

ABSTRACT

Joshua B. Howard. "THE MOST ABANDONDED SETT OF WRETCHES:" NORTH CAROLINA'S PRIVATEERING EFFORTS DURING THE AMERICAN REVOLUTION, 1776-1783. (Under the direction of Dr. Carl E. Swanson) Department of History, June 2004.

Privateers played a major role in the outcome of the American Revolution by providing otherwise unattainable war materials and damaging the logistical capabilities of the British military. Historians, however, have traditionally neglected the privateers of the southern states in favor of those from New England and the Middle Colonies. Some scholars have claimed that no North Carolina privateers even operated.

This thesis argues that North Carolinians outfitted, commanded, and sailed onboard a number of privateers and letter of marques during the Revolutionary War. The analysis first examines the state's merchant class on the eve of the conflict, illustrating that the financial and political support for privateering existed among the state's businessmen. Secondly, it illustrates the collapse of the state's navy, and examines the privateersmen and their vessels that sailed from North Carolina ports. Finally, the thesis examines the success of professionals and amateurs, arguing that those owners and captains who had business experience succeeded far more often than those without such skills.

“THE MOST ABANDONED SETT OF WRETCHES.”
NORTH CAROLINA’S PRIVATEERING EFFORTS
DURING THE AMERICAN REVOLUTION, 1776-1783

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CHAPTER ONE

PRIVATEERING AND AMERICA

In a letter to the North Carolina Provincial Council, James Davis, editor of the *North Carolina Gazette*, angrily protested the numerous depredations he suffered from the crew of the privateer *Pennsylvania Farmer*. Davis begged the legislature for relief, referring to the sailors as a "Crew of Banditti" and "the most abandoned sett of wretches ever collected together."¹ The predator, formerly a state navy vessel, had been docked at his Wilmington wharf for over three weeks, and the crew had taken great liberties with Davis's personal property including "Riot, Outrage, and Robbery." This description, perhaps the finest depiction of a North Carolina privateer crew available, portrays these sailors as a rambunctious, swarthy group of cutthroats.

Yet, this thesis argues that this "abandoned sett," despite their reputation, played a fundamental role in winning the American Revolution. Between 1776 and 1783, vessels sailed from each of the thirteen states, destroying maritime commerce and severely damaging Britain's prosecution of the war. Because of the fledgling Continental Navy's weaknesses, the majority of America's maritime power rested in the hands of roughly 2,000 privateer vessels.² Commerce destruction was the major form of maritime warfare

¹ James Davis to the North Carolina Provincial Council, in William L. Saunders, ed., *Colonial Records Records of North Carolina*, (Raleigh: State of North Carolina, 10 volumes, 1886-1890), X, 834-837. The letter is undated, but the *Pennsylvania Farmer* began operating as a privateer in January 1778.

² The number of 2,000 is an estimate. See Nathan Miller, *Sea of Glory* (New York: David McKay Co., 1974), 257, 259-261. See Edgar S. Maclay, *The American Privateers* (New York: D. Appleton & Co., 1899), and William M. Fowler, *Rebels Under Sail* (New York: Scribners, 1976). According to Charles B. Lincoln, *Naval Records of the American Revolution* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1906), there were 1,697 letters of marque issued during the war. This number, however, is most likely smaller

in North Carolina during the American Revolution. Throughout the conflict, British and Whig privateers and naval vessels constantly vied for control of North Carolina's coastal trading centers and waterways. In addition, unlike privateering enterprises of earlier periods that emphasized personal gain and military venture, North Carolina's efforts focused primarily on economic survival. This analysis will demonstrate that while profits continued to motivate privateer owners and captains, their vessels ensured the state's economic survival by providing goods unattainable because of disrupted trade patterns.

The thesis examines the maritime commerce of North Carolina on the eve of the Revolution, and illustrates that a thriving mercantile community existed that could support privateering. It includes vessel types and cargoes before and during the war, as well as the participation in maritime commerce of various ports such as New Bern, Edenton, and Wilmington. The work further demonstrates the failure of Whig politicians to create a viable state navy, and how the state subsequently chose privateering as its best method of maritime warfare. Further, it examines the logistical and operational sides of privateering, and indicate the overall impact of North Carolina's privateers by assessing their role in keeping the Continental army and the state well supplied with necessary war goods. Lastly, it investigates North Carolina's professional and amateur privateer owners and demonstrates the factors that determined success or failure.

North Carolinians and their fellow colonists who rebelled against Britain in 1775 shared a long historical tradition with privateering. Early English attempts at colonization at Roanoke Island and Jamestown were originally intended for provisioning

than the real total because many vessels likely carried state commissions in the early period of the war.

bases for privateers attacking Spanish treasure fleets.³ Throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, American colonists actively participated in Britain's commerce raiding operations. Americans sanctioned, commanded, and served on privateers during every major intercolonial conflict of the period. During the colonial era, privateering reached an apogee along the North American Atlantic coast. Consequently, American society had become well accustomed to the privateering enterprise by the beginning of the American Revolution.

Commerce raiding under the auspices of national sanction began as early as the thirteenth century in Europe. The crown traditionally issued letters of marque and reprisal to merchants during times of war. These documents were fundamentally based on the concept of reprisal. In 1242, when French vessels attacked the English coastline, Henry III issued such letters of marque to the English merchants who had lost vessels.⁴ Possession of a letter of marque legally separated a privateer from a pirate, the difference between life and death if captured. Whereas privateers sailed in the name of their mother country within the constraints of a formal legal system, pirates illegally seized vessels without any recognition of nationality or sovereignty. Privateer prizes were adjudicated in admiralty courts, and the proceeds from the prizes were divided among crew and owners, with a portion given to the monarch. Based on such principles, the system

³ See Kenneth R. Andrews, *Elizabethan Privateering: English Privateering and the Spanish War, 1585-1603* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1964).

⁴ David Starkey, *British Privateering Enterprise in the Eighteenth Century* (Exeter, Eng.: University of Exeter, 1990), 21. See Charles Wye Kendall, *Private Men-of-War* (London: Philip Allen & Co. Ltd., 1931), 6; Faye Kert, *Prize and Prejudice: Privateering and Naval Prize in Atlantic Canada in the War of 1812* (St. John's, Nfld.: International Maritime Economic History Association, 1997), 38-39; Archibald Lewis and Timothy Runyan, *European Naval and Maritime History, 300-1500* (Bloomington, Ind.: University of Indiana Press, 1985).

remained essentially the same until the middle of the seventeenth century when territorial expansion became increasingly important in the minds of most European politicians

Economic nationalism for the purpose of building a more powerful state fueled European colonial expansion. The idea of a world “mercantile system,” a phrase coined by Adam Smith in *Wealth of Nations*, established four basic principles. First, a nation needed to achieve a favorable balance of trade. This meant that a country should encourage exports while limiting imports, especially manufactured goods. Secondly, nations also were concerned with increasing their supply of specie. By doing so they increased their trade capabilities, especially in markets such as Asia where bullion was one of the only means of trade. Thirdly, mercantilists viewed the world’s supply of wealth as finite. Each nation vied for the “largest piece of the pie.” Lastly, government should participate actively in the nation’s economy.⁵ Legislation such as England’s Navigation Acts exemplified this principle.

Mercantilism greatly encouraged the use of privateers in maritime warfare. Most nations were incapable of building and maintaining fleets large enough to dominate the world’s sea lanes because of prohibitive costs and a lack of resources. Privateering provided a method of destroying an enemy’s commerce without overtaxing a nation’s governmental finances since expense came from private investments. By utilizing the private sector, a nation financed sea power without drawing from the national treasury. Privateering also increased a nation’s wealth while depriving an enemy of its own

⁵ Carl E. Swanson, *Predators and Prizes: American Privateering and Imperial Warfare, 1739-1748* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1991), 16-19. See John J. McCusker and Russell Menard, *The Economy of British North America, 1607-1789* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1978), 35-50.

the amount of the bond. Owners of the offending vessel were liable for damages as well, but the maximum fine they could incur was equivalent to the value of their own ship. Privateer captains also received instructions upon obtaining a letter of marque. These regulations stated that a privateer captain could not distort evidence, embezzle, or break bulk, nor could he treat the crew cruelly. The instructions also required proper admiralty court adjudication for captured vessels and cargoes.⁸

Further legislation concerning privateering followed in Parliament's "Act for the Encouragement of Trade to America." This act, commonly referred to as the 6th of Anne or Prize Act of 1708, had major implications for privateering. The act established parliamentary recognition of prize jurisdiction and gave captors a right to the whole of the prize. The captor retained full possession of the proceeds from selling the prize, thereby voiding the monarch's traditional share. The statute also prohibited impressment of privateer sailors by the Royal Navy. Various rules addressed violations of the instructions as well. For instance, these statutes curbed ransoming by declaring anyone guilty of such action against a neutral a pirate. The act further established time limits for court cases and laid out the process of appeals.⁹

The act also established colonial vice-admiralty courts, which provided a means for privateers to adjudicate their prizes in American ports. Vice-admiralty judges oversaw civil matters, the Navigation Acts, and prize adjudication. Unlike the vice-admiralty courts, in Great Britain cases concerning the Navigation Acts were held before

⁸ Henry J. Bourguignon, *The First Federal Court: The Federal Appellate Prize Court of the American Revolution, 1775-1787* (Philadelphia: American Philosophical Society, 1977), 14-17.

⁹ 6 Anne, 1708, c. 37, in Danby Pickering, ed., *The Statutes at Large from the Magna Carta to the end of the Eleventh Parliament of Great Britain* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1762-1807), XI, 433-443. (Act also known as the American Act). See Swanson, *Predators and Prizes*, 34-36.

the exchequer courts. This distinction was important because exchequer courts had juries; vice-admiralty courts did not. Because maritime interests dominated the colonial economy, the vice-admiralty courts held considerable influence on the lives of Americans. During the wars of the eighteenth century, American privateers found their vice-admiralty court's prize adjudication extremely valuable.¹⁰ For instance, during King George's War, privateers won 92 percent of the prize cases decided in American vice-admiralty courts in Massachusetts, Rhode Island, New York, Pennsylvania, and South Carolina.¹¹

Parliament passed further privateering legislation in the Prize Act of 1740. This act reversed the decision concerning privateer impressment. The exemption that colonial seamen had enjoyed from the Prize Act of 1708 was diminished officially, but not technically. Privateer owners proclaimed their seamen free from impressment, and Whitehall often cautioned naval officers to be more careful in their prosecution of kidnapping men from privateer vessels. Salvage, the act of recapturing a British vessel, also changed as a result of the act. Since 1708, a privateer could actually be awarded a British vessel recaptured from the enemy. Under the new legislation, however, a payment in the value of one half the vessel and cargo became the maximum reward. To encourage privateers to engage enemy warships, a further clause allowed privateers to gain bounty money based on each man onboard an enemy warship at the beginning of an engagement. This clause clearly provided incentives for privateers to attack enemy naval

¹⁰ See Carl Ubbelohde, *The Vice Admiralty Courts and the American Revolution* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1960).

¹¹ Carl Swanson, *Predators and Prizes*, 42.

and privateering vessels in addition to merchantmen. Additional acts required captors to post bonds before cases were adjudicated, thereby further eliminating the chances of questionable seizures. Also, breaches of discipline committed on privateer vessels were to be punished as those upon Royal Navy vessels, giving a great deal more power to privateer captains.¹²

During the eighteenth century, the terminology associated with privateering evolved as well. Traditionally, obtaining a letter of marque, or "privateering commission," identified privateers. The crown used the title, "privateer," during the American Revolution when granting letters of marque and reprisal against the rebellious British colonists who violated the law.¹³ The terminology, however, became much more complicated as "letter of marque" became synonymous with an armed merchant vessel. Armed merchant vessels were primarily involved in transporting cargoes from one port to another, but they carried a letter of marque and reprisal in case the opportunity for taking a prize presented itself. Letter of marque vessels differed from privateers in that sailors were paid wages, while prize money served as a bonus.¹⁴

During the eighteenth century's intercolonial wars, privateering's popularity soared throughout the British Empire. From the docks of London to the wharves of Charleston, wealthy merchants invested in privateering ventures. The profitability of privateering provided capital to many colonial economies. Colonial newspapers devoted entire pages to royal proclamations encouraging privateering, as well as advertisements

¹² Swanson, *Predators and Prizes*, 34-37

¹³ Starkey, *British Privateering Enterprise in the Eighteenth Century*, 21.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 51-52.

on behalf of privateer owners. They reported the capture of prizes and the auctions of cargoes that followed. During war years, seamen flocked to privateers in the hope of escaping service onboard Royal Navy vessels. Because a state's sea power increased without large financial stress to the national treasury, privateering offered a popular means of warfare during an age dominated by mercantilist ideas. Royal and parliamentary regulations were surely meant to curb the excesses of privateer commanders. Captains, were not always owners, and these statutes tended to make privateering more popular for entrepreneurs chary of entering the business.

Despite privateering's popularity, many politicians and military officers strongly opposed the enterprise. These men viewed private men-of-war as a massive drain of manpower needed by the navy in times of war. Privateers offered the possibility of windfall gains and until the 1740s, exemption from the press and harsh naval discipline. Seamen often deserted the navy in hopes of signing on with a privateer or letter of marque. Historian Carl Swanson notes that seamen onboard a privateer sloop that captured a prize of average value could expect prize money "worth more than twice the highest average monthly wages paid to sailors in the merchant fleet and nearly six times the monthly wages paid in the Royal Navy."¹⁵

Privateers, however, often faced the same manpower shortages, as evidenced by the numerous recruiting advertisements posted in colonial newspapers. Throughout the intercolonial wars, debate raged within Britain over the manpower problem. As historian Daniel Baugh states, "there were not enough seamen to supply the wartime needs of both

¹⁵ Swanson, *Predators and Prizes*, 103.

the navy and merchant service.”¹⁶ Sailors simply migrated towards the highest pay for their labor. Furthermore, no seaman wanted to spend a life underneath the strict disciplinary lash of the Royal Navy.¹⁷

The opposition further contended that privateering played a non-essential role in naval warfare. Many naval officers argued that privateers rarely aided strategic operations and assaults. By not coordinating with government forces, privateers arguably diminished their value as a weapon. Eighteenth-century naval officers often attacked privateering as wasteful and unnecessary. Naval historians have chastised privateering and subjugated the enterprise to a secondary importance as well. Alfred Thayer Mahan, whose writings influenced American foreign and naval policies for most of the twentieth century, considered privateers, “inconclusive, worrying but not deadly; it might also be said that it causes needless suffering.”¹⁸ Instead, he argued that sea control could only be achieved through large navies. William M. Fowler states, “Privateering had its place, but not necessarily with the navy, it only tended to fragmentize and dilute strength.”¹⁹

Naval historians, however, were severely biased in their claims. Eighteenth-century naval officers competed with privateers for prizes; every vessel that a privateer captured was one less prize for the Royal Navy. Royal Navy vessels would much more have wanted a French vessel to complete its outbound voyage and then capture it on its

¹⁶ Daniel Baugh, *British Naval Administration in the Age of Walpole*. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1965), 147.

