 1951). In addition, Gerald J. Fischer's *Statistical Summary of Shipbuilding under the Maritime Commission during World War II* (Washington, DC, 1949), provides a wealth of data concerning productivity and labor. Within the past decade a number of dissertations have been written on this topic, including Deborah Hirschfield, "Rosie Also Welded: Women and Technology in Shipbuilding During World War II," (Ph.D. diss., University of California at Irvine, 1987); Robert H. Pebbles, "Technology as a Factor in the Gulf Coast Shipbuilding Industry, 1900-1945," (Ph.D. diss., North Texas State University, 1980). See also David R. Dorn, "Ships for Victory," *U.S. Naval Institute Proceedings* (February 1985): 69-75. In addition to Strahan's fine account of the evaluation of Higgins LCPs, see also Norman Friedman, *U.S. Small Combatants* (Annapolis, MD, 1987), 115-51.

12 Bob Ferrell, *The United States Mosquito Fleet* (Memphis, 1977); Victor Chun, *American PT Boats in World War II* (Los Angeles, 1977).

13 The best insights into Higgins personality are the following: "The Boss," *Fortune* (July 1943): 101-3; Gilbert Burck, "Mr. Higgins and His Wonderful Boats," *Life* (August 1943):

100-111; Hilary St. George Saunders, *Pioneers! O Pioneers!* (New York, 1944), 116-29.

¹⁴ Saunders, 122.

¹⁵ These anecdotes are taken from the 1943 *Fortune* article on Higgins and are also contained in Strahan's "Higgins: The Man, the Boat, the Industry."

¹⁶ Strahan, 70-71.

¹⁷ Saunders, 123-24.

¹⁸ Pebbles, "Technology as a Factor in the Gulf Coast Shipbuilding Industry, 1900-1945," 141; U.S. House, 77th Cong., 2d sess., *Executive Hearings Before Subcommittees of the Committee on the Merchant Marine and Fisheries* (Washington, DC, 1942), 8, 68-69, 91. Robert V. Laney and Samuel B. Winsam trace production efficiencies in World War II shipyards in "The Case for a Modernized Shipyard," *U.S. Naval Institute Proceedings* 95 (1969): 50-59.

¹⁹ See Larry Schweikart and Douglas Daglish, *Trident* (DeKalb, IL, 1984).

²⁰ Frederic C. Lane, *Ships for Victory*, 186-87.

²¹ "The Boss," *Fortune* (1943): 216. On specific research projects, see *The Eureka News Bulletin* 1 (February 1942): 12; *Ibid.*, 3 (1944): 75, 89-91, 103, 111, 134.

²² "The Boss," 216.

²³ Higgins's ideas on containerized cargo systems are thoroughly explained in Higgins Industries, Inc., "The Higgins Transportation System," Typescript, 1945. Higgins Industries's plan to stimulate the national economy of Mexico by the use of a containerized transportation system is outlined in Emilio Alanís Patiño, Roberto Mendoza Franco, Alfonso Poire Ruelas Y. Francisco, and Avila De La Vega, *Comentarios al Estudio Sobre Mexico de Higgins Industries, Inc.* (Mexico City, 1954).

On prefabricated housing, see *The Eureka News Bulletin* 3 (1944): 116; *New York Times*, February 17, 1946; "Assembled Houses Will Cost More," *New York Times*, February 19, 1946; "Higgins Discloses Big Order Backlog," *New York Times*, March 28, 1946; "'Confused Lethargy' Grips Washington, Higgins Says," *New York Times*, February 20, 1946; "Higgins Plans Homes Without RFC Loan," *New York Times*, May 18, 1947, sec. 8.

²⁴ Higgins Industries, *History in a Hurry: The Story of Higgins of New Orleans* (New Orleans, 1945).

²⁵ "The Boss," 216.

²⁶ Labor problems at Higgins Industries are traced in the Industrial Union of Marine and Shipbuilding Workers of America-CIO, *The Strike at Higgins or the Bungling A.F. of L.* (N.p. 1945[?]); Andrew Jackson Higgins, *Equal Justice For All: An Amendment to the Wagner Act* (New Orleans, 1945); "To the Production Workers of Higgins Industries, Inc., Who Have Been Loyal and Refused to Accept Intimidation," November 1, 1945; "Background and Chronology of Events in Higgins Shutdown," November 6, 1945; Gladstone Williams to Andrew J. Higgins, December 1, 1945; all in 1945 file, McGuire Papers, Special Collections, Tulane University. Stuart S. Hellmann

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²⁷ *New York Times*, October 10, 1945.

²⁸ Higgins troubles with the SEC are traced in "New Higgins Concern to Sell Stock Paving Way for Reopening Plants," *New York Times*, January 8, 1946; "SEC Charges Van Alstyne, Noel Sold Higgins, Inc., Stock Illegally," *New York Times*, February 7, 1946; "Van Alstyne, Noel, Suspended by SEC," *New York Times*, March 1, 1946; "Buyers Too Eager for Underwriters," *New York Times*, March 3, 1946, sec. 3; "Higgins Nominates a New Syndicate," *New York Times*, March 21, 1946.

²⁹ "Higgins is Accused of Wartime Fraud," *New York Times*, August 7, 1946; "Charging of Crime to Higgins is Denied," *New York Times*, August 8, 1946; "Higgins is Cleared on War Contracts," *New York Times*, February 8, 1947.

³⁰ "Peron Sends Plane for Andrew Higgins," *New York Times*, March 3, 1946; "Braden Sows U.S.-Argentine Discord, Says Higgins, Humiliated by Slur to Peron," *New York Times*, June 5, 1946; "Higgins Denounces Braden," *New York Times*, November 29, 1946.

³¹ Interview with Graham Haddock, October 1988.

³² Interview with Robert G. Latorre, October 1988.

³³ On the last years of Higgins Inc., see "Gets \$2,000,000 Army Order," *New York Times*, November 5, 1951, sec. 3; "Chrysler to Reopen Higgins Boat Plant," *New York Times*, February 15, 1951; "Navy Places Order for 31 New Vessels," *New York Times*, November 9, 1951; "Gets Minesweeper Contract," *New York Times*, November 12, 1951; "W. R. Grace Seeks Higgins' Interest," *New York Times*, November 4, 1955.

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U-Boats in the Gulf: The Undersea War in 1942

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In early May 1942 the first two German U-boats which would operate in the Gulf of Mexico in the spring and summer of that year entered the Florida Straits. The Gulf would be a lucrative hunting ground, not only for these two boats, but for at least a dozen others which followed. From May through July America's Gulf Sea Frontier, consisting of the Gulf of Mexico, the northwestern Caribbean, most of the Bahamas, and the east coast of Florida from Miami up to Jacksonville, was the deadliest place on earth for shipping.¹ During June 1942 in the Gulf of Mexico, the Caribbean and their approaches, German U-boats destroyed more shipping than they had sunk in any single month in all theaters of the war combined.² In the Gulf of Mexico alone from May through September fifty-eight ships of approximately 300,000 tons would be sent to the bottom by torpedoes, gunfire or scuttling.³

In August, by which time America had strengthened its woefully inadequate sea defenses and convoys were being organized in the Caribbean and the Gulf of Mexico, there was a sharp reduction in successful U-boat attacks. In September the single German U-boat operating in the Gulf disposed of only one medium sized tanker. By then, the focus of operations had shifted back to the North Atlantic where U-boats were being massed to attack convoys bound for Britain and Russia.

Except for sporadic forays in 1943, the U-boat war in the Gulf of Mexico ended in late summer of 1942. From Admiral Doenitz's perspective it had been a remarkably successful campaign: "The results obtained had by far exceeded the high expectations held by U-boat command in January when operations in American waters had started."⁴

The decision to send U-boats to America and later into the Gulf of Mexico had been reached in accordance with Doenitz's fundamental doctrine of submarine warfare—to destroy the most enemy trade at the least cost to Germany's submarine fleet. The German navy's most important task was "to wage war on trade; its objective was therefore to sink as many enemy merchant vessels as it could. The sinking of ships was the only thing that counted."⁵

Doenitz's strategy of concentrating a massive assault on shipping was hampered by two factors. One was the difficulty in convincing Hitler of its merits. It was not until the spring of 1942 that Hitler was, perhaps reluctantly, won over to the argument that the destruction of shipping was the primary function of the German navy.⁶ The other obstacle was the failure to allocate sufficient resources to submarine construction early in the war. Even had the will existed, there were not enough U-boats—at least before mid-1942—to destroy more shipping than the Allies could produce. When war broke out in September 1939 Germany had a mere forty-six operational U-boats, only twenty-two of which had sufficient cruising range to be of any use in the Atlantic.⁷ Of those, only five to seven could actually be operating at any given time.

The entry of the United States into the war in December 1941 radically altered the picture. Doenitz needed more U-boats than ever before, but plans to construct 72 large Type IX and 228 medium Type VII U-boats were scaled back in December owing to reduced supplies of raw materials, especially copper. Three months later construction goals were further reduced. Now only 36 large boats and 144 medium ones were planned for 1942. Instead of twenty-five new U-boats per month, only fifteen were anticipated.⁸

Nonetheless there were enough U-boats to challenge British and American shipping in the North Atlantic and in more southerly waters. At the end of 1941 there were 98 operational U-boats.⁹ Four months later 124 were operational and an additional 114 were in construction or undergoing sea trials.¹⁰ Of the 124 operational U-boats, 85 were assigned to the Atlantic, 20 to the Mediterranean and 19 to Norwegian waters.

The decision to send U-boats to operate off American shores was reached within days after Pearl Harbor. At a naval conference with the führer on December 12, Admiral Raeder argued that the United States would be so distracted by events in the Pacific that Germany should intensify its efforts in the Atlantic to disrupt supplies reaching Great Britain. Six U-boats were authorized to proceed to the east coast of the United States.¹¹

Successes were not long in coming for Operation Drumbeat. Within a month U-123 commanded by Hardeggen had arrived in the western hemisphere and on January 12, 1942 sank a nine thousand-ton British steamer, *Cyclops*, the first victim of the "Happy Times." Virtually no organized resistance greeted the intruders. All shipping up and down the Atlantic seaboard was at risk, especially near the major ports and off Cape Hatteras.