¹⁷ For a different point of view on discipline see N.A.M. Rodgers, *The Wooden World: An Anatomy of the Georgian Navy* (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 1986); Rodgers’s view on the extent and harshness of naval discipline differs from my own. Rodgers argues that naval discipline was not as strict as has previously been presented by historians.

¹⁸ Alfred Thayer Mahan, *The Influence of Sea Power Upon History, 1660-1783* (Boston: Little, Brown & Company, 1890), 136.

¹⁹ Fowler, *Rebels Under Sail*, 95.

return than allow a privateer to take it. Thus, Royal Navy officers were hardly fair and unbiased sources. In addition, Alfred Thayer Mahan was trying to change United States naval policy from its historical emphasis on prize actions and blockades to a large standing fleet that could dominate the world's oceans. In comparison, naval histories such as Julian Gwyn's *The Enterprising Admiral: The Personal Fortune of Admiral Sir Peter Warren* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1974) and Richard Harding's *Seapower and Naval Warfare, 1650-1830* (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 1999) suggest that more recent naval historians appreciate the importance of privateering.

American privateering during the Revolutionary War glaringly contradicted Mahan's ideals of naval warfare through control of the sea. The American navy was small, and no major fleet actions occurred until France entered the war. Instead, privateer vessels sailed from virtually every American port, diffusing into an unorganized, yet remarkably effective force. The commodities and war material they captured contributed more to the American cause than any other strategic operation. American privateers combined patriotism and profit in their destruction of Britain's shipping and logistical capabilities.

Contemporaries and historians alike have commented on the reckless, cavalier attitude of privateersmen. Although this stereotype may have been true of the crews, it cannot be attributed to the owners. Entrepreneurs who outfitted privateering vessels during the Revolution came from a strong merchant class well versed in maritime commerce and warfare. Repeatedly, investors in privateering ventures included the country's legislators and congressmen. Benjamin Franklin outfitted privateers

throughout his stay in France and, at times, owned shares in North Carolina vessels.²⁰ In North Carolina, governors Richard Caswell, Thomas Burke, and Abner Nash held interests in privateer vessels, as did other state leaders such as Continental Congressman Cornelius Harnett.²¹ Because of their social positions, these men surely were not attracted to legally questionable activities. They were important, successful, educated men, well versed in military and political matters, who saw privateering as a union of profitability and patriotism and capitalized on it accordingly.

Privateering played an important role in American history for more than 300 years, so it is not surprising that maritime and legal historians have paid privateers considerable attention. During the nineteenth century, several works appeared including George Coggeshall's *The American Privateers* (New York: G. Coggeshall, 1861) and Edgar Stanton Maclay's *A History of American Privateers* (New York: D. Appleton & Co., 1899). Coggeshall wrote about his experiences onboard a privateer during the War of 1812. Although his narrative is interesting, it provides little substantive material for historians and focuses only on one war. In contrast, Maclay chronicles America's privateering operations throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. He argued that privateers damaged the British in the Revolution and War of 1812 more than the American navy ever could. Maclay's work, like Coggeshall's, suffers heavily from a

²⁰ Condemnation Proceedings of the *Fair American*, British High Court of Admiralty Papers 32/328-3, Public Records Office, London, copy in the British Collection, North Carolina State Archives, Raleigh; hereafter cited as HCA. Franklin was partial owner with Richard Ellis of Edenton. The *Fair American* was built in France and was captured off Portugal in November 1780.

²¹ Bond for N.C. privateer *Resolution*, June 6, 1777. Located in Treasurer and Comptroller Papers, Port Records Box 25, North Carolina State Archives. See also Richard Ellis to Governor Richard Caswell, June 28, 1778, in Clark, *State Records*, XIII, 174; Joseph Leech to Governor Abner Nash, September 5, 1780, in Clark, *State Records*, XV, 69-70; W. Savage to Governor Thomas Burke, February 24, 1782, in Clark, *State Records*, XVI, 520.

lack of documentation. R. G. Marsden's *Documents Relating to the Laws and Customs of the Sea* (London: Naval Records Society, 1915) is another early work concerning privateering. It provides the backbone for most subsequent works on admiralty jurisprudence. A legal historian, Marsden compiled documents pertaining to English admiralty and prize law. His editorial comments suggest that privateering largely directed and molded admiralty law throughout the eighteenth century.

The early decades of the twentieth century witnessed an increase in privateering publications. In 1923, J. Franklin Jameson edited *Privateering and Piracy in the Colonial Period: Illustrative Documents* (New York: Macmillan, 1923), a landmark work that provides important documents related to private men-of-war. Howard Chapin's *Rhode Island Privateers in King George's War, 1739-1748* (Providence: Rhode Island Historical Society, 1926) provided one of the first localized studies of privateering. His succeeding work, *Privateering in King George's War, 1739-1748* (Providence: Rhode Island Historical Society, 1928), offered a brief examination of private warships during one conflict, though it palls in comparison to later discussions of the war. Ralph Eastman's *Some Famous Privateers of New England* (Boston: State Street Trust Co., 1928), illustrated the lives of certain captains, but his study did not analyze the effectiveness of American commerce destroyers. Genealogists will find Eastman's book useful, but academic historians will be disappointed. Similarly, Charles Wye Kendall's *Private Men-of-War* (London: Philip Allen & Co. Ltd., 1931), suffered from a lack of analysis.

American privateering and the War of 1812 served as the platforms for a succession of works published from 1940 to 1960. J. P. Cranwell and W. B. Crane's *Men of Marque* (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 1940), examined Baltimore privateers during the conflict. They supported Mahan's view that privateers were incapable of defeating a sea power relying on battle fleets. Unfortunately, a lack of footnotes and repetitive sea yarns limited this book's usefulness to historians. In 1954, Harold A. Mouzon published *Privateers of Charleston in the War of 1812* (Charleston: The Historical Commission of Charleston, S.C., 1954), the first examination of southern private men-of-war. Mouzon's analysis, however, was more glorification than analysis. For instance, he largely negated the efforts of northern privateers in favor of the southern states. Like Cranwell and Crane, Mouzon's work failed to support his arguments effectively.

The 1960s witnessed the first intensive, academic studies of privateering. Kenneth R. Andrews's *Elizabethan Privateering: English Privateering during the Spanish War, 1585-1603* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1964), a very influential work, illustrated the association between early English colonization attempts and privateer operations. He demonstrated that the English intended early settlements such as Roanoke Island as privateering bases against the Spanish. His footnotes and bibliography were impressive, and he deftly supported his arguments concerning the beginnings of English privateering. Unfortunately, Donald Chidsey's *The American Privateers* (New York: Dodd, Mead, and Co., 1962), did not compare favorably with Andrews's work. Chidsey's study of American commerce raiding looked and appeared

to be almost identical to Edgar Stanton Maclay's work. Like Maclay, he argued the effectiveness of American privateers, but provided little evidence for such a claim. Joyce Harman's *Trade and Privateering in Spanish Florida, 1732-1763* (St. Augustine, Fla.: St. Augustine Historical Society, 1969) centered on the failing economic situation and provisioning problems in Spanish Florida during the mid-eighteenth century. She argued that Spanish privateers sailed from St. Augustine in search of prizes laden with foodstuffs. Melvin H. Jackson's *Privateers in Charleston, 1793-1796* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1969), was as much a discussion of American Francophilia as it was a discussion of privateering. He argued that the French saw Charleston as a launching point for attacking the British West Indies. In return, the Americans viewed the French as an economic gift horse. Utilizing admiralty court records and personal correspondence, Jackson weaved a story about the influence of French privateers in Charleston.

By the 1970s, privateering began receiving serious academic attention. James G. Lydon's *Pirates, Privateers, and Profits* (Upper Saddle River, N.J.: Gregg Press, 1970), provides an examination of the relationship between sea bandits and commerce destruction in New York during the 1740s and 1750s. A large portion of his book derived from his doctoral dissertation, "The Role of New York in Privateering Down to 1763" (Ph.D. Diss., Columbia University, 1956). In 1975, at the Tenth International Congress of Maritime History, a number of authors, including Kenneth Andrews and James G. Lydon, presented a series of papers that fueled interest in privateering. These papers

offered analyses of British, French, American, Dutch, and Swedish Privateering.²² In 1977, Jerome Garitee published a comprehensive examination of the business aspects of private men-of-war in *The Republic's Private Navy: The American Privateering Business as Practiced by Baltimore During the War of 1812* (Middletown, Conn.: Wesleyan University Press, 1977). Like Crane and Cranwell, Garitee glorified Baltimore's role. Nevertheless, Garitee provides a thorough analysis of privateer owners and the sociological and economic roles that privateering played within a community.

In the past two decades, more academic work has focused on privateering enterprise. Much of this increase probably resulted from the papers given at the 1975 Tenth International Congress of Maritime History. Patrick Crowhurst, a speaker at the congress, published *The French War on Trade: Privateering 1793-1815* (Brookfield, Conn.: Gower Publishing, 1989), which analyzed the revival of French privateering in the Napoleonic era. He argued that France used privateering to reestablish foreign trade that had been lost, especially in provisions. Historian David Starkey's *British Privateering Enterprise in the Eighteenth Century* (Exeter, Eng.: University of Exeter Press, 1990), fully examines Britain's private men-of-war and admiralty court procedures. He demonstrated that after the Seven Years War, British naval supremacy climbed while privateering declined. Starkey acknowledged a rise in privateering during the American Revolution, but indicated that their prize captures diminished. Carl Swanson's *Predators and Prizes: American Privateering and Imperial Warfare, 1739-1748* (Columbia:

²² *Commission Internationale d'Histoire Maritime, Course et Piroterie: Études présentées à l'occasion de son XVe colloque international pendant le XIVe Congrès International des Sciences historiques, San Francisco, août 1975* (Paris: Institut de Recherche et d' Histoire de Textes Editions du Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique, 1975).

University of South Carolina Press, 1991) provided a thorough examination of the relationship between imperial expansion and privateering during King George's War. His study also illuminated manning problems that plagued privateer and navy vessel alike. In deftly supporting his arguments, Swanson relied on a database of 3,973 prize actions during the conflict recorded in newspapers, court records, and privateer bonds.

More recently, Faye Kert's *Prize and Prejudice: Privateering and Naval Prize in Atlantic Canada in the War of 1812* (St. John's, Nfld.: International Maritime Economic History Association, 1997), offered an examination of the business and legal aspects of privateering during the early nineteenth century. Her work agrees with Garitee's in its discussion of the logistics of privateering. *Pirates and Privateers: New Perspectives on the War on Trade in the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries* (Exeter, England: University of Exeter Press, 1997), edited by David Starkey and Jaap de Moor was another fine source. This work, a collection of essays, analyzed commerce destruction during the Revolutionary period. Historians concerned with piracy will find several studies extremely beneficial, especially those concerning lesser known Chinese and Filipino sea bandits.

A few works have focused on privateering during the American Revolution. Carl Ubbelohde's *The Vice-Admiralty Courts and the American Revolution* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1960) provided an examination of American admiralty systems, but focuses on the courts' role in inciting revolution. Henry J. Bourguignon's *The First Federal Court: The Federal Appellate Prize Court of the*

American Revolution 1775-1787 (Philadelphia: American Philosophical Society, 1977), provided a much more thorough discussion of American prize law and privateering than Ubbelohde. Bourguignon's work deftly illustrated American adaptation of British judicial procedures.

For information on the economic impact of privateering, Charles C. Crittenden's *The Commerce of North Carolina, 1763-1789* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1936) provided much information concerning the state's economy, as well as cargoes and trade patterns. John J. McCusker's *Money and Exchange in Europe and America, 1660-1775: A Handbook* (Chapel Hill, N.C.: University of North Carolina Press, 1978) provided useful analysis of the various state currencies and their exchange rates. McCusker's *How Much is That in Real Money?: A Historical Commodity Price Index for Use as a Deflator of Money Values in the Economy of the United States* (Worcester, Mass.: American Antiquarian Society, 2001) offered a formula for determining what eighteenth-century currency is worth in modern United States bills. E. James Ferguson's *The Power of the Purse: A History of American Public Finance, 1776-1790* (Chapel Hill, N.C.: University of North Carolina Press, 1961) examined American finances during the Revolution.

Northern privateers provided the basis for Gardner W. Allen's "State Navies and Privateers in the Revolution" (*Massachusetts Historical Society Proceedings*, XLVI (1913), 179-183, William Bell Clark's *Ben Franklin's Privateers: A Naval Epic of the American Revolution* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1956), and Ralph D. Paine's *Privateers of '76* (Philadelphia: Penn Publishing, 1926). Allen's

Massachusetts Privateers of the Revolution (Boston: Massachusetts Historical Society, 1927), and Sidney Morse's "New England Privateering in the American Revolution" (Ph.D. Diss., Harvard University, 1941), both focused on northern efforts as well. William J. Morgan's "American Privateering in America's War For Independence, 1775-1783," *American Neptune*, 36 (1976), 79-87, provided a more balanced examination, but the brevity of the article was unfortunate. Morgan focused on the nation's efforts as a whole, and the significant influence privateering had on the outcome of the war. Lastly, C. Keith Wilbur's *Picture Book of the Revolution's Privateers* (Harrisburg, Pa.: Stackpole, 1973), is a simplistic work aimed at a juvenile audience. The title alluded to portraits, but historians will likely find little use for this work.

Unfortunately, most studies of Revolutionary War privateering focus on northern private men-of-war. This probably results from the large amount of primary information concerning the more numerous northern privateers. Their numerical superiority stemmed from the thriving pre-war maritime economy that supported more sailors and vessels than the southern colonies. In the early years of the conflict, this dominance played a major role, and most early prize actions were fought in the North. After 1777, however, the South became the primary theater of war for the British. The role of southern privateers during this phase of the conflict has never been fully examined.

Although largely ignored, a few works on Southern privateering do exist. Richard D. Herron's "Chesapeake Bay Privateering During the American Revolution: The Patriots, the Loyalists, and the British" (M.A. Thesis, East Carolina University, 1984), provided an analysis of Maryland and Virginia private men-of-war. North Carolina

privateers were also previously examined. Barry Frye's "Privateers and Letters of Marque in North Carolina During the American Revolution" (M.A. Thesis, East Carolina University, 1980), recorded the actions and establishment of privateers in North Carolina. Unfortunately, he failed to illustrate their economic role or their relationship with the state navy. Frye also omitted several prominent privateers and neglected British efforts at destroying the predators' home ports during 1781-1783. He focused on only thirteen privateers, although North Carolina merchants fitted more than six times as many private warships. Marred by these errors, Frye's work inadequately analyzed North Carolina's privateering efforts.

Consequently, an accurate interpretation of North Carolina's privateering efforts during the American Revolution is necessary. Southern privateering as a whole has been largely ignored, and studies focusing on single states simply do not exist. Throughout the American Revolution, North Carolina ports provided admiralty courts and safe havens for both native privateers and those from other states. North Carolina's merchant class gained valuable business experience and connections that aided the state immeasurably in the post-war years. A proper examination, detailing the various individuals and vessels involved in these actions is paramount to understanding the state's role in the American Revolution. Through this analysis the full story of North Carolina's "abandoned sett of wretches," will finally be told.

CHAPTER TWO

BARREL STAVES, HOGS, AND HARD MONEY MERCHANTS

On the eve of the American Revolution, the commerce of North American colonies provided great wealth to the First British Empire. Merchants obtained natural resources from the colonies in return for manufactured goods and commodities. North Carolina's economy, however, presented a puzzling oddity among the southern colonies. Often referred to as "poor Carolina," most Englishmen viewed North Carolina as a backwoods colony severely handicapped by a treacherous shoreline and lack of deepwater ports.¹ Nevertheless, by the outbreak of the Revolution, North Carolina had become an important source of naval stores and provisions for the British Empire. In addition, North Carolinians produced tobacco, rice, and lumber. From shipping such commodities, a rising social class of merchants developed. This chapter argues that this developing commercial system provided the financial and political support necessary for privateering.

Geography largely determined North Carolina's economic development during the colonial period. The colony's topography presented a paradox. The inner waterways at first glance appeared perfect for inland trade. A network of rivers and creeks that seemingly provided ideal avenues for trading vessels complemented the Albemarle and Pamlico sounds. These waterways, however, were all too shallow for the larger merchant

¹ This view is emphasized in one of the leading accounts of eighteenth-century North Carolina; see A. Roger Ekirch, *"Poor Carolina:" Politics and Society in Colonial North Carolina, 1729-1776* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1981).

ships to navigate. Only smaller boats could reach the headwaters of the many rivers where the majority of towns were located. Shipwrecks were not uncommon. A small sloop that, "as she was coming into the Neuse River, ran ashore on Brant Island, and filled; the People, by Accident, lost their Boat; and had no Means to get ashore."²

The Cape Fear River, greatly marred by a number of dangerous shoals, provided the only deep-water riverine access to the ocean. The river's sobriquet foreshadowed its treacherous nature. Incoming vessels had to first surpass Frying Pan Shoals and then pass the Middle Ground, a sandbank lying in the river's mouth. Having accomplished those feats, the vessel still had to cross the bar, roughly ten feet deep at low tide. The river's shallow nature meant that most trading vessels had to unload part of their cargoes near the river mouth before proceeding to Wilmington. Cargoes headed upriver had to be lightered using flats or scows, which added to the time and expense of maritime commerce.³

North Carolina's barrier islands were, and still are, a conglomeration of shifting sandbars and treacherous inlets. A 1766 act concerning these problems stated that "considerable Injuries have frequently happened to diverse merchants who have sent their Ships and Vessels to Bath, Edenton, and New Bern, By reason of the Badness of the Channels leading to the Said Places."⁴ Although nearly a dozen inlets existed during the

² *North Carolina Gazette* (New Bern), September 26, 1777; Charles C. Crittenden, *The Commerce of North Carolina, 1763-1789* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1936), 19.

³ Crittenden, *The Commerce of North Carolina*, 1-4.

⁴ "An Act for Facilitating the Navigation of Port Bath, Port Roanoke, and Port Brunswick, 1766," in Walter Clark, ed., *State Records of North Carolina* (Winston-Salem: State of North Carolina, 14 volumes, 1890-1906), XXIII, 667; These "14 volumes" are considered an extension of William L. Saunders, ed., *Colonial Records of North Carolina*, (Raleigh: State of North Carolina, 10 volumes, 1886-1890), and therefore they are numbered XI-XXV.

colonial period, only two played important roles in North Carolina's economy. Old Topsail Inlet, roughly twelve miles northwest of Cape Lookout, allowed fairly safe access. The number of recorded shipwrecks in this area is minor compared to those of the Cape Fear region. Unfortunately, the inlet led only to Beaufort, a small village that lacked any useful connections to the interior. In comparison, Ocracoke Inlet served as the great highway of North Carolina's maritime commerce. The deepest of all North Carolina inlets, Ocracoke, located nearly fifty miles farther north, ranged from ten to fourteen feet depth depending on the tide. Many dangerous shoals existed within the channel. The Swash, an area along the bar entering into the port of Ocracoke, was so shallow that, "no vessel of burthen can pass it until they discharged Cargo, and can only return again half loaded."⁵ The inlet served as a major commercial thoroughfare, but contemporary merchants labeled the area, "the contemptible Port of Ocracoke."⁶

Although North Carolina's waterways presented serious transportation problems, the colony's road systems were even worse. The dearth of properly maintained roads drastically affected North Carolina's ability to communicate and trade with neighboring colonies. Although legislation existed concerning the construction of proper roads and signposts, slack enforcement was the norm before the Revolution. In 1778, a traveler complained that the state's main post road "has become so bad, through the neglect of the Overseers of it, as greatly to delay the Post Riders and Travellers in general. Trees have fallen across it, and are not removed; the Roots are not cut up; a number of the

⁵ "Description of Occacock Inlet," *North Carolina Historical Review*, III, (1926), 629-630; Norman Delaney, "Outer Banks of North Carolina During the Revolutionary War," *North Carolina Historical Review*, XXXVI, (1958) 1-16.

⁶ Crittenden, *The Commerce of North Carolina*, 4.

Causeways are Swampy and full of Holes, and many of the Bridges are almost impassable.”⁷

Roadways also suffered from a lack of dependable ferries. Rivers were known to rise rapidly, and destruction of ferries commonly occurred. In 1730, Hugh Meredith, a powerful North Carolina landowner, stated that the Cape Fear in one day rose, “40 Foot perpendicular, but there were none that saw it who did not allow it to be upwards of 30.”⁸ Bridges were almost non-existent in colonial North Carolina, especially in the backcountry. The extant few consisted of privately owned toll bridges.

These factors heavily influenced overland trade. Moving goods by wagons or carts meant a slow, tedious course through the countryside. Rivers could rise without warning, and proper signposts directing the travelers’ way did not exist. There were few bridges, and ferries were terribly unreliable. Moving commodities by water proved the fastest, cheapest, and most reliable method of transportation in colonial North Carolina. Although this profited the coastal regions, much of the backcountry remained isolated from commercial outlets until the eve of the Revolution.

The colony’s transportation problems prompted numerous attempts at alteration and improvement. Colonial and imperial officials issued numerous declarations calling for navigational aids. Commissioners of navigation, appointed by the legislature, were required to mark all channels and erect beacons along the shoreline. No lighthouses existed, although lighted buoys were placed in virtually every harbor. Several efforts at

⁷ “Memorial of Ebenezer Hazard to the North Carolina General Assembly, April 6, 1778,” in Clark, *State Records*, XIII, 396.

⁸ Hugh Meredith, *An Account of the Cape Fear Country, 1731* (Perth Amboy, N.J.: C. F. Heartmann, 1922) 21-22; Crittenden, *The Commerce of North Carolina*, 18. Meredith had been a printer and business partner of Benjamin Franklin in Philadelphia before moving to North Carolina in the 1760s.

deepening the inlets enjoyed little success. Unlike maritime commerce, little effort took place to improve overland transportation. For instance, although by 1750 numerous stage routes existed in the neighboring colonies, North Carolina had none until well after the Revolutionary War.⁹

Despite these handicaps, North Carolina's economy expanded. North Carolina merchants traded with the West Indies, Great Britain, and New England in addition to South Carolina and Virginia. Throughout the colonial period, the vessels carrying North Carolina's maritime commerce sailed through five ports of entry: Ports Brunswick, Roanoke, Beaufort, Bath, and Currituck. Within each port the crown established a series of customs agents and officials charged with regulating and overseeing commerce. These included collectors whose responsibilities included examining ships' registers and receiving plantation tax duties. At both Roanoke and Brunswick a comptroller overlooked the actions of the collector. The British also established vice-admiralty courts consisting of a judge, registrar, and marshal within each colony. These courts answered to the British High Court of Admiralty in London. Records indicate that the North Carolina vice-admiralty court was active during the early half of the eighteenth century, but Governor William Tryon noted in 1767 that the court rarely met and had little activity.¹⁰

The different ports of entry divided North Carolina's commercial avenues by geographic regions (See Figure 1). Port Brunswick, whose officials were actually located

⁹ Crittenden, *The Commerce of North Carolina*, 33-35.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 40-41. For an in-depth study of the vice-admiralty court systems see Carl Ubbelohde, *The Vice-Admiralty Courts and the American Revolution* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, 1960).

in Wilmington, comprised the entire Cape Fear River basin. This deep-water port enjoyed the most profitable and important position in the colony's trade on the eve of the Revolution. Similarly, administrators of Port Roanoke, encompassing the Albemarle Sound, were located in Edenton. This area suffered from a lack of good approaches to the ocean, but still succeeded in building a commercial trade rivaling Cape Fear's. Port Beaufort commanded the areas of Cape Lookout and the Neuse River Basin. Initially, the officials resided within the small town of Beaufort. By the 1740s, however, the commercial rise of New Bern prompted the appointment of custom agents to the growing town. The last two ports of entry, Bath and Currituck, although important in the first half of the eighteenth century, had by 1760 declined so heavily in maritime trade as to be almost insignificant. Although vessels continued to visit both ports well into the 1770s, they never rivaled the Cape Fear, Albemarle, or Neuse River regions.¹¹

Statistical information on pre-Revolutionary imports is scanty. Extant records indicate that in 1769-1770, North Carolina import tonnage consisted of about 23,000. Brunswick received the largest amount at 8,300 tons, followed by Roanoke at 6,200. Beaufort experienced importation of 4,769 tons, with Bath and Currituck combining for 3,600. The other North American colonies supplied roughly two-fifths of the tonnage, while approximately one-fourth came from both the West Indies and Great Britain. The remaining one-tenth originated in Spain and the Azores.¹²

¹¹ Crittenden, *The Commerce of North Carolina*, 41-42.

¹² *Ibid.*, 78. These figures come from a statement dated October 1, 1764 located in the *North Carolina Magazine* (New Bern), September 28-October 5, 1764, an early North Carolina newspaper published in New Bern.

Imports varied from such extravagant items as musical instruments and Oriental textiles to the more mundane bricks and iron pots. British imports generally consisted of either manufactured goods or textiles. Materials such as linens, both British and Irish, including printed, striped, and checked pieces made their way into the colony in large

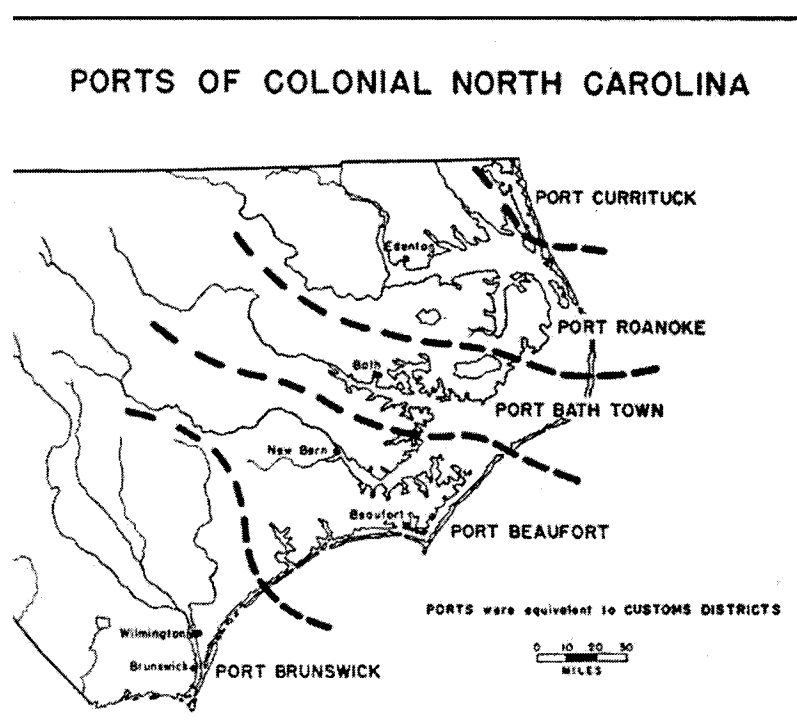


Figure 1. Ports of Colonial North Carolina¹³

numbers. Woolens, canvas, and cottons were imported as well. Continental European cloths, such as Hessian canvas, oznabrigs, German linen, and Russian drilling, were also purchased. Oriental materials such as calicoes, nankeens, pullicates, and Persian carpets were seen as well. These items first entered English ports and then were re-exported into

¹³ Harry R. Merrens, *Colonial North Carolina in the Eighteenth Century* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1964), 87.

the American colonies. In addition, apparel from shoes to bonnets came to North Carolina from Great Britain in massive amounts.¹⁴

Other manufactured goods included household items such as earthenware, iron pots, bottles, china, and cutlery. Farm tools such as scythes, spades, grindstones, and plows were all listed in newspaper advertisements for imported British goods. Leather goods such as whips, harnesses, and saddles also made their way into North Carolina ports. Virtually every imaginable manufactured good of the eighteenth-century British Empire could and did find its way into North Carolina at one point or another.¹⁵

Foodstuffs from Great Britain only arrived in minute amounts. These items reinforced the ideals many Americans held of retaining their British social culture. Foodstuffs exported from Britain typically consisted of luxury items. Many of these were actually European or Oriental goods re-imported from Britain to the colonies. They included beer, ale, and wines as well as salt. Most foodstuffs, however, consisted of cheeses, oils, nuts, and spices such as currants, nutmegs, cloves, and cinnamon.¹⁶

From the West Indies, North Carolina merchants imported a variety of different items. Most imports originated from the large sugar plantations, including sugar, rum, and molasses. In addition, imports of salt came in large quantities. Smaller quantities of fruits, ginger, coffee, and pimento entered North Carolina ports as well. The few manufactured goods imported from the islands likely originated in Great Britain. These

¹⁴ Crittenden, *The Commerce of North Carolina*, 80-81.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

included quantities of iron, linen, and earthenware. North Carolinians also imported African slaves from the Caribbean throughout the 1760s and 1770s.¹⁷

The northern colonies sent foodstuffs and manufactured goods such as New England rum, sugar, molasses, and salt. Provisions included beef, butter, onions, pork, and a large quantity of fish. The abundant fishing grounds off New England provided cod, mackerel, salmon, and herring. Luxury foodstuffs included pepper, chocolates, tea, coffee, and spirits such as wine, brandy, and beer. These manufactured goods were generally imports from Great Britain and Europe, re-imported from northern ports for North Carolina. These proved valuable to many North Carolina merchants since the northern colonies' imports took less time and generally cost less than those from Britain.¹⁸

North Carolina exports differed drastically from those of neighboring colonies. Unlike South Carolina rice and Virginia tobacco, North Carolina never maintained a staple crop system. Instead, the colony maintained a profitable position within Atlantic trading system by supplying a variety of goods. Tobacco, beeswax, rice, indigo, potash, and hemp were all exported in greater or lesser quantities during the colonial period as were furs, deerskins, and hides. The most lucrative exports, however, consisted of naval stores, lumber, and provisions. North Carolina's export tonnage in 1770 closely matched imports at roughly 23,000 tons. Traditionally, naval stores and lumber shipped for Great Britain, while vessels carried provisions to the West Indies. Exports to the northern

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 81-82.