Reacting to the dangers posed by German U-boats in American waters, President Roosevelt borrowed twenty-four anti-submarine trawlers from Great Britain and reorganized the defense of the eastern and southern coasts. It was clear that the Eastern Sea Frontier with its headquarters in Manhattan would be unable to oversee effectively the defense of the entire western Atlantic. On February 6, 1942, a Gulf Sea Frontier was formed to defend the southern coast from Jacksonville to Texas from the looming German menace. The Seventh and Eighth Naval Districts headquartered in Key West and New Orleans respectively formed this Gulf Sea Frontier whose first commander was Captain Russell Crenshaw. The forces at his disposal were overwhelmed by the events which followed.

The first ship sunk by a U-boat in the Gulf Sea Frontier was an American tanker, *Pan Massachusetts*, torpedoed in the early afternoon of February 19 off the Florida coast near Fort Pierce. During the next week Hardeggen and a companion U-boat operating off Florida's east coast sank four more tankers. Little substantial progress toward organizing anti-submarine defenses had been made in the Gulf Sea Frontier by the time two more U-boats arrived in April. Hardeggen in U-123, lying on the ocean bottom by day and attacking at night, sank six ships between April 8 and April 13. Over the course of the next two weeks five U-boats, including that of Cremer who survived the war and who

recently published an account of his World War II experiences, torpedoed or destroyed by artillery twelve more vessels, five of which were tankers.¹²

Raeder and Doenitz, quite pleased with the results of Operation Drumbeat, pressed for additional efforts in the western Atlantic. At the naval conference with the führer on March 12 Raeder stressed the advantages of capitalizing upon the "unpreparedness of the United States."¹³ During April Doenitz would time and again return to the theme of taking advantage of America's weakness. On the twelfth of that month he set forth a very carefully elaborated assessment of conditions on the American coast.¹⁴

Doenitz recognized that American defenses had been significantly improved since Operation Drumbeat began. Destroyers, picket ships, and observer craft were patrolling. He mistakenly concluded that steps to organize shipping into convoys had been taken.¹⁵ Nonetheless, Doenitz concluded, "the opportunities for attack remain on as high a level as heretofore." Not only did he regard navy and coast guard crews as "undistinguished, inexperienced and not very tenacious in pursuit," but he erroneously believed the U.S. Navy had ineffective sonar. Even after detecting the presence of a submarine, destroyers and picket ships preferred to "give wide berth rather than going over to the attack." Some U-boats had been detected in water as shallow as twenty meters, and still none had been lost in combat. Doenitz concluded that "taking everything into consideration, our boats have been so successful that their presence along the coast remains justified and further successes are to be expected."

In a war diary entry of April 15 Doenitz further refined Germany's U-boat strategy for American waters. In response to criticism that U-boats were failing to intercept vessels bound from America to Great Britain, Doenitz argued that it really didn't matter where a ship was sunk. The enemy's shipping network forms a single, unified piece. In the final analysis every ship sunk must be replaced. Over the long haul, Doenitz argued, the decisive question is the "race between sinking and new construction."¹⁶

Doenitz further recognized that his strategy against merchant shipping would forestall the opening of a second front in Europe. U-boats should be employed, therefore, wherever the most enemy merchant tonnage could be sunk the "most cheaply"—that is, with an acceptable rate of U-boat losses.

For the foreseeable future, U-boats could operate with relative impunity along the American coasts. The beefed up air and naval defenses were being operated by "inexperienced crews which do not constitute a serious threat at present." "American fliers," said Admiral Raeder, "see nothing, the destroyers and patrol vessels are travelling too fast most of the time even to locate submarines, or they are not persistent enough in their pursuit with depth charges."

On the other hand, German naval strategists could foresee a time when Germany would be forced to break off the U-boat offensive in American waters. Coastal waters were shallow, making U-boats operations hazardous. Eventually the United States would organize convoys which would probably be ineffective at first until they gained more experience. If and when merchant traffic lightened up, Germany would resort to laying mines in front of the major harbors. Finally,

Raeder acknowledged that "if operations in the American area should prove unprofitable, we shall resume warfare against the convoys in the North Atlantic with a large number of U-boats." ¹⁷

It was to carry out this strategy of attacking American coastal merchant shipping, especially oil tankers, that U-507, a long range type IX boat, captained by Lt. Commander Harro Schacht slipped out of the former French submarine base at Lorient in the evening of April 4, 1942, to make the short run downriver into the Bay of Biscay and on into the Atlantic. ¹⁸ Two days later Lieutenant Erich Würdemann and U-506 sallied forth with orders to rendezvous with U-507 in the Gulf of Mexico near the Mississippi delta. ¹⁹

The journey across the Atlantic was uneventful, dotted with diving practice, firing guns and inspecting torpedoes. In order to conserve fuel both boats proceeded slowly, mostly on the surface. April 20 was punctuated by a remembrance of the führer's birthday which Würdemann commemorated with a little speech.

Having arrived in the western Atlantic, Schacht was the first to draw blood. Just before noon on April 30 off northeastern Cuba, U-507 surfaced in the wake of a small tanker, and because—as the captain said—it "didn't deserve" a torpedo it was sunk with artillery fire. Another vessel was in view, but pursuit broke off when an airplane appeared on the horizon. The other U-boat was forging westward through the Nicolas Channel heading for the Straits of Florida, where Würdemann was pleased to discover that the Americans were not yet flying nighttime patrols. Like every German U-boat captain who passed through these waters, he noted that coastal lights were burning just as in peacetime. ²⁰

That same night U-506, sailing south, saw a bright halo of light over Miami which lay on the starboard. Just to the south of Miami and with a luminous moonlit sea, Würdemann sank a small Nicaraguan freighter around midnight with a single torpedo.

During the next two days, both U-boats made their way through the Straits of Florida into the Gulf of Mexico. On May 4, U-507 sank its first ship in the Gulf west-northwest of Key West. It was an American freighter, the *Norlindo*. According to survivors the German sub surfaced and gave them forty packs of cigarettes and a cake with French writing on it. ²¹ Within the next twelve hours two more vessels were sunk. The first was a tanker, the *Munger T. Ball* which exploded when struck by the torpedo. Schacht described the scene in his war journal: "The whole sea burns in a wide circle around the spot where she sank. Over it stands a gigantic mushroom of smoke." ²²

Almost immediately U-507's radio operator listening on the 600-meter band picked up an SOS from another ship, the *Joseph M. Cudahy*, reporting the torpedo attack. Within an hour this vessel, too, had been sighted and was being tracked. Realizing its desperate situation, the *Joseph M. Cudahy* began zigzagging into the pitch black night. But it was hopeless. In less than three hours this ship too exploded and was burning from stem to stern. An hour later, an American shore station sent an urgent U-boat warning to all ships in the Gulf of Mexico instructing them to extinguish all of their lights at night.

U-506 was the first of the two boats to reach the designated rendezvous to the southsoutheast of New Orleans. While waiting on the surface in a calm sea with visibility limited by haze it spotted a PC type subchaser forcing the sub to crash dive. No depth charges followed and no sonar was heard. U-507, meanwhile, was miles away, distracted by tempting targets. On May 6 and 7 Schacht was busy sinking two freighters by artillery, and just after dawn on the eighth torpedoing a Norwegian freighter, *Torny*, which was steaming for the mouth of the Mississippi. On the following day Schacht was attacked by an airplane which dropped two bombs, causing no visible damage, however it was later realized that nearly two tons of fuel oil were missing from the bunker. Although no leak could be found, the forward depth rudder on the starboard side had torn loose probably causing the clanking noise which could be heard when submerged.

When Schacht intercepted the U-boat warning issued by New Orleans' Eighth Naval District on May 10 he knew that Würdemann and U-506 were not far away. Würdemann, in fact, was sinking his first victim in the Gulf. It was the tanker *Aurora* which he had begun pursuing just before midnight. About 1:30 in the morning local time, Würdemann fired two torpedoes, one of which struck amidship, slowing the tanker down. An hour and a half later U-506 fired two more torpedoes, both of which exploded, causing the *Aurora* to stop, list to starboard, and begin sinking abaft. ²³

The onslaught of sinkings led to beefed up patrols at sea and in the air. Although the discovery of surfaced U-boats was rare, about midmorning on May 11, U-506 was attacked by a plane coming out of the sun which was spotted by the watch too late. A powerful detonation tossed the U-boat about, causing little damage except to tube five into which a torpedo could not be inserted.

Ashore there was as yet little awareness that the war had moved into the Gulf and that the coastal communities were soon to become part of America's front line in the war against Germany. The ports, of course, were bustling with activity. Normal shipping was augmented by wartime cargos of industrial goods, foodstuffs, and petroleum products. There were new jobs and cities such as Mobile and Galveston were growing and prospering. Smaller communities also benefited, for example, Pascagoula and Moss Point, which, tripled in size between 1940 and 1942 following the opening of the shipyard there. ²⁴

Another of the Gulf's bustling shipyards was the Alabama Dry Dock and Shipbuilding Company which had a contract to build ten thousand-ton Liberty ships. On May 3, when U-507 and U-506 were running through the Straits of Florida toward the Gulf, a crowd of some two thousand Mobilians were at the Pinto Island shipyard participating in the christening of the *Arthur Middleton*, the company's second Liberty ship in ten days and the fourth built by the firm. ²⁵ Another Mobile firm, Gulf Shipbuilding, whose shipyard was at Chickasaw, was at that same time putting the finishing touches on the *USS Capps* which was the first destroyer built in the eastern Gulf and the first warship built in Alabama since the Civil War. ²⁶

Although acts of war had taken place in the Gulf during the first week of May and although shipping had been warned of the presence of U-boats in the Gulf, there was, then, no public acknowledgement of these events. It was not until Sunday, May 10, that newspapers carried stories about the sinking of vessels in the Gulf. In Mobile's *Press Register* a bold headline announced the torpedoing of Gulf shipping.²⁷

The main angle of the story was the possibility that the sub attacks were masterminded by Baron Edgar von Spiegel, a World War I submarine veteran and former German consul in New Orleans whose Nazi fanaticism had embroiled him in controversy and led to his being withdrawn from America. The likelihood that he was on board one of the subs seemed, for the gullible at least, to be confirmed by interviews with the rescued merchantmen who reported being hailed by a tanned officer wearing shorts who spoke, as they said, perfect "American."