¹⁸ Virginia Bever Platt, "Tar, Staves, and New England Rum: The Trade of Aaron Lopez of Newport, Rhode Island, with Colonial North Carolina," *North Carolina Historical Review*, XLVIII, (1971), 1-22.

colonies consisted of naval stores and furs, but the majority of North Carolina commodities were sent to Great Britain or the West Indies. For example, in the year 1768, three-fifths of the Port Brunswick exports crossed the Atlantic, while another one-fourth cleared for the West Indies. About one-tenth accounted for the other continental colonies.¹⁹

North Carolina's export economy focused on the production of numerous lucrative commodities. Naval stores such as pitch, tar, and turpentine provided North Carolina's most profitable exports. Although considered inferior to similar items from the Baltic, the colony's exports were much cheaper to import into Britain. These items came from the abundant pine forests in the eastern half of the province. Naval stores could be harvested at roughly any time of the year, but the process was rather labor intensive. Thus, slave labor dramatically impacted the output of stores in different areas of the colony. Johann Schoepf, who witnessed naval store production in 1783-1784, estimated that a single slave could oversee turpentine production over twelve to fifteen acres, producing roughly 120 barrels of sap in a season.²⁰ Areas such as the Cape Fear, which had larger numbers of Africans than the Albemarle, accounted for a larger percentage of the export trade. In all, North Carolina supplied roughly 60 percent of the naval stores shipped from North America during the colonial period (See Figure 2).²¹

¹⁹ Merrens, *Colonial North Carolina in the Eighteenth Century*, 88-95; Crittenden, *The Commerce of North Carolina*, 53-60.

²⁰ Johann David Schoepf, *Travels in the Confederation, 1783-1784* (New York: B. Morgan, 1968), 140-141.

²¹ Merrens, *Colonial North Carolina in the Eighteenth Century*, 86. Merrens provides a good description of the various production methods in obtaining turpentine, tar, and pitch. See also Crittenden, *The Commerce of North Carolina, 1763-1789*, 53-60.

In addition to naval stores, lumber played a significant role in the colony's economy. Shingles, barrel staves, and sawn lumber were exported in significant amounts. From 1768 to 1772 an estimated 6 million shingles left North Carolina ports, roughly one-eighth of those exported from the North American colonies. Similarly, the annual shipment from the colony of four million feet of sawn lumber and three million staves constituted nearly one-twelfth of that shipped from the colonies. One certain feature of this trade deserves further discussion. While the majority of sawn lumber was shipped from Port Brunswick, a larger proportion of barrel staves left Port Roanoke. Sawn boards were from pine trees, but the shingles and staves typically came from hardwoods. The majority of the hardwood forests lay along the Albemarle Sound region. Therefore, regional specializations and natural resources dictated which types of products shipped from different ports (See Figure 3).²²

Provisions, ranging from corn to cheese and cattle, were also important North Carolina exports. Crops such as corn and wheat played large roles in the provision trade. During the years 1768 to 1769, North Carolina merchants exported 117,389 bushels of corn. In 1773, the colony sent out over 175,000 bushels. Similarly, wheat served as an export, but was not nearly as important as corn. Most North Carolina wheat growing areas existed in the backcountry and northeastern section. Thus, the 13,400 bushels of wheat exported in 1772 cleared almost en masse from Edenton and Port Roanoke. Unlike corn, which was grown primarily for local consumption, wheat was grown specifically for the export trade. Planters produced and exported prodigious amounts of

²² *Ibid.*, 94-103.

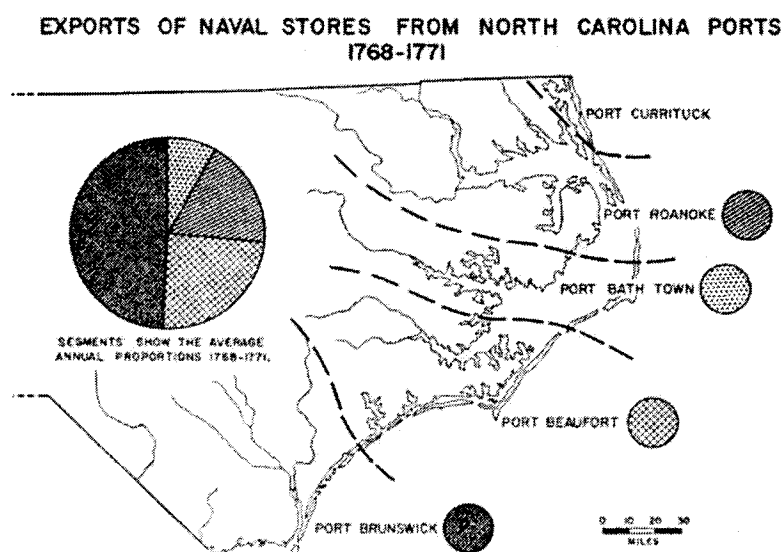


Figure 2. Exports of Naval Stores From North Carolina Ports²³

tobacco was well. In 1772 the colony exported 1,605,000 pounds of tobacco, and in 1773 Port Roanoke alone cleared 1,525,000 pounds.²⁴ Although nowhere near the exports of Virginia or Maryland, North Carolina tobacco played a major role in the colony's economy. The Hamilton firm played a major role in the development of the tobacco trade. As one contemporary stated, "this House was among the first to encourage and promote the Cultivation of Tobacco in No. Carolina."²⁵

Along with crops, livestock exports played a major role in the development of North Carolina commerce. Most farmers raised cattle or hogs in addition to their crops of corn and tobacco. As one contemporary noted, "Every proprietor of ever so small a piece

²³ Merrens, *Colonial North Carolina in the Eighteenth Century*, 88.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 109-121.

²⁵ Rigdon Brice Deposition, American Loyalist Claims, in Merrens, *Colonial North Carolina in the Eighteenth Century*, 124.

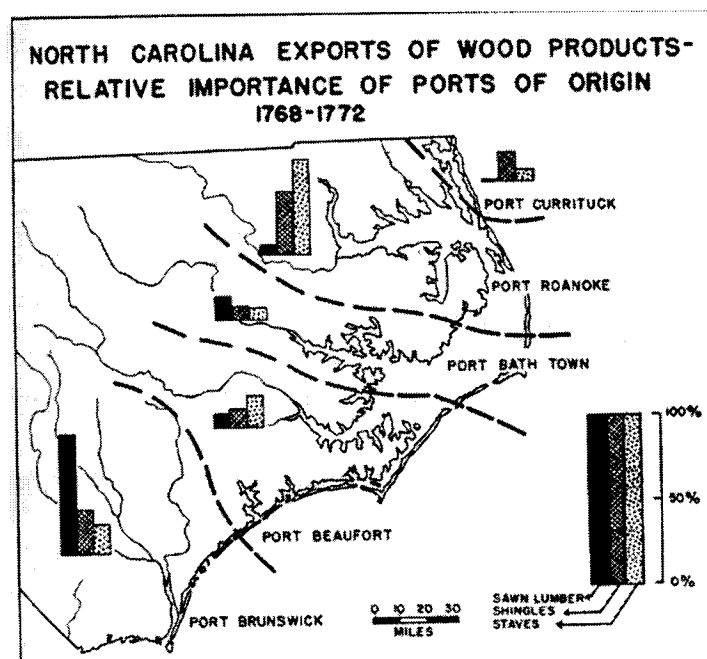


Figure 3. North Carolina Exports of Wood Products²⁶

of land, raises some Indian Corn and sweet potatoes, and breeds some hoggs and a calf or two.”²⁷ Livestock did not, however, serve simply for consumption. Animals were used as a source of farm income and transportation as well. Cattle drives were common in colonial North Carolina, typically ranging to Virginia, but at times as far north as Pennsylvania. The cattle were driven mostly from western areas such as the Yadkin River Valley. An agriculturalist in New Jersey noted, “the Cattle from Carolina generally arrive at any time from harvest till ye last of November.” Cattle also supplied large

²⁶ Merrens, *Colonial North Carolina in the Eighteenth Century*, 97.

²⁷ “Description of North Carolina by Alexander Schaw,” in Janet Schaw, *Journal of a Lady of Quality: Being the Narrative of a Journey from Scotland to the West Indies, North Carolina, and Portugal, in the years 1774 to 1776*, ed. Evangeline W. Andrews and Charles M. Andrews, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1939) 281.

amounts of cheese and butter, of which North Carolina exported 49,747 pounds in 1772.²⁸

Pork played an even larger economic role than cattle. William Byrd II, on his expedition to define the dividing line between Virginia and North Carolina stated, "The only business here is raising of Hogs, which is managed with the least Trouble, and affords the Diet they are most fond of."²⁹ One manuscript asserted that hogs in the colony were of "a prodigious number."³⁰ Raising hogs cost little money and required little labor since the animals only needed to be penned during the final fattening stages. Byrd noted, "To speak the Truth, tis a thorough Aversion to Labor that makes people file off to N Carolina where Plenty and a Warm Sun confirm them in their Disposition to Laziness for their whole lives."³¹ Another account explained that North Carolinians could "send their salted hog meat to market at a third or a half cheaper than their neighbors in the northern states [colonies] where harder winters and more restricted pasturage make the maintenance dearer." All together, cattle and pig products provided an extremely profitable export for North Carolina. In 1772, the colony exported 4,831 barrels of beef and pork, as well as 49,797 pounds of tallow and lard.³²

²⁸ Carl R. Woodward, ed., *Ploughs and Politicks: Charles Read of New Jersey and His Notes on Agriculture, 1715-1774* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1941), 331; Merrens, *Colonial North Carolina in Eighteenth Century*, 134-135.

²⁹ John Spencer Bassett, ed., *The Writings of Colonel William Byrd of Westover in Virginia, Esquire*, (New York: Burt Franklin, 1970), 45.

³⁰ Harry J. Carman, *American Husbandry* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1939), quoted in Merrens, 136.

³¹ Bassett, *The Writings of Colonel William Byrd*, 76.

³² John Lord Sheffield, *Observations on the Commerce of the American States* (London, 1784), quoted in Crittenden, *The Commerce of North Carolina*, 60-61; Merrens, *Colonial North Carolina in the Eighteenth Century*, 135-138.

North Carolina's economy, therefore, relied on a multitude of different commodities. Commercial vessels that carried these goods were equally diverse, including sloops, schooners, brigantines, snows, and ships. The sloop, ranging in size from six to fifty tons, carried a fore-and-aft rig with only a single mast (See Figure 4). They were the most popular eighteenth-century sailing vessel because of their nimble sailing qualities and small crew size. Fore-and-aft rigged sloops were very fast sailors, and could sail close to the wind. This trait, known as leeway, was essential for sailing in narrow waters. These vessels carried trade along the Atlantic Coast, especially to the northern colonies. For example, in 1787 the *Charlotte*, an 18-ton sloop, cleared Beaufort for Boston carrying 180 barrels of naval stores and 150 bushels of potatoes.

Schooners were two-masted, fore-and-aft rigged vessels and were typically less than fifty tons in size (See Figure 5). These vessels carried trade along the Atlantic Coast and into the West Indies. With a fore-and-aft rig, schooners were fast sailors and handled well in narrow waters. With a second mast, the vessels were able to use smaller sails and lighter spars, therefore needing smaller crews than sloops. The schooner *Dandy*, 20 tons, with a crew of six, sailed from Beaufort to New York in 1787 with a cargo of 70 barrels of rosin, 25 barrels of turpentine, and 20,000 shingles. The smaller crew attracted merchants because of the reduction in labor and provision costs, and schooners slowly surpassed sloops in popularity and became the most popular cargo carriers. Both vessels were economical, requiring small crews and carrying substantial cargoes.³³

³³ Crittenden, *The Commerce of North Carolina*, 9-11; Carl Swanson, *Predators and Prizes: American Privateering and Imperial Warfare, 1739-1748* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1991), 56-58.