Almost without fail, survivors of U-boat attacks had the same story to tell. Following the attack, the U-boat approached. A German officer, almost invariably wearing shorts and tanned, spoke to them in impeccable English or American. Survivors were given cigarettes and matches, and they were given directions for the nearest coastline. Usually, the German made some lame joke about blaming this on Mr. Roosevelt or Mr. Churchill and that the shipping company could bill them for the damages.

There is no evidence that Edgar von Spiegel or any other "Nazi fanatic" was masterminding U-boat attacks in the Gulf. In point of fact, there is little evidence that Doenitz and the Naval War Staff had much in the way of intelligence other than what they could read in the press or interpret from intercepted radio signals. Nonetheless there was great fear that America was crawling with Nazi agents, an apprehension lent some credence by a few isolated incidents. The arrest of eight Nazi agents who had been landed in the United States by U-boats fuelled this kind of speculation. One group of four had come ashore on Long Island and the other at Ponte Verde Beach just south of Jacksonville, Florida. These saboteurs possessed dynamite, \$150,000 in cash, as well as maps and plans of industrial installations, bridges, and hydroelectric plants.²⁸ In an unrelated incident in early July, FBI agents entered the homes of forty aliens living on the Gulf coast, seizing flares and telegraph keys from homes in Greenville, Vicksburg, and Natchez, Mississippi.²⁹

Closer to home, ordinary citizens were reminded of the presence of spies and saboteurs by the "Zip Your Lip" campaign and by the anti-espionage classes which J. Edgar Hoover's G-Men were holding in Mobile and other towns to coordinate law enforcement agencies in their struggle against espionage.³⁰ Hollywood was also doing its bit to remind Americans to be on guard against Axis agents. A Grade B film, "Secret Agent of Japan," with a cast of unknowns was playing at Mobile's Empire Theater.

However, fears that German agents and spies and saboteurs were lurking around the Gulf are not borne out by the war diaries of Doenitz or U-boat commanders. If Raeder, Doenitz, and the naval staff had intelligence about the American war effort, ship sailings, and other useful information, there is no evidence

so far that it was passed on to the U-boats on station along the Gulf Coast. Würdemann, Schacht, Müller-Stöckheim and other U-boat commanders were left to their own devices to wait patiently outside the principle harbors or to patrol the obvious coastal sea lanes to discover ships to sink. The U-boats didn't really need any secrets. Ship traffic was still moving independently and with little protection.

After rendezvousing near the mouth of the Mississippi, U-506 and U-507 enjoyed great success. Between May 10 and 20, Würdemann in U-506 sank eight vessels and Schacht bagged two more. Schacht should have had more kills, but for inexplicable reasons and to his great disappointment some of his torpedoes ran under ships, others ran in circles and in still others the explosive pistols failed to fire. He was not the only U-boat captain to experience similar technical problems which were not solved until later in 1942.³¹ For the moment German torpedoes were little better than they had been in 1918.

Both captains reported an abundance of ship traffic, at least during the daylight hours. Except for constant, but ineffective, aircover on the major ship channels and occasional PC boats it was almost like peacetime. Ships were travelling singly. There were no convoys. To protect themselves, some vessels had been painted in camouflage, and though some had deck guns, they were almost never used and in any case were mostly ineffective. Until a coastal dimout was ordered for the Gulf in mid-June, lights still burned brightly on the shore at night, but whether that contributed to U-boat successes is a matter of debate.³²

Sea conditions near the passes of the Mississippi were generally favorable for U-boats. Although currents ran strong and it was oftentimes difficult to navigate in shallows, the turbid water discharged by the river concealed U-boats. Schacht reported the muddy water provided good cover at periscope depth and reduced the risk of detection by sound.³³ Both Schacht and Würdemann advised Doenitz that the Gulf of Mexico offered rich opportunities for additional U-boats.³⁴

On his return to the U-boat bases in France, Würdemann composed an insightful assessment of the reasons for his boat's successes. Having set forth from Lorient on April 6, he returned two months and ten days later during which time his boat had travelled 11,249 nautical miles of which 877 were submerged. U-506 had sunk ten vessels totaling over sixty thousand tons of which nearly fifty-six thousand were sunk in the Gulf of Mexico. Würdemann attributed his success to two simple things: "We surprised the enemy and found him unprepared."³⁵ Among the weaknesses of the Americans, he specified three in particular: their failure to establish systematic observation of the sea; the absence of convoying; and their failure to implement zigzagging.

During late May and early June four more boats operated in the Gulf. U-103 (Winter) was in the Yucatan Channel; U-753 (von Mannstein) replaced Schacht and Würdemann in the passes of the Mississippi; U-106 (Rasch) operated south of Mobile; U-158 (Rostin) entered the Caribbean, proceeded through the Yucatan Channel to the mouth of the Mississippi, and finally marched west to attack vessels leaving Mexican ports.

Three developments during this period influenced the war in the Gulf: the introduction of the type XIV submarine tanker, the entry of Mexico into the war and the embryonic introduction of the convoy system. Submarine tankers, or "milch cows" made it possible for U-boats to operate for longer periods and thus in more remote areas such as the Gulf of Mexico, the Caribbean, the South Atlantic, and eventually around the Cape of Good Hope in the western Indian Ocean.³⁶ Refueling could extend the operation of a U-boat by a couple of weeks. The larger Type IX U-boats that generally were operating in the Gulf of Mexico could take up their stations off New Orleans, Galveston, or even Tampico and Vera Cruz and remain there until they had expended their complement of torpedoes and ammunition.

Mexico was now more directly threatened than previously, and it would be the sinking of two Mexican tankers that would prompt her to declare war against the Axis. In mid-May a Mexican vessel, the *Portrero del Llano* was torpedoed and sunk off Miami Beach, followed a week later by the sinking of yet another ship, the *Faja de Oro*, in the eastern Gulf of Mexico near the Straits of Florida.

On the basis of reports from U-564, the U-boat which sank the *Portrero del Llano*, the German government maintained that the vessel had been in violation of international law by traveling in a war zone without lights and not having its national flag properly lighted.³⁷ The American press, on the other hand, reported that the Mexican ship had been fully illuminated, and that the sub had stalked the vessel for half an hour before firing the fatal torpedo.³⁸

These episodes inexorably led toward a break in relations. There were demonstrations against German businesses and citizens. Axis residents along Mexico's Gulf coast were informed by President Avilo Camacho's government that they were to be moved into the interior and would probably be interned. Mexico's Navy Minister promised a speedup in the construction of twenty-five torpedo patrol boats to protect shipping in the Gulf.³⁹ Before the month of May was out the Mexican senate had voted fifty-three to nothing to declare war on the Axis powers. German U-boats were informed on June 1, 1942, that from henceforth Mexican naval and air forces were to be regarded as hostile.⁴⁰ The entry of Mexico into the war produced closer cooperation between its defense forces and those of the United States in the months which followed.

The most effective defensive measure against U-boat attacks was, of course, the organization of convoys. Coastal patrol by destroyers, Coast Guard cutters, small picket ships, flying boats, land planes, and blimps helped some, especially planes, which even if spotted by U-boats at great distance would often cause a U-boat to dive. But most of these measures were relatively ineffective.

Some measures were not only ineffective but ludicrous and foolhardy. One such was Ernest Hemingway's private effort to defeat the Germans singlehandedly. With the assistance of the American embassy in Havana, Hemingway obtained enough fifty-caliber machine guns, bazookas, and grenades to convert his fishing boat, the *Pilar*, into a disguised gunship—like the Q-boats of World War I.⁴¹ He and his crew, sometimes including two of his sons, cruised up and down

the Old Bahama Channel on Cuba's northern shore hoping to catch a napping sub on the surface. Alas, they saw only one sub all summer and that was far out of range.

More effective were the measures taken by the new commander of the Gulf Sea Frontier and the Seventh Naval District, Rear Admiral James Lawrence Kauffman, who arrived in Key West in late May.⁴² Many of the steps to be taken were quite obvious, but what was needed was an able administrator to put them into effect. Kauffman had a no-nonsense reputation for being hardworking, aggressive, and organized. In World War I he had gained experience in anti-submarine activities and, most recently, had been sent to Iceland to establish an American base which played a vital role in defending convoys supplying Britain and Russia. In a front page story, "Hardbitten Sub Foe Handed Job of Making Gulf Waters Safe," Mobile's *Press Register* expressed hope that the convoy methods employed by the Iceland command would succeed in reducing casualties in the Gulf Sea Frontier.⁴³

Upon arrival at Seventh Naval District Headquarters Admiral Kauffman began taking action immediately. Because the Keys were too remote, and communications with the mainland too fragile, he moved the administrative offices to a more spacious facility in Miami, which provided better communications with air and naval bases in the Gulf Sea Frontier. The dimout which had been in effect on the Atlantic coast to the Florida Panhandle was extended to Texas, and the navy was ordered to patrol the coast to ensure compliance.⁴⁴

In his first communication with naval forces in the Gulf Sea Frontier, Admiral Kauffman told them their first job was to "sink submarines."⁴⁵ Admiral Kauffman did not have long to wait. On June 13, after being pursued through the Old Bahama Channel by the Key West Killer Group, including three destroyers and B-18's, U-157 was finally sunk by the Coast Guard cutter *Thetis*.⁴⁶ Six weeks later near the Mississippi Delta, U-166 would be sunk by a Coast Guard plane from Houma, Louisiana. In order to combat submarines more effectively in the Gulf of Mexico, a coastal bomber task force was established under the command of Colonel Louis Merrick.⁴⁷

In response to congressional criticism over losses in the Gulf of Mexico and to reassure public opinion, Secretary of Navy Knox promised to build three thousand small boats a month to combat the U-boat menace in the Gulf.⁴⁸ Alabama congressman Boykin had been one of the major proponents of a small boat called the "Aqua Bomber" powered by automobile engines and capable of carrying two or three depth charges. Vice Admiral Russell Waesche, Commandant of the Coast Guard, announced he had been consulting with national yachting organizations to seek their help in spotting U-boats in American waters. Desperate measures indeed seemed to be in order.

Based on the very promising assessments by the first wave of U-boat captains who operated in the Gulf, Doenitz sent additional submarines and the height of the underwater war in the Gulf was reached in June and early July. Between June 7 and July 21 at least seven U-boats operated in the Gulf of Mexico. Among them they sank no less than twenty-eight vessels amounting to more

than 130,000 tons. Three U-boats in particular enjoyed outstanding success. U-67 under the command of Müller-Stöckheim who specialized in shallow water operations and who cruised from the Tortugas, off Appalachicola, and over to the Mississippi passes, sank seven vessels in the Gulf for 44,856 tons.⁴⁹ U-158 sank nearly 38,000 tons and U-129 sank over 20,000 tons.

The establishment of convoys would bring the U-boat offensive in the Americas to an end. On America's east coast the combination of convoys as well as reinforced defenses inflicted such unacceptable U-boat losses on the Germans, that on July 19 Admiral Doenitz ordered the withdrawal of the last two U-boats from the Cape Hatteras area.⁵⁰ However, he was prepared to continue committing boats to the Caribbean and to the Gulf as long as conditions were more favorable, (i.e.) where traffic consisting of single, unescorted ships continued.

It was probably not before mid-July that any significant coordinated convoy system was established by Admiral Kauffman. The earliest German encounter with a Gulf convoy is recorded in Doenitz's war diary on May 31. Commander Poske whose U-504 had just entered the Gulf of Mexico and was due west of Cuba spotted a convoy consisting of a two-funnelled passenger ship, two freighters, and three destroyers heading for Yucatan or perhaps Tampico.⁵¹ Intermittently, convoys were sighted in the Florida Straits or north of Cuba. On July 16 Mobile's *Press Register* reported that the convoy system had been inaugurated in the Gulf-Caribbean sea lanes which were also being patrolled by warships, bombers, and blimps.⁵²

By the end of July Doenitz knew that convoys had become a fact of life in the Gulf. Reporting from near the passes of the Mississippi, U-171 spotted a convoy of eleven vessels close to the coastline. The sudden arrival of a plane forced the sub to dive. By the time U-171 surfaced, the convoy had already entered the mouth of the Mississippi.⁵³ U-171 was not only the last of the successful U-boats in the Gulf in the late summer of 1942, it also probably set a record for length of time spent in the Gulf. On July 26 it sank its first victim and another ship two weeks later both at the mouth of the Mississippi. Its final target was a tanker, the *Amatlan*, torpedoed on September 4 off the coast of Mexico.⁵⁴

The days of the easy kills off American coasts had ended. Although short lived, the U-boat war in the Gulf of Mexico during 1942 proved momentarily profitable. It had been clearly conceived as only a subsidiary operation in German naval strategy, but catching the Americans, the British in the Bahamas, the Cubans, and the Mexicans off guard, the U-boats destroyed much valuable shipping at an acceptable cost. Rohwer has calculated fifty-eight vessels were sunk by German submarines between May and September, of which twenty-eight were tankers. Actually, there may have been even more ships sunk which have not been reconciled with either German or American records.⁵⁵

Despite the fact that access to the Gulf of Mexico is confined to narrow straits and that its coastal waters are relatively shallow, therefore making it a potentially hazardous body of water in which to operate U-boats, German losses

were at first minimal and acceptable. U-boats had been able to enter and depart through the Straits of Florida and the Yucatan Channel almost at will, especially during May and early June. Only two U-boats were sunk in the Gulf during the 1942 campaign—one, U-157, sunk in the Straits of Florida in mid-June and the other, U-166, sunk in the passes of the Mississippi in early August.⁵⁶ Such losses were tolerable, although as time passed it grew clear that the ratio of merchant sinkings to U-boat losses was clearly shifting in favor of withdrawal from the Gulf of Mexico.

Another, but peripheral factor, which might have hastened the withdrawal of U-boats from the Gulf in the late summer was the morale of the crews. Anyone who has seen the classic film *Das Boot* can imagine the tension of life within a U-boat. In the Gulf of Mexico boats also had to contend with stifling heat and rampant mildew. In his final report to Admiral Doenitz, Würdemann of U-506, praised his "young, and for the most part inexperienced crew" for proving itself "capable."⁵⁷ He went on to write that his boat had altogether spent about two weeks underwater, lying on the bottom or travelling submerged, about sixteen hours per day in which temperatures inside the boat reached about 35 degrees Celsius, that is, 95 degrees Fahrenheit.

Staats of U-508, operating in the Gulf during August, commented extensively in his war diary about the impact on his crew. While attempting to minimize the effects of heat, especially in the engine room, he conceded that "the physical condition of the crew left much to be desired some of the time—emaciation, boils and especially prurient rashes."⁵⁸ Fortunately, he wrote, the weight loss and the boils "disappeared for the most part on their own" when the crew had an opportunity to get some sunshine and fresh air in the Atlantic on the return voyage.

Probably these factors were only incidental matters of concern for the U-boat command. Even after operations ceased in the Gulf of Mexico, tropical missions continued particularly along the African coast off Freetown which was serving as an assembly point for convoys from the Indian Ocean and South Africa. Nonetheless, morale decisions were not insignificant and perhaps played a minor role in the decision to shift the focal point of intercepting shipping from the Americas back to the North Atlantic.

Attention was shifted to the convoys in the North Atlantic and to those steaming up the African coast from Capetown and Freetown. The U-boat offensive in the Gulf of Mexico had ended, but it had inflicted a staggering cost upon the Allies. Victory, in fact, was not yet in sight. Churchill, writing to President Roosevelt on October 31, remained fearful of the U-boat war. "This, I am sure, is our worst danger."⁵⁹

Notes

¹ Forty-one ships of 219, 867 gross tons were sunk. Samuel Elliot Morrison, *History of United States Naval Operations in World War II*, vol. 1, *The Battle of the Atlantic, September 1939-May 1943* (Boston, 1948), 142.

² Ibid., 144.

³ These figures are extracted from Jürgen Rohwer, *Axis Submarine Successes, 1939-1945* (Annapolis, 1983), translated from *Die U-Boots Erfolge de Achsenmächte 1939-1945* (München, 1968), 93-120.

⁴ Admiral Doenitz, *Memoirs: Ten Years and Twenty Days*, trans. R. H. Stevens (Westport, CT, 1976), 223.

⁵ Ibid., 150.

⁶ "The Fuehrer agrees with the Commander in Chief, Navy that victory depends on destroying the greatest amount of Allied tonnage possible." Germany, Kriegsmarine, Oberecommando, *Fuehrer Conferences of Matters Dealing with the German Navy*, microfilm (Washington, DC, n.d.), April 13, 1942. (Hereafter cited as *Fuehrer Naval Conferences*.)

⁷ Doenitz, *Memoirs*, 46-47.

⁸ *Fuehrer Naval Conferences*, March 12, 1942 and April 16, 1942.

⁹ Ibid., December 29, 1941.

¹⁰ *Kriegstagebuch des Befehlshaber der Unterseeboote*, in *Records Relating to U-Boat Warfare, 1939-1945*, microfilm, T-1022, Reel 3979/PG30307/a, May 1, 1942, National Archives. This is the "war diary" of the Commanding Admiral of U-boats, Karl Doenitz. The PG number was assigned by the British microfilmmers and it refers to a group of documents, usually arranged chronologically. Unlike German documents filmed in the United States, the British did not assign individual frame numbers for each page. Rather they assigned a number to groups of documents which were "pinched" (hence, PG) after Germany's defeat in 1945. (Hereafter cited as Doenitz KTB.)

¹¹ *Fuehrer Naval Conferences*, December 12, 1941.

¹² Peter Cremer, *U-Boat Commander* (Berlin, 1982; Annapolis, 1984).

¹³ *Fuehrer Naval Conferences*, March 12, 1942.

¹⁴ Doenitz KTB, Reel 3979/PG30306/a, April 15, 1942.

¹⁵ It was not until May 15, 1942, that a Convoy and Routing Section of the Chief of Naval Operations was established, headed by Rear Admiral M. K. Metcalf. See Morrison, *Battle of the Atlantic*, 1: 206.

¹⁶ Doenitz KTB, Reel 3979/PG30306/a, April 15, 1942.

¹⁷ *Fuehrer Naval Conferences*, May 14, 1942.

¹⁸ *Kriegstagebuch U-507*, in *Records Relating to U-Boat Warfare, 1939-1945*, microfilm, T-1022, Reel 3066/PG30545/2, April 4, 1942, National Archives. (Hereafter cited as KTB U-507.)

¹⁹ *Kriegstagebuch U-506*, National Archives, *Records Relating to U-Boat Warfare, 1939-1945*, microfilm, T-1022, Reel 3066/PG30566/2, April 6, 1942. (Hereafter cited as KTB U-506.)

²⁰ KTB U-507, Reel 3066/PG30545/2, May 3, 1942.

²¹ *Mobile Press Register*, June 27, 1942.

²² KTB U-507, Reel 3066/PG30545/2, May 5, 1942.

²³ KTB U-506, Reel 3066/PG30566/2, May 10, 1942.

²⁴ *Mobile Press Register*, June 21, 1942.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, May 4, 1942.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, June 1, 1942.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, May 10, 1942.