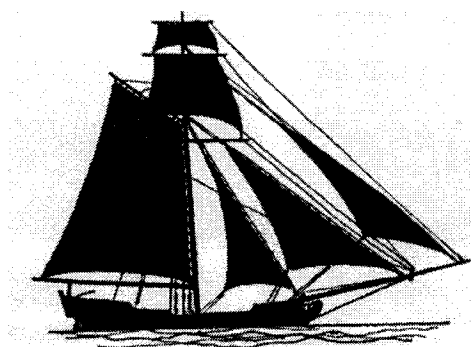


Figure 4. Sloop³⁴

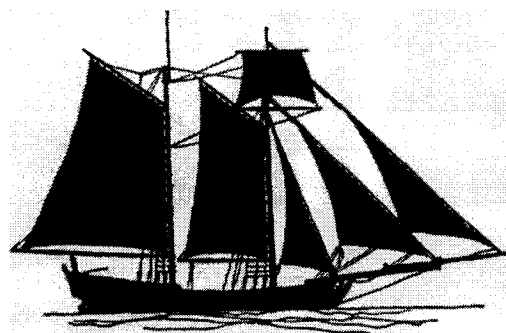


Figure 5. Schooner³⁵

The brig averaged 60 to 100 tons burthen and carried two masts.³⁶ The foremast utilized square sails, while the mainmast carried a fore-and-aft rig (See Figure 6). These vessels, typically crewed by six or more men, carried North Carolina goods throughout the West Indies and across the Atlantic. For example, the brig *Abigail*, 50 tons, crewed by six, sailed from Edenton in 1774 for the West Indies with a cargo of 422 barrels of herring, 30 barrels of pork, and 525 lbs of tobacco. In addition, the *Abigail* carried candles, oil, and bundles of hay, earthenware, and barrel staves.³⁷ The brig, the *Hannah*, 80 tons, sailed from Cape Fear to Hull, England, in 1789 carrying 608 barrels of tar, 163 casks of turpentine, and 10,000 barrel staves.³⁸ Overall, brigs and brigantines were slower than sloops or schooners, but could carry larger cargoes.

³⁴ Edgar L. Bloomster, *Sailing and Small Craft Down the Ages* (Annapolis: United States Naval Institute, 1957), 11.

³⁵ *Ibid.*

³⁶ In the eighteenth century, the terms brig and brigantine were almost interchangeable. Brigantine was used to describe a vessel's rigging as, "square rigged on the foremast and fore and aft rigged on the mizzen." See William Falconer, *Universal Dictionary of the Marine* (London: T. Cadell, 1780).

³⁷ Platt, "Tar, Staves, and New England Rum," 1-22.

³⁸ Crittenden, *The Commerce of North Carolina*, 10-11.

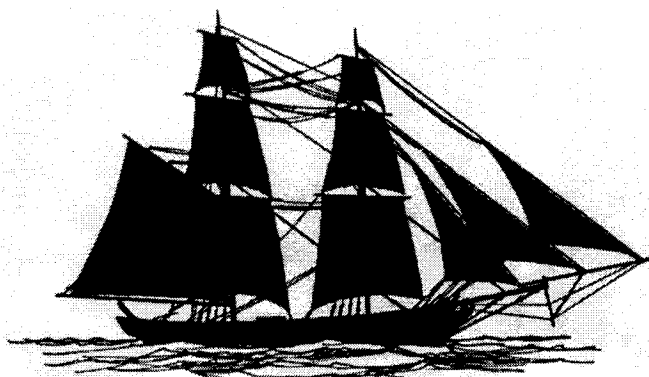


Figure 6. Brig³⁹

The largest vessels that plied North Carolina waters included snows and ships. The snow, carrying two masts, resembled a brig, but differed in the spars used.⁴⁰ Snows typically were 150 tons burthen, nearly 50 tons larger than brigs. The largest vessel, a ship, carried three square-rigged masts and ranged in size from 150 to 300 tons. These vessel types were the large cargo freighters of the eighteenth century. For example, the 250 ton ship *Polly and Nancy* sailed for Liverpool, England, from North Carolina in 1788 carrying 594 barrels of naval stores, 2,700 pipe staves, 8,575 hogshead staves, 90 hogsheads of tobacco, and 59 logs of black walnut. Similarly, the *Charley*, a 120 ton snow, cleared from Cape Fear for England in 1767 carrying 104 barrels of pitch, 1,018 barrels of tar, 28 barrels of turpentine, and 800 barrel staves.⁴¹

Most of these vessels were not built in North Carolina. Despite the abundance of naval stores, shipbuilding was never a major industry in the colony. This appears bewildering at first. Shallow waters and a lack of skilled shipbuilders, however, stalled

³⁹ Bloomster, *Sailing and Small Craft*, 9.

⁴⁰ Swanson, *Predators and Prizes*, 59.

⁴¹ Crittenden, *The Commerce of North Carolina*, 11. Swanson, *Predators and Prizes*, 58-59.

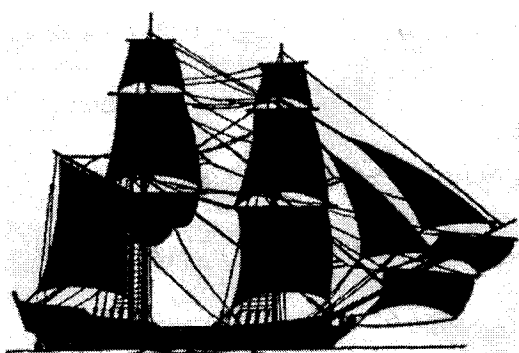


Figure 7. Snow⁴²

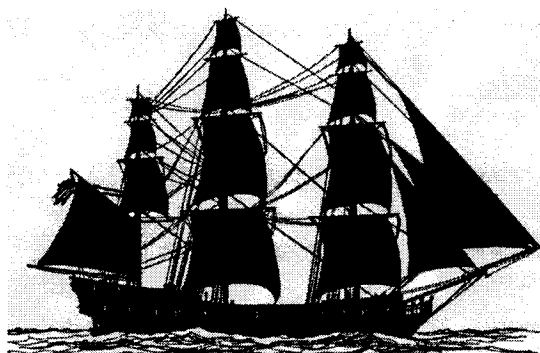


Figure 8. Ship⁴³

the industry within the colony. Nevertheless, some vessels were built at several North Carolina ports. In 1769, twelve vessels were constructed with an aggregate tonnage of 607, roughly one-fourth the output of ships from New Hampshire and one-thirteenth of Massachusetts. In 1772, of the ships clearing Port Roanoke totaling 6,304 tons, 21 of them, with a tonnage of roughly 1,000 were North Carolina built. Some prominent plantation owners and merchants owned shipyards. Nathaniel Duckenfield and Thomas Macknight both owned yards in the northeastern section of the state. Some considered Macknight's property the, "most commodious and best shipyard in the province."⁴⁴ The capital required for shipbuilding, however, limited opportunities to a wealthy few. Although the live oak of eastern North Carolina was plentiful, in 1775 the cost of building a fore-and-aft-rigged vessel's hull was as high as £5 10s. per ton.⁴⁵ At the same

⁴² Bloomster, *Sailing and Small Craft*, 11.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 15.

⁴⁴ Crittenden, *The Commerce of North Carolina*, 13. Audit Office Papers, XIII, 121, at North Carolina State Archives, Raleigh.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 14.

time, a Philadelphia built fore-and-aft-rigged hull cost only £3 6s. per ton. A completed fore-and-aft-rigged Philadelphia vessel only cost £6 8s. a ton.⁴⁶

Merchants owned the majority of North Carolina's merchantmen. Apparently, either the vessels were owned entirely by a merchant or in a partial-ownership with the captain or master. They could either be built or bought outright by the merchant, as was a "Sloop called the Dolphin with all her Riggin Sails Anchors and Cables and all other Appurtenances thereunto," for £54 along the Albemarle in 1765. Once purchased, vessels were equipped for sea service with provisions and other necessary supplies. One estimate states that provisioning and outfitting typically cost £4 10s. per ton in North Carolina.⁴⁷ Along with supplies, a ship needed a crew. Many eastern North Carolina inhabitants were accustomed to a seafaring life, and they also fished and sailed the region's inner waterways. Poling a flatboat or handling a periauger, however, differed drastically from skills necessary to sail a fully rigged ship across the Atlantic. Only a small portion of the sailors frequenting the docks of New Bern, Edenton, and Wilmington were likely native-born North Carolinians.

North Carolina merchants also faced hardships in procuring maritime insurance on their cargoes and vessels. At times, groups of merchants in Wilmington, New Bern, and Edenton banded together to underwrite their risks. Typically, however, they had to contact friends in Great Britain and request that insurance be obtained. The lapse between the time a letter was sent and when it arrived meant a vessel often sailed before a reply

⁴⁶ John McCusker, "Philadelphia Shipping," *Journal of Economic History*, XXXII (1972), 146-157.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 14-15, 105-106.

arrived. In addition, British insurers appeared reluctant to insure North Carolina ships.⁴⁸ Insurance rates on vessels sailing from or to North Carolina were significantly higher than in less hazardous waters. This was further exacerbated in times of war. For instance, in 1776 a cargo from Cadiz to Edenton sold at 1200 percent profit, but one-fourth of that value went to pay for maritime insurance.⁴⁹

The ports through which these vessels passed expanded throughout the colonial period from small villages into thriving towns. Wilmington, the largest and fastest growing town in colonial North Carolina, boasted a population of nearly 1200 people at the outset of the Revolution. In 1775, a visitor to the town observed, "the people in town live decently, and tho' their houses are not spacious, they are in general very commodious and well furnished. This town lies low, but is not disagreeable. There is at each end of it an ascent, which is dignified with the title of the hills; on them are some very good houses."⁵⁰ During the 1760s a series of stores opened in Cross Creek that operated as factors for Scottish and English trading firms. For example, James Gammell, a merchant from Greenock, Scotland, established trading houses in 1769 in both Wilmington and Cross Creek. Like Gammell, the Cruden brothers of Scotland also maintained stores in both towns. At Cross Creek, local Scots, such as Maurice Nowlan and Neil McArthur, operated stores as well. Within Wilmington, the major merchants included Cornelius Harnett, Jonathan Dunbinnin, and the firm of Richard Hogg and

⁴⁸ Crittenden, *The Commerce of North Carolina*, 109-110.

⁴⁹ Crittenden, *The Commerce of North Carolina*, 109, 143; William Hooper to James Iredell, December 17, 1778, in Griffith J. McRee, *Life and Correspondence of James Iredell: One of the Associate Justices of the Supreme Court of the United States*, (New York: Appleton, 2 volumes 1857-1858) I, 406. Hooper was one of North Carolina's signers to the Declaration of Independence.

⁵⁰ Janet Schaw, *Journal of a Lady of Quality* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1939) 155-156.

Samuel Campbell. Most of these companies operated independently rather than as agents for British merchants.⁵¹

Like Wilmington, Edenton also benefited commercially from interior markets. From Edenton, vessels traveled up either the Chowan or the Roanoke rivers. At the head of the Chowan is the nexus of the Nottoway and Blackwater rivers at South Quay, Virginia. This region allowed access into central Virginia markets and shipbuilding facilities. The town of Halifax, positioned at the headwaters of the Roanoke, provided additional markets for Edenton merchants. The major firms involved in this backwater trade included Blount, Hewes, and Blair, and Lowther, Hardy, and Little. Smaller merchants included Richard Blackledge, Joseph Westmore, and William Savage.⁵² Although these men were independent, most Albemarle merchants were British factors. London merchants such as Alexander Elmsley and Henry McCulloh operated stores in Edenton, as did the Glasgow firms of Buchanan, Hastie, and Company, and Alston, Young, and Company. The largest trading firm, John Hamilton and Company was organized in 1762. John Hamilton, a Glasgow merchant, established trading operations with his son and nephew. They owned stores in Edenton, Halifax, and the headwaters of the Chowan. In addition, they also maintained warehouses, a hatter's shop, a tailor's shop, a blacksmith, a cooper's shop, a tavern, and several plantations. Their annual profits before the Revolutionary War averaged between £4,000 and £5,000 sterling.⁵³

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 96-97. See also Hogg and Clayton, Letterbook and Accounts, 1762-1771, Manuscripts Division, Duke University Library, Durham, North Carolina.

⁵² Crittenden, *The Commerce of Colonial North Carolina*, 97-98. See also Joseph Westmore Journal, Manuscripts Division, Duke University Library, Durham, North Carolina.

⁵³ Crittenden, *The Commerce of North Carolina*, 98, 110-111.

New Bern maintained some backcountry markets along the Neuse, but the port's position as colonial capital proved its greatest asset. The town grew in the 1760s, and as Governor Josiah Martin stated, "since it became the seat of Government, which has promoted its growth exceedingly, by inviting many considerable Merchants to settle in it."⁵⁴ Another visitor claimed, "the Regularity of the Streets are Equal to those of Philadelphia, and the Buildings in General very Good."⁵⁵ New Bern merchants, like those of Wilmington, typically operated independently from British firms. The most prominent merchants in the port included Samuel Cornell and the firm of Assheton and Batchelor. Edward Batchelor and Thomas Assheton's commercial relationship illustrates the connections between northern and southern merchants. Batchelor operated the firm's store in New Bern, while Assheton operated one in Philadelphia. Batchelor sent him naval stores and tobacco, and Assheton sent rum and manufactured goods. A series of smaller firms also existed including operations headed by Richard Ellis, James Green, John Wright Stanly, William Thompson, and William Tomlinson. Contemporaries described merchant David Barron as "a gentleman, who, in the course of a few years, with great industry and assiduity, has acquired a handsome fortune."⁵⁶

Aside from traditional shipping enterprises, North Carolina merchants also engaged in a varied selection of business activities. As noted, many merchants operated mills, cooper's shops, and tailor's shops. Almost all the members of larger firms owned

⁵⁴ "Journal of a French Traveler in the Colonies, 1765," *American Historical Review*, XXVI (1921), 733.

⁵⁵ Peter Du Bois to Samuel Johnston, February 8, 1757. Hayes Collection, North Carolina State Archives, Raleigh. Du Bois was a French visitor to the colony and Johnston was a member of the General Assembly and the colony's deputy naval officer.

⁵⁶ *North Carolina Gazette* (New Bern), Feb. 13, 1778, in Alonzo Dill, "Eighteenth Century New Bern, A History of the Town and Craven County, 1700-1800: Part V, Political and Commercial Rise of New Bern." *North Carolina Historical Review*, XXIII, (1946) 63.

plantations of varying sizes. Both Frederick Gregg and Hamilton and Company of Wilmington owned a number of estates along the Cape Fear. Others, such as Richard Blackledge, operated ironworks and shipyards. By diversifying their interests, merchants increased their chances for success in a fluctuating economy.⁵⁷

North Carolina merchants also operated as ad hoc bankers. Fairly little specie actually circulated in the colony. Alexander Schaw stated, "There is no specie in the province and there never was a person who could command a sum of any consequence even of their paper currency. Nothing in the stile of a banker or money merchant was ever heard of."⁵⁸ Little is known concerning the paper currency and bills of exchange used in North Carolina. In 1748, North Carolina currency was valued at £133 to £100 sterling, however this figure changed during the Seven Years' War to £177 to £100. Hardly anything is known concerning bills of exchange, although historian John J. McCusker stated that, "North Carolinians probably exchanged with their near neighbors, South Carolina and Virginia, on the basis of a comparison of their respective commercial rates of exchange." According to McCusker, a proper study of Colonial North Carolina currency and bills of exchange is limited because of the overall "lack of commercial records."⁵⁹

Most merchants instead accepted raw materials in exchange for imported goods since the purchasers rarely had hard currency. Richard Ellis of New Bern stated in 1764

⁵⁷ Crittenden, *The Commerce of Colonial North Carolina*, 109-110; Will of Richard Blackledge, February 20, 1776, Craven County, North Carolina Archives, New Bern.

⁵⁸ "Description of North Carolina by Alexander Schaw," Quoted in Schaw. *Journal of a Lady of Quality*, 282.

⁵⁹ John J. McCusker, *Money and Exchange in Europe and America, 1600-1775: A Handbook* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1978), 215-216.

that he only took "ready Money, or Produce in hand." Some merchants, however, refused to accept such exchange. A famous slogan of the day stated, "In God we trust, all others pay cash."⁶⁰ Jonathan Dunbinnin, a Scottish merchant from Wilmington, declared that he only accepted cash at his "ready money store near the Markethouse." Considering the varying length and dates of seasonal crop returns, one can understand why merchants were often wary of accepting anything but cash. In the same respect, however, the lack of specie forced them to accept crops as payments. The legislature passed several acts concerning these commodity payments. The first, in 1715, limited them to fifteen separate agricultural products, but a later act extended this number to twenty-two.⁶¹

Problems with payments, however, persisted as promises made on credit did not always equal the final payoff. Farmers typically purchased goods from merchants with promises of harvest yields. Low-yield harvest seasons, however, resulted in farmers going into debt. For smaller firms, this debt could be no larger than the £67 13s. 2d. owed Cross Creek merchant James McCallum in 1775. Larger merchant houses, however, lost heavily as a result of such practices. James Gammell of Wilmington was owed roughly £15,000, and the Hamilton family business incurred an estimated loss of nearly £200,000 on the outbreak of the Revolutionary War in both Virginia and North Carolina.⁶² Such practices ultimately meant that merchants themselves went into debt to their creditors in Great Britain and the other colonies as well. A memorial of North Carolina merchants stated that they, "carried on very extensive business without any

⁶⁰ Hugh Lefler and William S. Powell, *Colonial North Carolina: A History* (New York: Scribner's Sons, 1973), 167.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 155.

⁶² Crittenden, *The Commerce of North Carolina, 1763-1789*, 103-104.

funds of their own, but altogether upon credit which they had abroad.”⁶³ This trend persisted throughout the British American colonies. By 1776, Americans owed Great Britain an estimated £2,516,000. North Carolinians owed an estimated £350,000 of this figure.⁶⁴

Despite these debts, North Carolina merchants formed a rising social class in the decades preceding the American Revolution. Most politically powerful individuals in colonial North Carolina achieved their prominence through planting and mercantile business. Wilmington became the scene of much of this political ascension. For instance, merchants Frederick Gregg and John Dubois both served as mayor during the 1760s. Robert Hogg, through his business acumen, became one of the leading gentlemen of Wilmington. Hogg, labeled by Governor Josiah Martin as “a merchant of first consideration in the colony,” was elected town commissioner in 1770 and 1772.⁶⁵ His business partner, Samuel Campbell, the son of the founder of Wilmington, also gained a position as town commissioner in 1772.⁶⁶ Cornelius Harnett, one of the most politically active North Carolina merchants, became a town commissioner and justice of the peace

⁶³ “A Memorial of North Carolina Merchants, Traders, and Other Residents to the General Assembly, September 6-7, 1780,” in Clark, *State Records*, XV, 203.

⁶⁴ These statistics come from the estimates of James F. Shepherd and Gary M. Walton, *Shipping, Maritime Trade, and the Economic Development of Colonial North America*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1972), 131-132. The authors admit that has been estimated from £2 to £ 6 million. Their information comes from Chatham Papers, 30/8/343/167, Public Records Office, London. Specifically they utilized the, “List of Debts due by Citizens of the United States of America to the Merchants and Traders of great Britain contracted previous to the year 1776 with interest on the same to January 1, 1790.” Shepherd and Walton took the 1790 figures and detracted an annual interest rate of 5 percent to get their numbers for 1776.

⁶⁵ William S. Powell, *Dictionary of North Carolina Biography* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 6 volumes, 1979-), III, 161-162.

⁶⁶ Ida B. Kellum and Donald R. Lennon, eds., *The Wilmington Town Book, 1743-1778* (Raleigh: North Carolina Division of Archives and History, 1973), 209.

in 1750. In 1754, he was elected to represent Wilmington in the General Assembly, a position he held for the next 26 years.⁶⁷

Merchants also gained political prominence in New Bern. In 1767, Governor William Tryon appointed Samuel Cornell to the North Carolina Council for appropriating £8,000 for the construction of Tryon's Palace. He served on the Council for the next four years, supporting Tryon's programs, and serving as a general officer against the Regulator movement in 1771.⁶⁸ Similarly, Richard Cogdell served as justice of the peace for Craven County from 1764-1767, and subsequently represented the county in the General Assembly. From 1767 to 1775, Cogdell served as commodities inspector for New Bern and Port Beaufort. Although charged with neglect and threatened with impeachment from the position in 1772, Cogdell persevered at his post.⁶⁹ Like Cornell, Cogdell also served as an officer against the Regulators, commanding a battalion of Craven County militia. James Green, Jr., another New Bern merchant, served as the clerk of the General Assembly from 1769 to 1775. This position allowed him associations with many powerful people within the colony.⁷⁰

In Edenton, merchant Joseph Hewes ascended the social ladder through a combination of business and civic duties. Having come to Edenton from Philadelphia in 1755, he had within two years gained a post as Chowan County justice of the peace. By 1758, the county appointed him inspector for Port Roanoke as well. From the 1760s until

⁶⁷ Powell, *Dictionary of North Carolina Biography*, III, 36-38; Kellum and Lennon, *The Wilmington Town Book, 1743-1778*, 40; Leora H. McEachern and Isabel Williams, eds., *Wilmington-New Hanover Safety Committee Minutes, 1774-1776* (Wilmington: Wilmington American Revolution Bicentennial Committee, 1974), 126.

⁶⁸ Powell, *Dictionary of North Carolina Biography*, I, 435.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, III, 395-396.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, II, 355.

the outbreak of the Revolutionary War, Hewes held Chowan County's position within the General Assembly. He also involved himself heavily in religion and education.

Although raised a Quaker, Hewes left the faith early in his life. He supported the construction of several churches and the Edenton academy during the 1760s.⁷¹

While most of North Carolina's colonial merchants owed their political and social rise to a combination of business skills and connections, another factor was also important. In the eighteenth century, marriage played a major role in determining an individual's social mobility. North Carolina merchants were no different. For example, Joseph Hewes married Isabella Johnston in 1760. Through this marriage, Hewes aligned himself with Isabella's father, Samuel Johnston, an assembly member and the colony's deputy naval officer.⁷² Similarly, Francis Brice of Wilmington married the daughter of Marmaduke Jones, the attorney general of North Carolina and a member of the Council.⁷³ The most intriguing story of marriage concerning a North Carolina merchant, however, is that of John Wright Stanly and Ann Cogdell. A popular legend states that John Wright Stanly met Ann in 1772 at a ball at Tryon's Palace. According to legend, Stanly became so enamoured with her beauty and grace that he asked for her hand almost immediately. Stanly had been shipwrecked on the coast a few weeks earlier while attempting to flee bad business dealings in Philadelphia. Surely, Stanly quickly realized that Ann's father, Richard Cogdell, was one of New Bern's most politically powerful and wealthiest merchants. Marrying into such a family ensured his chances of commercial success.⁷⁴

⁷¹ Powell, *Dictionary of North Carolina Biography*, III, 123-125.

⁷² *Ibid.*, III, 124, 307.

⁷³ McEachern and Williams, *Wilmington-New Hanover Safety Committee Minutes, 1774-1776*, 122.

⁷⁴ This myth is purported in Mary Stanley Hessel, *Profile of a Patriot: The Story of John Wright Stanly*,

An interesting dichotomy appears among the merchant class of North Carolina in the 1760s. Although they gained political and commercial success in similar fashions, a clear distinction existed between the merchants who owed their loyalties to British mercantile houses and those who did not. The list of politically powerful merchants on the eve of the Revolutionary War illustrates that those men who served as General Assembly members or local magistrates generally came from the firms largely independent of British trading houses. In contrast, powerful merchants such as the Hamiltons and Samuel Cornell, already linked commercially to Britain, allied themselves more with the crown. The turmoil of the 1760s furthered divided these two factions. In the coming war, however, the merchants who supported American Independence persevered through ambition and adaptation.

Regardless of how they acquired prominence or where their political loyalties lay, North Carolina merchants held a high social status in the colony in the turbulent years preceding the Revolutionary War. They gained political positions among the elite of their colonial world. Whether independent firms or British trading house factors, North Carolina merchants played a major role in the British Atlantic trade system. Faced with a geographic nightmare detrimental to trade, their successes appear altogether amazing. They diversified their businesses, made important political connections, and married well in their commercial ambitions. When war broke out in 1775, those merchants who fought for American independence possessed the political and financial support necessary to enter the privateering business.

CHAPTER THREE

FROM STATE NAVY TO PRIVATEER FLEET

News of the skirmish at Lexington reached New Bern on May 6, 1775. Until that point, North Carolinians had maintained a strained yet loyal allegiance to the mother country. Many legal battles had been waged between the Patriot and Tory factions within the state, and Governor Josiah Martin dissolved the General Assembly on April 7. Nevertheless, there had been few physically violent confrontations. Yet, with word of the April 19 engagement, open warfare seemed inevitable. *North Carolina Gazette* editor James Davis stated, "The Sword is now drawn, and God knows when it will be sheathed."¹

Exactly how that sword, once drawn, would challenge Britain's naval superiority and alternatively defend the state from the Royal Navy were issues facing North Carolina's leaders in the summer of 1775. The questions were part of larger dilemmas the rebelling colonies faced. How would they defeat or even challenge the mighty Royal Navy? Would America's ports be laid waste by cannon shot and their commerce destroyed by blockades? There was no American navy, and the idea of building one seemed utterly foreign to most members of the Continental Congress. Although the colonies had united for mutual protection, most were primarily concerned with their own defenses on a local scale.

¹ *North Carolina Gazette* (New Bern), May 12, 1775.

Faced with such daunting problems, the colonies and the Continental Congress had three options. The first involved building a national navy, something that Congress began on December 14, 1775, despite a complete lack of funds, equipment, and men. Most Americans, however, understood that confronting British naval power head on was all but impossible. The second option concerned coastal defense through navies funded and outfitted by individual colonies. Nearly every colony chose this method of defense in late 1775-1776. Nevertheless, relying on each state to finance a navy also proved to be impossible. This chapter argues that North Carolinians instead chose private men-of-war, the third, and most controversial option.

Although America had a long privateering tradition, some colonists were averse to using private warships against Britain. Benjamin Franklin claimed that legalizing private men-of-war would only result in Britain dispatching more heavily-armed merchantmen. This, he argued, would mean that fewer and fewer prizes would be taken as the war continued. Franklin also felt that privateer crews were mainly concerned with "rioting, drunkenness, and debauchery" and postulated that they would "lose their habits of industry." He further argued that privateers only increased the number of "highwaymen and house breakers."²

In contrast, other Patriot leaders, including Thomas Jefferson and John Hancock, led discussions in Congress in favor of privateering. Jefferson labeled them a "national

² An American Citizen, *An Appeal to the Government and the Congress of the United States Against Privateers* (New York: [?], 1819), 9-10. This 71-page appeal appeared in 1819 from an unknown author but quotes Franklin numerous times.

blessing, when a country like America is at war with a commercial nation.”³ Hancock argued that privateers were the only method of fighting against the Royal Navy. In addition, he claimed that privateering would provide goods mostly inaccessible because of the blockade such as gunpowder, sugar, and salt. Silas Deane, commander of the fledgling Continental Navy, received a letter from the Congress on August 7, 1776, explaining that through privateering the country could expect “to make their [British] Men of War weary of their unprofitable and hopeless Cruises, and their merchants Sick of a Contest in which so much is Risk’d and Nothing gained.”⁴

Most American merchants understood the profitability of privateering and strongly supported the destruction of British maritime commerce. Massachusetts began issuing privateering commissions in 1775, as did Rhode Island, South Carolina, and Connecticut. By 1776-1777, merchants in virtually every state, including North Carolina, invested heavily in privateering operations. Even Benjamin Franklin, one of privateering’s most adamant critics, owned and financed several private men-of-war. In August 1776, John Adams wrote, “Thousands of schemes for privateering are afloat in American imaginations.”⁵ Similarly, Boston merchant James Warren noted to Samuel

³ Gomer Williams, *History of the Liverpool Privateers and Letters of Marque with an Account of the Liverpool Slave Trade* (London: W. Heinemann, 1897), 193.

⁴ Committee of Secret Correspondence of the Continental Congress to Silas Deane, August 7, 1776, William B. Clark, Michael Crawford, and William Morgan, eds., *Naval Documents of the American Revolution*, (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 10 volumes, 1964-), VI, 103; Hereafter cited as *Naval Documents*.

⁵ John Adams to Abigail Adams, August 12, 1776, in Peter Force, *American Archives Consisting of a Collection of Authentick Records, State Papers, Debates and Letters and Other Notices of Publick Affairs* (Washington, D.C.: [?], 9 volumes, 1837-1853), I, 908.

Adams that business in Boston mostly concerned fitting out privateers and "the condemnation and sale of prizes."⁶

These options, whether to build a state navy or legalize privateering, weighed heavily on the minds of North Carolina's revolutionary politicians in late 1775. From December 1775 until January 1777 a series of provincial councils administered the state's naval affairs. After January 1777, a new state constitution created the General Assembly, an executive consisting of a governor, council of state, and secretary, and a judicial branch. Although the General Assembly had final authority, Governor Richard Caswell actually held the responsibility of maintaining and operating the state navy.⁷

These individuals, like their compatriots in Massachusetts and South Carolina, likely realized the profitability of privateering. North Carolinians, however, were equally afraid of an imminent British blockade. In February 1776, North Carolina delegates to the Continental Congress wrote the Provincial Council warning them, "It is more than probable that the American seas will be covered with Men of War and cutters in the Spring for the purpose of intercepting vessels." They also noted, "the sea Coast of our Colony is very extensive and may require your notice and attention."⁸

Coastal defense in the form of a state navy consequently took center stage. On December 21, 1775, Joseph Hewes, North Carolina delegate to Congress, received a letter from Samuel Johnston, president of the North Carolina Provincial Council stating,

⁶ James Warren to Samuel Adams, August 11, 1776, *Naval Documents*, VI, 143.