²⁸ Alan Hynd, *Passport to Treason: The Inside Story of Spies in America* (New York, 1943); Eugene Rachlin, *They Came to Kill. The Story of Eight Nazi Saboteurs in America* (New York, 1961). Leon O. Prior, "Nazi Invasion of Florida," *Florida Historical Quarterly*, 49, no. 2 (1970): 129-39.

²⁹ *Mobile Press Register*, July 3, 1942.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, May 17, 1942; June 28, 1942.

³¹ KTB U-507, Reel 3066/PG30545/2, May 13, 1942. For a discussion of the problems with torpedoes, see Doenitz, *Memoirs*, 84-99 and Appendix 3: Naval High Command (Raeder), Memorandum No. 85/a/42, Secret Command Document. The problem with the pistol mechanism first came to light in the 1940 Norwegian campaign, and it was not fully understood until early 1942. A newly designed firing mechanism (a Pi magnetic pistol) was installed on torpedoes from December 1942. Circling torpedoes and acoustic torpedoes were further innovations made in 1942.

³² U-506 described attacking some silhouetted vessels at night although it is unclear whether they were set off against an illuminated coastline or whether the sea was illuminated. U-507 reported to Berlin that, in any event, there was no traffic at night. KTB U-506, Reel 3066/PG30566/2, May 17, 1942; and Doenitz KTB, Reel 3979/PG30307/a, May 12, 1942.

³³ KTB U-507, Reel 3066/PG30545/2, May 12, 1942; and Doenitz KTB, Reel 3979/PG30307/a, May 12, 1942.

³⁴ Doenitz KTB, Reel 3979/PG 30307/b, May 20, 1942.

³⁵ KTB U-506, Reel 3066/PG30566/2, June 15, 1942.

³⁶ Doenitz KTB, T-1022, Reel 3979/PG30306/b, April 25, 1942; *Fuehrer Naval Conferences*, May 14, 1942; Doenitz, *Memoirs*, 219; Doenitz KTB, Reel 3980/PG30309/a, July 1, 1942.

³⁷ Doenitz KTB, Reel 3979/PG30307/a, May 14, 1942.

³⁸ *Mobile Press Register*, May 15, 1942.

³⁹ *Mobile Press Register*, May 28, 1942; also see Blanco Torres Ramirez, *Historia de la revolución mexicana*, vol. 19: *México en la segunda guerra mundial* (Mexico City, 1979), 69-70.

⁴⁰ KTB U-507, Reel 3066/PG30545/2, June 1, 1942.

⁴¹ I am indebted to my colleague Hines H. Hall for reminding me of Hemingway's madcap scheme. See Carlos Baker, *Ernest Hemingway: A Life Story* (New York, 1969), 373-81.

⁴² *Mobile Press Register*, May 31, 1942; also see Morrison, "The Organization of Anti-Submarine Warfare 1939-1942," in *The Battle of the Atlantic*, 202-65, for an introduction to this topic and for a sketch of Kauffman's career.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, May 31, 1942.

⁴⁴ *Mobile Press Register*, June 13, 1942.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, June 6, 1942.

⁴⁶ Malcolm F. Willoughby, *The U.S. Coast Guard in World War II* (Annapolis, 1957), 197; Edwin P. Hoyt, *Death of the U-Boats* (New York, 1988), 150; Morrison, *The Battle of the Atlantic*, 142-44.

⁴⁷ Willoughby, *U.S. Coast Guard*, 43, 198.

⁴⁸ *Mobile Press Register*, July 8, 1942.

⁴⁹ For the insight that Muller-Stockheim specialized in shallow water operations, I am grateful to Carl Vought of Huntsville. For U-67's operations, see KTB U-67, in *Records Relating to U-Boat Warfare, 1939-1945*, microfilm, T-1022, Reel 3030/PG30664/5, March 31-August 8, 1942, National Archives. Also C. J. Crist of Houma, LA, who has assembled an important private collection of the U-boat materials, has generously provided insights into the tactics and personalities of U-boat commanders.

⁵⁰ Doenitz KTB, Reel 3980/PG30309/b, July 19, 1942.

⁵¹ Doenitz KTB, Reel 3979/PG30307/b, May 31, 1942.

⁵² *Mobile Press Register*, July 16, 1942.

⁵³ Doenitz KTB, Reel 3980/PG30309/b, July 31, 1942.

⁵⁴ Doenitz KTB, Reel 3980/PG30311, September 5, 1942.

⁵⁵ For example, see *Mobile Press Register* story of May 30, 1942, entitled "Cargo Ship Sunk by Sub in Gulf." This dispatch describes the sinking during the night of May 18 of a vessel proceeding blacked out through the Gulf of Mexico on a zigzag course. Purportedly, three torpedoes struck and mortally crippled this unidentified ship. Subsequently, the submarine surfaced and approached the sinking vessel but asked no questions. The survivors were rescued and brought to Mobile. There is, however, no German record of any ship sunk in the Gulf that night. U-125, operating to the west of Grand Cayman, sank a ship on the night of the eighteenth, but it is highly improbable that these two incidents would have been confused.

⁵⁶ Hoyt, *Death of the U-Boats*, 210-11.

⁵⁷ KTB U-506, Reel 3066/PG30566/2, June 15, 1942.

⁵⁸ KTB U-508, Reel 3066/PG30546/1, June 15, 1942.

⁵⁹ Churchill to Roosevelt, October 31, 1942, in Francis T. Loewenheim, ed., *Roosevelt and Churchill: Their best Wartime Correspondence* (New York, 1975), 262 ff.

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USS Thetis

National Archives

Still They Sail: Shipbuilding in Tampa During World War II

Lewis N. Wynne and Carolyn J. Barnes

When the planes from Vice Admiral Chuichi Nagumo's carriers attacked the American Pacific Fleet at Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941, the United States was thrust into the cauldron of world war. Subsequent declarations of war by Adolph Hitler and Benito Mussolini merely confirmed what the American public already realized—that they were in a fight for the very survival of the world as they knew it. Despite the optimism of some Japanese and German militarists over the destruction of the Pacific Fleet, other, wiser leaders were less enthusiastic. Fleet Admiral Isoroku Yamamoto, the strategic planner of the Pearl Harbor raid, quieted the jubilant voices on his staff, noting that only a portion of American naval strength had been wiped out and warning darker days ahead for Japan, since they had only "awakened the sleeping giant."¹

Yamamoto's depiction of the United States as a sleeping giant was apt. The collapse of the economy in 1929 and the hardships of the Depression that followed had demoralized the people of the United States and had hobbled its industry to the point that it appeared to be dead, but the reality of the situation was that American industry was merely hibernating, awaiting some stimulus to bring it to life. Pearl Harbor served that purpose.

Tampa, like hundreds of other small cities, had suffered the Depression decade fitfully. The city's economy had experienced sputters and sparks of revival, but since its economy was based primarily on agricultural or service industries, Tampa found little in the way of continuous prosperity. Her port, once bustling with activity, was largely stagnant and contributed little to prosperity. After the explosive development boom of the 1920s, Tampa had struggled through the thirties and experienced only minimal growth. Its population had grown slowly during the decade, with only seven thousand new persons becoming residents of the city. The 6.7 percent change in population growth from 1930 to 1940 could easily be accounted for by the natural increase in a city of that size. For Tampa's people, the Depression struck hard. The adjusted unemployment rate for white males was 10.8 percent, but that figure almost doubled when individuals involved in emergency government employment—the CCC, WPA, and PWA—were counted. For non-whites and women, the rate was even higher. With virtually no manufacturing base for heavy industry, citizens relied heavily on the annual influx of tourists to supplement the local economy.²

There were occasional bright spots in the otherwise dismal picture. Tampa Shipbuilding and Engineering Company, which had been in operation since February 1917, offered some hope in 1938 when it borrowed \$750,000 from the Public Works Administration to fund the construction of a ten-thousand-ton dry-dock. The company's objective was to compete for shipbuilding contracts available through the U.S. Maritime Commission and authorized by the Merchant Marine Act of 1936.³

The Roosevelt Administration, disturbed by the inability of American shipyards to compete with foreign yards and aware that the clouds of war gathering in Europe and Asia might soon cover the United States, prevailed upon Congress to enact this legislation. The purpose of the act was to fund the construction of ten merchant ships a year for ten years. For American shipyards, which had constructed only two dry cargo vessels between 1922 and 1935, the Merchant Marine Act was a godsend. Not only did it provide a market for new ships, but it also featured a "no lose" cost-plus incentive for builders and operators.⁴

Under the leadership of Ernest Kreher, Tampa Shipbuilding secured the PWA loan, constructed the dry-dock and, in 1939, was awarded an eight million dollar contract for the construction of four cargo ships. Approximately two thousand new jobs were created, and for the city's sixty-four hundred unemployed males, the company's success in securing the contracts seemed like the answer to their prayers. The excitement created by the contract award was soon dampened when the company announced that after the construction of a single ship, the *Seawitch*, it was in serious financial difficulty and might not be able to fulfill the remaining contracts.⁵

The inefficient management of the company prompted the Maritime Commission and the Reconstruction Finance Corporation, which had assumed the PWA loan, to look around for new owners. In the words of a U.S. Accounting Office report in 1942, "Kreher . . . and his associates were competent shipbuilders, [but] they were incapable of efficiently managing the company's finances."⁶ The heavy demands for ships generated by the war in Europe and the realization that the U.S. might soon be involved made it imperative to find someone new to oversee the administration of the company.

Encouraged by the Maritime Commission and the RFC, a local financier, George B. Howell of the Exchange National Bank, purchased the company for five hundred dollars and became the sole owner. Along with the contracts for three new ships, Howell also acquired \$47,000 in assets and the almost \$1 million in liabilities. Under Howell's leadership, TASCO, as the new company was called, worked to fill the contracts with the Maritime Commission. When war came in 1941, the new management was in place and ready to expand to meet the needs of the nation.⁷

In the aftermath of Pearl Harbor, TASCO quickly converted its peacetime operations to a war footing. Within days, the company began to gear up to meet the anticipated needs of the Navy and to expand its facilities to increase the number of bottoms it could handle at once. However, change did not happen easily. With the shift from peacetime production to war time construction, TASCO immediately became embroiled in two major controversies.