⁷ William N. Still, Jr., *North Carolina's Revolutionary War Navy* (Raleigh: Division of Archives and History, 1976), 6-7. Still's pamphlet is by far the most comprehensive examination of North Carolina's state navy.

⁸ Delegates to North Carolina Council of Safety, February 10, 1776, Hayes Collection, North Carolina Division of Archives and History, Raleigh. Hereafter cited as Hayes Collection. A few weeks earlier, a British sloop captured several vessels inside Ocracoke Inlet.

"We are endeavoring to take some steps to protect our inlets from tenders with which they have of late been infested, for this purpose they have ordered three armed vessels to be fitted out, one at Cape Fear, one at New Bern, and a third at Edenton under the direction of Commissioners at each of these places. The two at Edenton and New Bern to act in conjunction at Ocracoke and we hope if properly conducted they will be sufficient to keep off anything that can come over our Bar."⁹

The three vessels Johnston spoke of, apparently converted merchantmen, were all small brigs. The first, the *General Washington*, was purchased at Port Brunswick for £2,000 (NC) on January 17, 1776. The other two, the *King Tammany* and the *Pennsylvania Farmer* were purchased for £1,000 (NC) each in February for Edenton and New Bern. We know very little about these vessels. The *Pennsylvania Farmer* was approximately one hundred and twenty tons burthen and carried sixteen carriage guns and ten swivel guns. Its normal complement was one hundred and ten officers and men. The *King Tammany* was apparently smaller since it only carried twelve carriage guns and ten swivels. Nothing is known of its complement. There is no information whatsoever concerning the *General Washington*'s armament or crew.¹⁰

Commissioners, mentioned in Johnston's letter, assisted the governor and General Assembly in outfitting these vessels. They were located in Wilmington, New Bern, and Edenton, and consisted initially of three to eight members each. Because of a series of resignations, however, the bodies were later reduced to three men for each vessel. These

⁹ Samuel Johnston to Joseph Hewes, December 21, 1775, Hayes Collection.

¹⁰ Still, *Revolutionary War Navy*, 8-9.

boards had the responsibility of recruiting crews, obtaining provisions and weapons, and making recommendations to the assembly and governor.¹¹

North Carolina and Virginia agreed to outfit small galleys to defend Ocracoke Inlet, although the exact agreement terms are unknown. Virginia evidently agreed to supply the vessels if North Carolina provided the necessary stores, rigging, canvas, and guns. The vague agreement seemed ill-defined to the Virginians, for in 1778 Governor Patrick Henry complained to Richard Caswell, "Carolina was to furnish a force equal to ours . . . and it has not been done."¹² The major point of contention appears to have been recruiting and paying the crews. Apparently, North Carolina believed that the Virginians would provide crews paid by both states. Virginia, on the other hand, felt that the pay matter rested solely on North Carolina's shoulders. This ill-termed agreement led to constant confusion and division over issues such as pay and ship's stores.

Galleys were found in several other state navies during the Revolution. Rowing galleys were commonly used in the eighteenth century because they could maneuver in narrow waters better than sailing vessels and they were not affected by wind conditions. Pennsylvania launched thirteen galleys as state navy vessels in September of 1775, and Virginia had several in service when the agreement with North Carolina was completed.¹³ The two galleys, commissioned the *Caswell* and the *Washington*, were to be seventy-five feet in length, twenty-seven in beam, and ten feet deep amidships with a "quarter deck

¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹² Patrick Henry to Richard Caswell, July 6, 1779, Letterbooks of Governor Richard Caswell, 1779-1786, Division of Archives and History, Raleigh, North Carolina.

¹³ See John W. Jackson, *The Pennsylvania Navy: 1775-1781* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1974); Robert A. Stewart, *The History of Virginia's Navy of the Revolution* (Richmond: Mitchell and Hotchkiss, 1934); and Gardner W. Allen, "State Navies and Privateers in the Revolution," *Massachusetts Historical Society Proceedings*, XLVI (1913).

sufficient to hold officers,” and a “spar deck, below for the men.” With twenty-four row ports to a side, they were lateen rigged and armed with sixteen guns. Their official complement is unknown, but in April 1778 the *Caswell* had one hundred and forty-five men on board.¹⁴

Construction on the two galleys began in the summer of 1776. On June 6, 1776, the Virginia Committee of Safety decreed, “Mr. Christopher Calvert is appointed to superintend the building of the two row Gallies ordered by Convention to be employed in Ocracock.”¹⁵ The shipyard where these vessels were located was left up to Calvert with the stipulation that it should be on the Blackwater or Nottoway rivers for “transporting cordage and Iron to it which shall be brought down James River.”¹⁶

The North Carolina state navy declined almost as quickly as it was created. Although purchased in the early winter of 1776, the three brigs were unprepared to sail until October. The delay was needed to finish outfitting them as well as purchasing tenders for the *King Tammany* and *Pennsylvania Farmer*. In addition, a debate began over how to use these vessels. Many members of the General Assembly argued that the brigs should attack British commerce, while others maintained that they should be used as originally intended and feared, “the defend less condition of the State in case the

¹⁴ “A Plan for a Galley,” May 1776, in Papers of the Convention, Virginia State Library, Richmond; Walter Clark, ed., *State Records of North Carolina*, (Winston-Salem: State of North Carolina, 14 volumes, 1890-1906), XII, 257.

¹⁵ *Naval Documents*, V, 405.

¹⁶ John C. Parker, “Old South Quay in Southampton County,” *Virginia Magazine of History and Biography*, LXXXV (1959), 167.

privateers King Tammany and General Washington should be sent out."¹⁷ In October the *Pennsylvania Farmer's* commissioners informed the Council that the vessel had been fitted out, and "that in a very short time she may reimburse the Country in an ample manner the whole expence and much to spare by bringing in some valuable prizes."¹⁸ The commissioners could not have been more wrong.

Upon learning that a fleet of British merchant vessels was headed from Jamaica to England, the Council ordered the *Pennsylvania Farmer* to sail for one month eight leagues from the coast. In addition the Council ordered *King Tammany* to protect Ocracoke Inlet until the *Pennsylvania Farmer* returned, then proceed to sea for a month under the same orders. On October 10, however, the *King Tammany's* commissioners alerted the Council that the *Pennsylvania Farmer* was still at New Bern and would not be ready "for some considerable time." They recommended that the *King Tammany* be allowed to proceed to sea. The Council acquiesced but did not change the *Pennsylvania Farmer's* orders. Instead, the Council ordered the "Washington round to Ocracock, for the protection of our Trade, until either the Farmer or Tammany shall return."¹⁹

Although seemingly logical, the plan unraveled before it began. The *King Tammany* sailed in early November, but returned in January 1777 with only a cargo of salt from the West Indies. The *Pennsylvania Farmer* did not sail until late December

¹⁷ Journal of the North Carolina Council of Safety, September 7, 1776, in Clark, *State Records*, XXII, 912. The date of this document is September 7, 1779, but this must be erroneous. Since this council meeting was held at Dobbs County, the letter must date from 1776.

¹⁸ Commissioners appointed to fit out the Brig *Pennsylvania Farmer* to the Council of Safety, October 1, 1776, in William L. Saunders, ed., *Colonial Records of North Carolina*, (Raleigh: State of North Carolina, 10 volumes, 1886-1890) X, 831-832.

¹⁹ Commissioners appointed to fit out the Privateer *King Tammany* to the Council of Safety, October 18, 1776, in *Ibid.*, X, 848-849; Journal of the Council of Safety, *ibid.*, X, 877.

because the vessel lacked a proper mainsail. A few days after the brig's return to New Bern in February, the commander quarantined the vessel at Cape Lookout because most of the crew had contracted smallpox. Instead of prizes, the vessel returned with only a cargo of ammunition and salt. Captain Joshua Hampstead, a New Englander, simply sold the cargo, pocketed the money, and fled the state. A warrant for his arrest was announced, but he was never apprehended. The third vessel, the *General Washington*, never left the Cape Fear because the captain failed to recruit a crew.²⁰

After these disappointing beginnings, North Carolina's leaders agreed that the vessels should be used solely for defense. The brigs would "cruise within the rivers or within five leagues of the sea coast, but shall not be ordered out to sea when any vessels of Force belonging to the enemy are known to be cruising in the neighborhood."²¹ In late 1777, two British brigs crossed the Ocracoke Bar and took several prizes. The *Pennsylvania Farmer*, close enough to respond, instead fled up the Neuse River. Many merchants began to seriously question the navy's use or effectiveness. Joseph Leech, a New Bern merchant, stated, "if something is not done to keep them from laying within our Bar . . . we shan't have a single vessel coming in."²²

Realizing the ineffectiveness of the brigs, the state slowly did away with them. The *King Tammany* continued to sail for the state as a trading vessel, although never again as a warship. By 1780 it disappeared from the records; its final disposition is unknown. The vessel may have been purchased and later used as a privateer. The

²⁰ Journal of the Provincial Council, Saunders, in *Colonial Records*, X, 926; Senate Journal, 1777, in Clark, *State Records*, XII, 55, 58, 419.

²¹ Senate Journal, 1777, in *ibid.*, XII, 83.

²² Joseph Leech to Governor Caswell, September 17, 1777, *ibid.*, XI, 624.

General Assembly ordered the *General Washington* sold in February 1778. The vessel had been stranded on the banks of the Cape Fear for over a year without any crew. The *North Carolina Gazette* announced, "her guns, stores, tackle, apparel, and furniture," were to be sold "by public vendue at Wilmington the 17th of February next."²³ Evidently the vessel was not sold, since in April a number of British prisoners were incarcerated onboard the *General Washington*. In April 1778 the General Assembly ordered the *Pennsylvania Farmer* sold along with its "tackle, apparel, and furniture." One of its commissioners, Charles Bondfield, reported to the General Assembly:

I advertised her for sale on the 30th Day of May last, on which day I employed John Blackburn to cry her off, and after several bids had been made he cried a bid of five thousand one hundred pounds which he said was for Mr. Hewes; but Mr. Hewes denied having bid that sum and would not take the vessel. The next day I had her put up again but no Person would bid anything. I then had the sails and rigging taken off and brought to my House and being the next day obliged into Virginia, I desired Captain Cricket to take care of the vessel until my return and to see her constantly pumped out but on my return I was surprised to be informed she was sunk in the Creek.²⁴

The *Pennsylvania Farmer* sank because of a leaky bottom. An investigation exonerated Joseph Hewes and determined that the state still owned the vessel. In June 1779, it was apparently floated, and offered for sale. Nothing remains, however, to indicate whether it was purchased. The vessel simply disappeared from the documentary record.

In April 1778, the same month the North Carolina legislature ordered the *Pennsylvania Farmer* sold, the *Caswell* galley reached Edenton and was pronounced ready for service. The *Washington*, however, remained on the stocks at South Quay. The

²³ *North Carolina Gazette* (New Bern), December 26, 1777.

²⁴ Still, *Revolutionary War Navy*, 23.

Caswell took up position at Ocracoke Inlet and stayed on station throughout the fall and winter of 1778-1779. Despite the galley's presence, several British vessels attacked American ships off the North Carolina coast during this period. HMS *Ariel* spent nearly three weeks cruising off the Outer Banks in May and June 1778, capturing six vessels and burning two. During those same months, the *North Carolina Gazette* reported that three British privateers, "Captain McFarling in a 16 gun brig, and Captains Neale and Goodrich, in 10 gun sloops," prowled the coast. In July, the *Gazette* noted that, "the cruisers are yet very troublesome on our coast."²⁵

Despite these attacks, Captain Willis Wilson, the commander of the *Caswell*, reported little enemy activity. Wilson either could not or would not challenge enemy vessels. He wrote Governor Caswell that "the enemy takes a peep at us now and then, but are not disposed to venture in." The captain became so nonchalant concerning the attacks that in July he left the ship to visit his wife in New Bern. While there he assured the governor that, "nothing has happed at the Bar worth notice."²⁶

The *Caswell* continued a persistent, yet completely ineffective watch over the inlet throughout the fall and winter of 1778-1779. In November, Currituck County resident Samuel Jarvis wrote the governor: "The coast is much infested at this time with the enemy which are constantly landing men and plundering." These attacks included the capture of two vessels by John Goodrich, a British privateer operating off North Carolina's coast.²⁷

²⁵ *North Carolina Gazette* (New Bern), May 15, 1778, and July 17, 1778.

²⁶ Governor Caswell to Willis Wilson, May 26, 1778, Clark, *State Records*, XIII, 138-139; Willis Wilson to Governor Caswell, June 26, 1778, in *ibid.*, XIII, 171.

²⁷ Samuel Jarvis to Governor Caswell, November 16, 1778, in *ibid.*, XIII, 285.

Although Governor Caswell believed that Wilson's galley effectively protected the inlet, the Virginians were not convinced. The burgesses were tired of spending their resources to help man and maintain the vessels, so they offered to sell the galleys to North Carolina in 1779. What eventually happened to the *Caswell* and the *Washington* is a mystery. The evidence is contradictory. On June 30, 1779, Caswell received a letter from Thomas Jefferson stating that the *Caswell* had sunk. In 1780, however, Captain Hance Bond, commander of the *Caswell*'s marines, stated that, "the said ship is now laid up and materials, stores, and men are removed on board the ship *Washington*."²⁸ Other than Bonds's account, no other information exists concerning the galleys.

By the winter of 1779, the North Carolina navy ceased to exist. There are numerous reasons for its collapse. North Carolina's successful coastal defense did not rely on the state navy, but instead on the environment and the British government's own inability to realize Ocracoke Inlet's importance. First, the individuals who were responsible for protecting the province did not foresee the weaknesses of the British blockade. There simply was no need for a state navy. Lord Howe's policy of using his limited naval forces to guard principal navigation channels such as the Chesapeake Bay and Delaware River meant that smaller ports such as North Carolina's were left open. Many Loyalists understood this failure, and one even wrote the earl of Dartmouth to complain: "Mr. Cornell informs us that there is an amazing quantity of goods brought into North Carolina, and that Virginia and Maryland are supplied from that quarter . . .

²⁸ Petition of Captain Hance Bond, in *ibid.*, XV, 221; Thomas Jefferson to Governor Caswell, June 22, 1779, in *ibid.*, XIV, 126; Thomas Jefferson to Governor Caswell, June 30, 1779, in *ibid.*, XIV, 136; *The Letters of Thomas Jefferson*, Volume 2 of *Official Letters of the Governors of the State of Virginia* (Richmond: Virginia State Library, 1928) 15.

the insignificance of the place (Ocracock) prevented Lord How from sending vessels to cruize there . . . I hope your Government on the other side of the water will think differently from his Lordship."²⁹ Since British forces were elsewhere, the North Carolina navy was unnecessary.