The first centered around the reorganization of the company and the purchase of all outstanding stock by George B. Howell in 1940. When Howell had assumed control, TASCO had contracts for three cargo vessels for the Maritime Commission. Immediately after the U.S.'s entry into the war, the company had sold these ships, with the concurrence of the Commission, to the Navy. The transaction, which gave TASCO a working capital in excess of two million dollars,

came under the scrutiny of the U.S. Accounting Office. After reviewing the evidence, the AO charged Howell and TASCO with illegally selling the ships and with overcharging the Navy to the tune of \$1.2 million. The controversy dragged on, but while bureaucrats and company lawyers argued, the yard continued to build new ships. Despite the heat surrounding the transaction, both the Commission and the Navy supported Howell, and he was ultimately absolved of any wrongdoing.⁸

The second controversy which involved TASCO and other shipyards in the state stemmed from the efforts of State Attorney General J. Tom Watson to have a "closed shop" contract between the company and the American Federation of Labor declared unconstitutional. Watson, a flamboyant attorney, had attempted to persuade the state legislature to outlaw the practice in 1941, but had been unsuccessful. In June 1942, using the war emergency as an excuse, he attacked the union in court. His pursuit of this cause also included a round of fisticuffs with M. J. Nicholason, the attorney for the National Labor Relations Board. Although the courts gave him a technical victory and declared the closed shop suspended for the duration of the emergency, the practice continued nevertheless. Watson's efforts were not supported publicly by local leaders, and TASCO remained unionized throughout the war.⁹

For Tampans, as for most Americans, the war provided a welcome relief to the economic stagnation of the Depression. For the next four years, workers of all ages and occupations were recruited to provide the manpower needed to produce the material the U.S. and its allies needed. "War work" and "war industries" became the single largest employers of laborers, as thousands of large and small plants sprang into existence overnight to meet this need. The 12.5 million Americans who had suffered through the Depression unemployed now found themselves being actively recruited to fill factory spaces. Older workers, forced into retirement during the previous decade, were now coaxed back to work for wages that were significantly higher than their Social Security benefits. For example, TASCO employed a number of workers in their sixties and seventies who possessed metal working skills that were considered essential. High school and college students were encouraged to contribute to the war effort by taking part-time jobs. Perhaps the greatest gains in the labor market were made by women, and thousands of them took on the roles of "Rosie the Riveter" and "Wanda the Welder." As the demand for soldiers grew, women workers became more and more essential. Thomas M. Woodward, a member of the U.S. Maritime Commission, noted the importance of women in the labor force on an inspection of the Tampa yards. Citing a need for thirty thousand additional workers in yards along the Gulf of Mexico, Woodward offered the observation that "women seem to be the answer, the only one, to the problem."¹⁰

Although TASCO remained the largest single employer in Tampa, its ability to secure the sixteen thousand workers it needed by 1943 was hampered by the construction of a second major shipyard in 1942. Citizens of the city were delighted with the announcement in the Tampa *Tribune* that a private company intended to spend thirty million dollars to construct a shipyard in Tampa to

produce twenty-four unique cargo vessels, financed by a U.S. Maritime Commission contract for thirty million dollars. ¹¹

This project, known as the Hooker's Point Yard, was the creation of Matthew H. McCloskey, Jr., a Philadelphia construction mogul and a powerful Democratic politician. Taking advantage of the national shortage of rolled steel, McCloskey proposed the use of concrete for ship construction. Despite the rather lackluster performance of similar ships during World War I, materiel shortages, and the success of German U-boats dictated improvisation. Within weeks of the contract award, McCloskey and his staff moved their operations to Tampa. ¹²

Hooker's Point was little more than a sandy spit of land jutting into Tampa Bay. However, for McCloskey the site had three major advantages. First, it was located adjacent to the ship channel in the harbor. Second, its nearest neighbor was the Florida Portland Cement Company, with a fleet of trucks to haul wet concrete. Third, as McCloskey explained to the local newspaper, "You've got to get away from frost to pour concrete, and we . . . can work the year round." ¹³

Before work on the ships could begin, the yard had to be constructed from the ground up. Administrative buildings, lofts for creating forms and patterns, machine shops, utility services, service roads, and storage sheds were necessary to get the operation going. The most essential of all, however, was the construction of basins to house the ships as they were being built. Unlike conventional shipyards which constructed ships on land and launched them into the water, the Hooker's Point yard built three concrete lined basins, twelve hundred feet long, twenty-seven feet deep and eighty-two feet wide, which were connected to the Bay by huge doors. In each basin, three of the 360-foot ships were built simultaneously. Launching was simply a matter of opening the doors and letting the water in. ¹⁴

McCloskey's experiment with concrete ships brought six thousand new jobs in Tampa, and the expansion of a third shipbuilding facility, Tampa Marine Company, also increased the demand for workers. Despite the high rate of unemployment in 1940, Tampa could not supply the labor needs of these facilities, and company officials instituted a statewide recruitment program. When these efforts did not produce enough workers, the campaign was expanded into a nationwide effort. The campaign to attract workers was never totally effective, and the Tampa shipyards, as well as other industries, attempted to offset the lack of workers by extending the work week from forty to forty-eight hours. Wages were constantly increased, and appeals made to operators of non-essential industries to release workers for war industries. The cigar industry, Tampa's largest employer prior to World War II, lost two thousand skilled workers by mid-1943, and the process of attrition continued until the end of the conflict. ¹⁵ No doubt this loss of laborers contributed both to the decline and rapid mechanization of the cigar industry in the post-war period.

Tampa's rise as a center of shipbuilding in south Florida, coupled with the development of Hillsborough County as a center for training bomber crews, presented local leaders with a myriad of problems. As the thousands of workers arrived in the city, officials were hardpressed to find sufficient housing. The housing shortage became even more critical as the military opened new bases to train

recruits. MacDill, Drew, and Henderson fields were all training centers for bomb crews of the Army Air Force. Pinellas County, across the bay from Tampa, also attracted minor military establishments, and added to the problem. Despite the wartime restrictions on gasoline, some of the snowbirds insisted on making their annual trek south and further complicated the situation. ¹⁶

City leaders were hardpressed to meet the needs of the sudden influx of war workers. In order to accommodate the infrastructure needs for the expansion of the TASCO facility and the new Hooker's Point yard, they asked for and received huge loans from various government agencies. Public transportation routes were rearranged and new routes were added to ensure that workers could reach the yards from almost any point in town. Hours of operation were expanded in order to serve the late night and early morning shifts. Additional vehicles were added to transport workers forced to live as far away from the city as fifty miles. ¹⁷

Officials with the Tampa branch of the Office of Price Administration closely monitored the price of gasoline, and were equally as diligent policing the claims of workers in car pools for extra gas and tire rations. Violators were charged, prosecuted, and punished. The OPA also closely monitored the practices of local merchants, and hoarders and speculators were quickly dealt with. ¹⁸

Perhaps the most difficult task faced by local authorities was in satisfying the demand for affordable housing. As the yards expanded their labor forces, workers found it difficult to find accommodations for themselves and their families. Patriotic appeals were frequently made in the newspapers asking home owners to rent every available apartment or room to house these new arrivals. To ensure that workers were not being gouged by greedy landlords, the Office of Rent Control periodically published lists of acceptable rents established by Federal regulations, and just as periodically, the ORC sent inspectors into the field to ensure that no gouging took place. ¹⁹

Despite the best efforts of the ORC and local officials, the demand for housing exceeded supply. A variety of plans were suggested, including one that called for the city to turn vacant factory buildings into apartments. Although the idea seemed worthwhile, it was quickly abandoned because the cost of renovation was greater than that of new construction. Other solutions had to be found. ²⁰

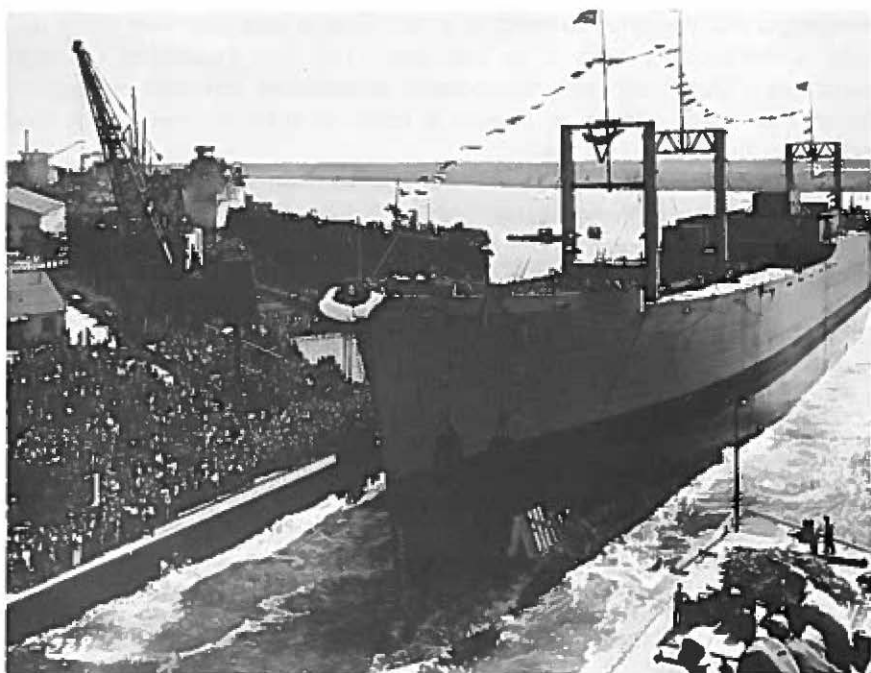
The city fathers, led by Mayor Robert E. Lee Chauncey, quickly took other steps to resolve the problems. On the same day the Tampa *Tribune* reported the decision to forego the renovation of old factories, the City Council voted to lease twelve acres of the Municipal Trailer Park to serve as a park for four hundred two and three bedroom trailers for workers and their families. Rather primitive, the trailers had no bathrooms or laundry facilities, and occupants were forced to use a communal building for this purpose. Despite the critical shortage of housing and the relatively low rent (twenty-eight dollars a month for a two bedroom unit and thirty-two dollars for a three bedroom one), the trailer park proved unpopular and never operated at full capacity. ²¹

For workers at the new Hooker's Point facility, the Maritime Commission constructed six hundred housing units adjacent to the yard. The project, known as Maritime Homes, represented a considerable improvement over the trailers. Each unit included its own bathroom, hot water heater, and refrigerator. The project also included a grocery store, beauty shop, barber shop, and theater. Restricted to McCloskey workers, the rental prices were only slightly higher than those charged for municipal trailers.²²

Negroes in Tampa also benefitted from the housing shortage when the city government and the Federal Public Housing Authority decided in 1943 to spend \$2.3 million to construct five hundred low cost concrete block homes. Justified as a war emergency measure to provide housing for essential shipyard workers, the project was located "in the heart of the largest Negro section in Tampa, and [was] . . . well served by electricity, water, transportation and Negro schools." The original plans were modified and the number of units reduced when Tampa alderman "asked that three of the big apartment buildings that would have come within five hundred feet of Ponce de Leon courts, [a] white development, be eliminated."²³ Even the desperate need for emergency housing was not a sufficient cause to ease the rigors of segregation.

All in all, however, race relations in Tampa were placid during the war. Although some Negroes were hired in the shipyards, war industries, with their higher wages and strong unions, remained largely a white preserve. A survey of the Tampa *Tribune* for the years 1940-1946 reveals only one issue that carried any mention of black shipyard workers, and that issue pictured them sifting through a trash pile to retrieve scrap metal for reuse.²⁴ The caption to the only picture of black workers in the extant copies of the *Hooker's Point Log*, the McCloskey company newspaper, identified the white workers, but did not mention any of the Negroes.²⁵

White women, on the other hand, were welcomed as workers. Women joined the work force at the shipyards within a few months of the declaration of war. Although the initial groups of women were used in office positions or in "soft" jobs like drafting or driving, this quickly changed as manpower became more scarce. Quick to admit that "women aren't naturally mechanically inclined," the first female office workers nonetheless insisted that they were "equally as capable as men."²⁶ As the need for additional laborers became more acute, women moved out of the offices and into the yards. On July 28, 1942, a month after the first *Tribune* article about female workers, the newspaper ran a front page story about Mrs. Alma Brown, the first female member of "the ultra-conservative local No. 432 of the Boilermakers' union, as hard-boiled an outfit as ever pushed a ship into the sea," and the first woman welder to join the TASCO assembly line. Brown, the product of a ten-week welding course at a local vocational school, entered the yard as a probationary trainee, but her immediate supervisor expected little difficulty in having a woman on the job. "Sure, she'll get along all right," he said, "She's a little bit of a curiosity now to the boys, but when we get five or six more the curiosity will wear off."²⁷



*Launching USS Mauna Loa,
April 14, 1943, TASCO*

Hampton Dunn Collection

So critical was the need for additional workers by mid-1942, local unions, caught between their desire to maintain control of skilled laborers and the government's demand for more productivity, led the way in admitting women members. Tampa Local 432 of the International Brotherhood of Boilermakers had admitted Alma Brown to membership weeks before the national leadership submitted the issue to a vote from the general membership. In this way, the sixty-two-year-old prohibition against female members fell by the wayside, and the union leadership found itself rushing to keep pace with its locals.²⁸

By 1943, women welders had become so commonplace in both the TASCO and Hooker's Point yards that they received little extra attention. By 1944, enough women were employed in the Hooker's Point facility that the company could hold a yardwide contest to select the best female welder and sponsor her in competition with other yards operating in the eastern United States.²⁹

Older males found work in Tampa shipyards as well. TASCO actively sought older men with metal working skills and brought them into its yard. The oldest worker employed by TASCO was seventy-seven years old in 1943. J. M. Hutchins had entered the blacksmithing trade in 1908, worked in the Mobile and Pensacola shipyards during World War I and was working a full shift at TASCO. Hutchins was joined by others who were advanced in age: W. M. Lovelace, seventy-five years old; R. F. Roberts, sixty-six years old; and E. L. Broadway, also sixty-six. The special skills these men possessed were critical to the production of

steel ships, and they were recruited to work. "They're men who were doing this kind of work before many of us were born," said Carl Froehiking, the shop supervisor, "That many years of experience is something that can't be replaced by any other kind of training. Besides, in times like these, we need all the men we can get to keep the iron hot." ³⁰

A temporary subculture developed around the yards, and company officials supported a variety of recreational and cultural activities for their workers. Hooker's Point printed a bi-weekly newspaper, supported various sports programs, provided after-work social programs and generally maintained a paternalistic attitude toward its workers. The construction of housing projects for war workers only tended to promote the concept of separation from the native population of Tampa. Although no copies of company newspapers from the TASCO yard have been located, references to that yard and smaller yards in the area indicate that a great deal of intercourse took place between the workers of different companies. ³¹

Workers were not free to move from yard to yard, however. Wartime job assignments, regulated by the federal Manpower Administration, prohibited workers from capriciously seeking new positions. Hanging over the head of all male workers was the threat of losing their critical job rating and having to enter the draft. The threat of military service did not prevent workers from voicing their dissatisfaction from time to time, and all the Tampa yards occasionally experienced work stoppages and walkouts. From the beginning of the war absenteeism was a problem for yard administrators, and remained so during the entire period. ³²

The impact of the war industries on Tampa was revolutionary, particularly in motivating the business and civic leadership of the city. They believed that the industrial development brought by the war and the economic benefits created by the construction of military bases demonstrated the viability of Tampa as a "New South" city. The rapid industrialization of the Tampa area also forced local leaders to modify their stance on unionization and the rights of laborers. Tampa's reputation as a center of anti-union feeling before the war had focused national attention on the city, but this sentiment was quickly suppressed when the prospect of millions of dollars in government contracts loomed before them. Of course, much of the community acceptance of unions stemmed from the nature of the shipyard work. Although TASCO was operated by a local businessman, George B. Howell, the Navy Department, adhering to the pro-labor legislation of the New Deal, mandated the use of union labor. Howell and other local leaders had no choice but to accept this mandate. Hooker's Point yard, owned by northerner McCloskey, also depended on government contracts, and local sentiment played no part in its decision to recognize the right of unions. The conversion of prominent Floridians to the labor point of view was temporary at best, and the state adopted a "right to work" constitutional amendment in 1944. ³³

The influx of nearly thirty-one thousand new workers and their families dramatically altered the economy of the city, and changed it from a somnolent small town with a primarily agricultural and semi-skilled labor base into an

aggressive forward-looking city seeking to retain and expand its war time supply of skilled labor. As early as February 1942, Tampa newspapers were speculating as to what the city's future would be after the war. By 1943 corporate leaders at TASCO, Hooker's Point and the smaller yards in the area were focusing a portion of their time and resources on postwar industrial pursuits. George B. Howell and the TASCO yard management team inaugurated a program to design, build, and test semi-trailers for use by trucking companies in the postwar period. Matt McCloskey, the owner of the Hooker's Point yard, also invested time, money, and manpower in identifying and developing postwar products. Civic leaders promoted the concept of a new industrially based economy for the postwar years, and the diversity of these ideas indicated that most Tampanans were no longer willing to return to the prewar reliance on tourism, cigars, and agriculture.³⁴

The productive capacity and engineering innovations of Tampa yards gave every indication that the possibility of maintaining a postwar heavy industry base was very real. Matt McCloskey's Hooker's Point yard astonished the shipbuilding world by devising new construction techniques in its use of reinforced concrete to build cargo vessels. Although some concrete ships had been built during World War I, they had proved to be fragile and unreliable. Hooker's Point yard, using continuous pours made possible by new vacuum pumps and mobile mixers mounted on trucks, applied many of the techniques used in constructing high rise buildings. When engineers determined that a lighter weight concrete was needed, McCloskey employees identified "Fuller's earth" as a substitute for the heavier sand traditionally used. A secondary industry developed around the mining of this material, and the McCloskey company purchased deposits and opened their own mining operation.³⁵

Concrete ships built by the Hooker's Point yard provided a viable alternative to steel ships, and when the nation's steel output failed to keep pace with demands during the early years of the war, these ships helped meet the need for new vessels. Unlike their World War I counterparts, the McCloskey ships performed very well. Powered by 3500 h.p. engines, the "floating skyscrapers" weathered hurricanes, submarine attacks and hard use. Individuals who served on the concrete ships were most complimentary of their stability, durability, and overall seaworthiness. McCloskey's continued development of this method of shipbuilding was brought to an end when supplies of steel improved. Although revolutionary in design and relatively inexpensive to produce, the major criticism of the concrete vessels was the length of time needed to produce them. In an era when Henry J. Kaiser was producing a 550-foot "Victory" ship every ten days, the three to six weeks needed to produce the smaller concrete ship could not be justified. Although some experiments were undertaken to speed up the curing time for the wet concrete, no significant reduction was ever achieved. No longer concerned about material shortages, the Maritime Commission ended the concrete ship experiment, and in 1944, the Hooker's Point facility joined the rest of the nation's yards and began to construct steel ships of the N-3, coastal cargo freighter, variety.³⁶

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Tampa Marine Company, another yard along the Ybor Channel of Tampa Bay, also contributed to the city's war economy. Employing only two hundred prewar workers, this yard expanded its capacity significantly during the war years, and between 1942 and 1945, it produced ninety-five ocean going tugs. Bushnell-Lyons, another small company, produced steel barges for the Navy. Perhaps the most noteworthy accomplishment of these yards was the diversity of ships they produced.³⁷

Despite the productivity of Hooker's Point, Tampa Marine, and Bushnell-Lyons, the combination of these yards could not match the productivity of the TASCO yard. Operated under contract to the Navy, TASCO produced an amazing variety of naval vessels, ranging from the ten thousand-ton destroyer tenders, *Piedmont*, *Sierra*, and *Yosemite*, to seven ammunition carriers in the *Mazama* and *Mauna Loa* class. In addition to these large supply ships, TASCO also produced twenty-four coastal minesweepers in the "Auk" and "Admirable" classes, twelve destroyer escorts, as well as a number of self contained "barracks" barges, repair vessels, and cargo ships. Including repairs made to ships damaged by enemy attack and conversions made to existing ships, TASCO processed a total of 494 vessels. Its employees received approximately \$105 million in wages and salaries, most of which remained in the Tampa economy. In addition, the company either trained or paid for the training of a large number of Tampa residents in the skilled machine trades.³⁸ The full extent of the yard's production was a closely guarded secret during the war, and Navy personnel maintained a close watch over the facility. The Tampa *Tribune* made note of the secrecy imposed by the Navy when it announced it on July 1, 1945: "Navy Takes Lid off Tampa Shipyards."³⁹

The economic boom created by the entry of the U.S. into World War II ended suddenly for Tampans. With the Allied victory in Europe in April 1945, and the detonation of the atomic bombs over Hiroshima and Nagasaki on August 6 and 7, the need for more ships suddenly ceased. By August 12, despite the absence of a formal surrender by Japan, both the navy and Maritime Commission cut back their orders for ships. Two days later, TASCO announced a reduction of its labor force by two thousand workers. On August 17 McCloskey's Hooker's Point yard announced the loss of its contracts. In rapid succession the Tampa *Tribune* announced one layoff after another. The phaseout was hardly a gradual process; layoffs were frequently for thousands of workers at a time.⁴⁰

By December 1945 the Hooker's Point yard was closed permanently, and little war-related activity was going on at TASCO or Tampa Marine. Both companies had returned to peacetime production, and the strategic planning for the postwar period allowed them to continue operations, although at a reduced level. George B. Howell, the dominant force behind TASCO, resigned the presidency of the company and returned to the banking business. Matt McCloskey, the developer of Hooker's Point, now shifted his attention once again to traditional construction enterprises, although he did purchase an interest in a Jacksonville shipbuilding company. For the residents of Tampa, the end of the war did not mean an end to the industrial dreams spurred by the war. For the next twenty

years, various attempts would be made to keep Tampa shipyards in operation. The irony is that the Japanese, whose defeat was engineered in part by Tampa workers, would later prove to be too strong as competitors for this industry.⁴¹

For Attorney General J. Tom Watson, the end of the war was a signal to renew his attacks on organized labor. Within days of the beginning of layoffs by Tampa shipyards, he announced his intention to enforce the "right to work" amendment to the state's constitution.⁴²

There is little in Tampa today to remind residents of the great flurry of activity that was generated by the World War II shipyards. Hooker's Point is gone, replaced by other industries. Maritime Homes, the large complex erected for war workers, has been bulldozed. TASCO has passed through several hands and now is known as the American Shipbuilding Company, a property of New York Yankees owner, George Steinbrenner. It is as if some giant hand has simply wiped the slate clean, and what was, is not and never will be again.⁴³

Despite the demise of Tampa's shipyards, there are some who remember this great adventure fondly. There are also occasional flashes from the past when ship names are mentioned. Perhaps the greatest tribute to the strength and vitality of the shipyards is found in a perusal of *Jane's Fighting Ships* or other ship publications. Here and there, the notations appear: "built by Tampa Shipbuilding." For most of the ships constructed between 1940 to 1946, age and modernity have consigned them to scrapheaps or reserve fleets, but some, like the *Sierra* and *Yosemite*, still play an active role in today's Navy. For still others, however, postwar existence has meant being transferred to foreign countries. Today, Tampa built ships are operated by the navies of Taiwan, Mexico, Peru, Russia, Argentina, and Turkey. Orphans of the sea, but still they sail.⁴⁴

Notes

¹ John Deane Potter, *Yamamoto: The Man Who Menaced America* (New York, 1965), 96-135.

² *Sixteenth Census of the United States: 1940, Population* (Washington, 1943), Table C-41, 154.

³ L. A. Sawyer and W. H. Mitchell, *The Liberty Ships: The History of the 'Emergency' Type Cargo Ships Constructed in the United States During World War II* (Newton Abbot, Devon, 1970), 11-15.

⁴ Clinton H. Whitehurst, Jr., *The U.S. Shipbuilding Industry: Past, Present, and Future* (Annapolis, 1986), 25-42.

⁵ Edwin P. Hoyt, *The Lonely Ships: The Life and Death of the U.S. Asiatic Fleet* (New York, 1976), 276-77. *Tampa Tribune*, June 17, 1942.

⁶ *Tampa Tribune*, June 17, 1942.

⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸ *Ibid.* See also, *Tampa Tribune*, December 11 and 12, 1942.

⁹ See Tampa *Tribune*, June 23; July 25, 28; August 2, 5, 13, 19, 20, 22, 22, 23, 26; September 12; October 10, 18, 27, 30; November 1, 8, 10, 12, 13, 1942; January 17, 21, 24, 31; February 12, 17, 1943. For a good treatment of anti-labor activities in Tampa, see Robert P. Ingalls, *Urban Vigilantes in the New South: Tampa, 1882-1936* (Knoxville, 1988).

¹⁰ Tampa *Tribune*, May 2, 1943; June 6; July 4, 18; August 22, 1943.

¹¹ Tampa *Tribune*, June 11, 1943. See also, Robert J. Ehlinger, *Matt: A Biography of Matthew H. McCloskey* (Privately Printed, 1987).

¹² Ibid., 109-13.

¹³ Tampa *Tribune*, June 23, 1942.

¹⁴ Ibid., August 26; November 17, 1942.

¹⁵ Ibid., May 2; June 2, 1943.

¹⁶ Ibid., September 22, 1942; March 18; April 2, 5; December 31, 1943.

¹⁷ Ibid., June 17, 1942.

¹⁸ Ibid., June 23; July 26; August 13, 19, 1942.

¹⁹ Ibid. See also, December 25, 1943.

²⁰ Ibid., November 14, 1942.

²¹ Ibid., November 6, 14, 19, 1942; January 17, 18; March 18; April 4, 5, 11, 1943.

²² Ibid., June 21, 1943.

²³ Ibid., October 7; December 23, 1943.

²⁴ Ibid., October 16, 1942.

²⁵ *Hooker's Point Log*, December 30, 1944.

²⁶ Tampa *Tribune*, June 28; December 15, 1942.

²⁷ Ibid., July 28, 1942.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ *Hooker's Point Log*, February 17; March 31, 1945.

³⁰ Tampa *Tribune*, August 22, 1943.

³¹ See 1944-45 run of *Hooker's Point Log* in author's possession.

³² Ibid., September 25; November 30, 1944.

³³ Tampa *Tribune*, February 16, 1945.

³⁴ Ibid., February 4; December 16, 1945.

³⁵ Ibid., January 20, 1943.

³⁶ Ibid., June 10, 1944.

³⁷ Ibid., September 12, 1943.

³⁸ Ibid., October 14, 1945.

³⁹ Ibid., July 1, 1945.

⁴⁰ Ibid., August 12, 14, 17, 18, 21, 23; September 5, 1945.

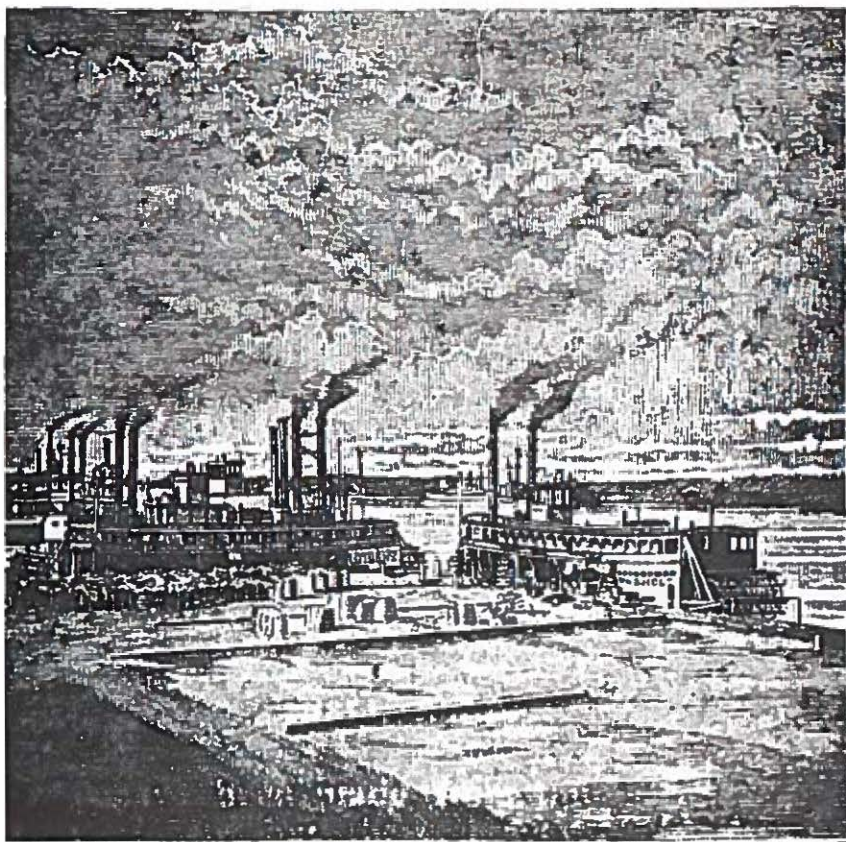
⁴¹ Ibid., February 14; March 21, 1946.

⁴² Ibid., November 17, 1945.

⁴³ Leland Hawes, "Two Concrete Ships Used at Normandy," *Tampa Tribune*, July 27, 1985.

⁴⁴ *Jane's Fighting Ships, 1986-87* (London, 1988).

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Riverboats at Mobile, c. 1880

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