In addition, the nightmarish North Carolina coast that proved so detrimental in peace was a major asset in war. The British never blockaded Ocracoke Inlet for more than a few weeks during the entire conflict. There simply was no place to gather food for the crews, and the dangerous currents and shoals meant that large British vessels could not maintain their station for long periods. HMS *Ariel* was the only Royal Navy vessel stationed off the coast until nearly 1780.³⁰

The primary reason the state navy failed, however, concerned the inability to find crews. After Congress legalized privateering, sailors deserted Continental navy and state navy vessels in droves. Willis Wilson even stationed the *Caswell* at "a place [Ocracoke] where [the ship's crew] can't well run away, otherwise....it would have but few hands left as they have received no pay."³¹ On a state navy vessel, a sailor earned a small, regular wage, as well as a share of prize money. Yet, regulations provided that two-thirds of the value of any prizes went to Congress and the state, while only one-third went to the crew. In comparison, privateers divided prize money entirely between crew and owner, and sailors often received a regular wage as well. In one day, a privateer crewman could

²⁹ John Cruden to his father, January 28, 1778, copy in Dartmouth Collection, Division of Archives and History, Raleigh; Governor Josiah Martin to Lord Germain, January 23, 1778, in Clark, *State Records*, XIII, 367-368.

³⁰ Still, *Revolutionary War Navy*, 24.

³¹ Willis Wilson petitions, in Treasurer and Comptroller Papers, Military Papers, Box 3, North Carolina Division of Archives and History, Raleigh.

make far more money than he would on a state navy vessel in an entire year. The commander of the *General Washington* lamented that most North Carolina seamen "have gone to other ports," because of the "encouragement given in the Merchant Service and on board private vessels of war."³² Sailors had options, and they took full advantage of the situation.

Officers also realized the advantages of serving onboard privateers. The commander of the *King Tammany*, Sylvanus Pendleton, left the state navy in 1776 in favor of commanding a letter of marque. Shortly thereafter, Joseph Hewes, one of the vessel's commissioners complained, "No good man can be found that will take the command of her to be as a guard ship."³³ Similarly, John Cheshire, master of *Caswell*, left in 1778 for life onboard a privateer. The Continental Navy also lost officers to North Carolina privateers. In 1779, Lieutenant Luke Matthewman of the Continental Navy vessel *Lexington* signed on as commander of the North Carolina privateer *Fair American*. Officers and men understood the greater prospective financial rewards from serving onboard private men-of-war.³⁴

Even when the state navy managed to recruit men, many were of dubious character. Scurrilous officers such as Joshua Hampstead embezzled state funds and fled to New England. Two of the officers of the *Pennsylvania Farmer* deserted to the British after stealing some ships stores and a yawl. Other state navy officers were labeled as

³² John Forster to Governor Caswell, March 1, 1777, Letterbooks of Governor Richard Caswell. North Carolina Division of Archives and History, Raleigh.

³³ Joseph Hewes to Governor Caswell, April 4, 1777, in Clark, *State Records*, XI, 441-442.

³⁴ Robert Smith to Governor Caswell, November 19, 1778, in *ibid.*, XIII, 291; Condemnation Proceedings of the *Fair American*, British High Court of Admiralty Papers 32/328-3, Public Records Office, London, copy in the British Collection, North Carolina State Archives, Raleigh; hereafter cited as HCA.

“utter Strangers, without Abilities, without Interest, Connections, or any other tie to the Country, the Captain having never sailed in, much less more commanded, a square-rigged vessel in his Life.” Although discipline on state navy vessels supposedly adhered to Continental Navy standards, officers evidently rarely punished their crews. In early 1777, the *Pennsylvania Farmer*’s men terrorized the inhabitants of New Bern for several weeks. James Davis, one of the vessel’s commissioners, resigned and wrote the Council of Safety:

The Pennsylvania Farmer sailed from this Town a few Days since after lying here with 110 men on board at the Expense of near Forty Pounds per Day, upwards of six months, in the most inglorious, inactive, and dissolute state that perhaps was ever suffered in any Country. By the Inexperience, Inactivity, and neglect of the Officers of this Vessel, who early began their Irregularities by inlisting the regular soldiers into their service, a continued scene of Riot, Outrage and Robbery has been carried on by the people of her, the most daring Insults on the Inhabitants of the Town suffered to pass with Impunity. One hundred and ten Pints of Rum poured out to them every morning kept them continually drunk and ready for mischief, especially as they consist of men of all nations and conditions, English, Irish, Scotch, Indians, Men of Wars Men and the most abandoned sett of wretches ever collected together.³⁵

Another problem associated with manning the vessels was the overall cost of a state-funded navy. From the start, many North Carolinians probably realized that fully funding a navy was an all but impossible task for the fledgling state. Sending the *King Tammany* and the *Pennsylvania Farmer*, with full complements of men and guns, on a three month cruise as the state attempted in 1776-1777 would have cost the state £6,286

³⁵ James Davis to the Provincial Council, undated, in Saunders, *Colonial Records*, X, 834-837.

or about \$357,000 in modern United States currency.³⁶ Obviously, the state navy's costs were staggering. Privateers, however, were privately owned and cost the state nothing.

Privateering clearly provided Americans the best possible method of fighting the British at sea. On March 23, 1776, Congress resolved that: "The inhabitants of these colonies be permitted to fit out armed vessels to cruize on the enemies of these United Colonies," and that "all ships and other vessels . . . belonging to any inhabitant or inhabitants of Great Britain, taken on the high seas, or between high and low water mark, by any armed vessel, fitted out by any private person or persons, and to whom commissions shall be granted, and being libeled and prosecuted . . . shall be deemed and adjudged to be lawful prize."³⁷ Prizes were to be adjudicated in official state admiralty courts established upon the recommendations of Congress in 1775. Although suggested by Congress, these were not federal courts. The state courts, presided over by a judge and his marshal appointed by the state assemblies, included jury trials, payment in proportion of the vessel as salvage in the case of recapture, and a form of appeals. Congress

³⁶ This figure is determined using the following statistics from John J. McCusker, *How Much Is That In Real Money?: A Historical Commodity Price Index for Use as a Deflator of Money Values in the Economy of the United States* (Worcester, Mass.: The American Antiquarian Society, 2001). Assuming the vessel had a full complement of 110 officers and men, then based on the monthly wages set forth by the General Assembly, the crew of each vessel would have been paid £437 5s. a month. Using the conversion rate of £1 sterling = \$4.44 silver dollars (Spanish), the crews for each vessel were paid \$1,941.39. Utilizing the conversion rates from consumer price indexes for the years 1778 and 2001 (a multiple of 12.79), the crews would have been paid \$24,830.37 each month in modern US currency. Each vessel cost £1,000 (NC) in 1776. Using McCusker's conversion rates again (£175 (NC) = £100 sterling), each vessel was worth roughly £570 sterling, or \$32,368.93 in modern US currency (570 x 4.44 x 12.79). In addition, the cost of a four-pounder carriage gun in 1777 was approximately 400 silver dollars (Spanish). The *King Tammany* carried twelve, while the *Pennsylvania Farmer* carried sixteen. At this rate, when the prices are converted to sterling, the armaments were £1081 and £1441 each, or another \$61,391.93 (modern US) for the *King Tammany*, and \$81,855.92 (modern US) for the *Pennsylvania Farmer*.

³⁷ Congressional Resolves on Privateering, March 23, 1776, in *Journals of the Continental Congress, 1774-1789* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 34 volumes, 1904-1937), IV, 227-232.

established a federal appellate court, the first true federal court, and provided that appellants would pay triple costs if the state admiralty court's judgment was affirmed.³⁸

North Carolinians reacted swiftly on Congress's resolves. Within three months the state organized an admiralty court, and merchants began sending privateers to sea. Modeled almost entirely on the British vice-admiralty courts, North Carolina's system consisted of three judges. Each individual judge theoretically oversaw one of the three major ports, though court locations changed throughout the war. In June 1776, the Provincial Council established the first three North Carolina admiralty courts at Edenton, New Bern, and Bath. Jasper Carlton oversaw the court at Edenton, Christopher Neale managed the court at New Bern, and Thomas Respass, Jr., presided over Bath. The Cape Fear region apparently had no court until December 1776, when Richard Quince became judge at Brunswick.³⁹

Selected and paid by the General Assembly, judges appointed marshals to aid in adjudicating prizes and other maritime cases. Most judges had mercantile backgrounds and included powerful men such as Richard Cogdell, John Ancrum, Richard Quince, and Joseph Blount. Although politically powerful, many judges had little legal experience. Sampson Moseley, one of the wealthiest merchants in the Cape Fear, was appointed judge for Brunswick in April 1777. In August, Moseley, apparently quite embarrassed, requested Governor Caswell to send him a set of instructions for the admiralty courts

³⁸ Henry J. Bourguignon, *The First Federal Court: The Federal Appellate Prize Court of the American Revolution, 1775-1787* (Philadelphia: The American Philosophical Society, 1977), 57-59, 73. Bourguignon's study is the most comprehensive analysis of American admiralty courts during the American Revolution.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 49, 73; John L. Cheney, ed., *North Carolina Government, 1585-1979: A Narrative and Statistical History* (Raleigh: N.C. Dept. of the Secretary of State, 1981), 359-365.

stating, "I am at a loss to proceed without those directions."⁴⁰ Aside from inexperience, North Carolina's judges also suffered from corruption. In 1777, the General Assembly removed Richard Cogdell from his position as judge in New Bern after he appointed his infant son as his marshal. Similarly, William Tisdale lost his position in June 1781 amidst charges of bribery.⁴¹

In legalizing privateering and recommending the establishment of admiralty courts, Congress realized the necessity of producing letters-of-marque for those individuals fitting out armed vessels. This document separated legally commissioned private men-of-war from pirates. A good example is the letter of marque for the privateer *Jenny* seen in Figure 7. The commission, which closely resembled a British letter of marque, had blanks to be filled in by the committees of safety or governors identifying the vessel, the master and owners, and the number of guns and crew. Obtaining a commission required posting a bond insuring compliance with congressional rules and regulations. Congress drafted the bond forms and issued them to naval officers in various ports and to the state governors.⁴²

The actual process of outfitting a privateer, therefore, began not at the docks or shipyards, but in the governor's office. Here, the owner obtained the letter of marque, signed and sealed by the president of the Continental Congress. Although procedure called for the prospective owner to voyage to New Bern for an audience with the

⁴⁰ Sampson Moseley to Governor Caswell, August 25, 1777, in Clark, *State Records*, XI, 592.

⁴¹ Cheney, *North Carolina Government*, 365-366; Clark, *State Records*, XII, 20-21, 25.

⁴² Bourguignon, *The First Federal Court*, 53-57.

governor, a trusted naval officer apparently could deliver the commission. In May 1777, Joseph Hewes wrote Governor Caswell from Edenton:

There are several persons now here who wish to get Commissions for armed vessels that they are fitting out. They can get good security here, but being strangers at New Bern might meet with some difficulty there. If your Excellency could send half a dozen Commissions with the instructions to Mr. Payne, with orders to him to take the proper securities, and fill up the blanks, it would save much trouble and expence to those who want them. How far this may be consistent with the mode of issuing those Commissions, I know not: but, if it can be done, it will much oblige the mercantile interest here.⁴³

Bribery provided another method of obtaining a letter of marque. Throughout the war, businessmen knew how to line the pockets of politicians. In April 1779, Captain Charles Biddle, commander of the privateer sloop *Eclipse*, wrote Governor Caswell for a commission. Included with his letter was, "a cask of wine and some olives for your Excellency." The ploy obviously worked, since Biddle obtained a commission for the *Eclipse* and one for the *Cornelia*.⁴⁴

In addition to a commission, Congress issued instructions to insure proper conduct by privateer commanders and crews (See Figure 8). American instructions stipulated one-third of the crew were to be landmen. Prisoners could not be cruelly treated, and no cargo was to be damaged or sold before being libeled. Prizes were to be adjudged by a properly established admiralty court at an American port. American privateers were warned that failure to follow the rules would result in forfeiting of the letter of marque, seizure of vessels, and personal liability of owner and master. Each

⁴³ Joseph Hewes to Governor Caswell, May 16, 1777, in Clark, *State Records*, XI, 473. On the same day Hewes wrote to Caswell, Michael Payne, the naval officer for Edenton, wrote a similar letter asking for commissions. Payne's letter is also located in *ibid.*, XI, 473.

⁴⁴ Capt. Charles Biddle to Governor Caswell, April 16, 1779, in *ibid.*, XIV, 70.

In C O N G R E S S.

The DELEGATES of the UNITED STATES of New-Hampshire, Massachusetts-Bay, Rhode-Island, Connecticut, New-York, New-Jersey, Pennsylvania, Delaware, Maryland, Virginia, North-Carolina, South-Carolina and Georgia, TO ALL unto whom these Presents shall come, SEND GREETING-----
K N O W Y E,

THAT We have granted, and by these Presents do grant Licence and Authority to Stephen Buxton, Mariner, Commander of the *Bridget*, to call the said *Bridget* of the Burthen of *Eighty* Tons, or thereabouts, belonging to *Joseph Meddars* of *Philadelphia*, to fit out and set forth the said *Bridget* in a warlike Manner, and by and with the said *Bridget* and the Crew thereof, by Force of Arms, to attack, subdue and take all Ships and other Vessels whatsoever carrying Soldiers, Arms, Gunpowder, Ammunition, Provisions, or any other contraband Goods to any of the British Armies or Ships of War employed against these United States: And also to attack, seize and take all Ships or other Vessels belonging to the Inhabitants of Great-Britain, or to any Subject or Subjects thereof, with their Tackle, Apparel, Furniture and Lading, on the High Seas, or between high and low-water Marks, (the Ships or Vessels, together with their Cargoes, belonging to any Inhabitant or Inhabitants of Bermuda, ~~Excidence and the Bahama Islands~~, and such other Ships and Vessels bringing Persons with Intent to settle and reside within any of the United States, or bringing Arms, Ammunition, or Warlike Stores to the said States for the Use thereof, which said Ships or Vessels you shall suffer to pass unseized, the Commanders thereof permitting a peaceable Search, and giving satisfactory Information of the Contents of the Ladings and Destination of the Voyages, only excepted.) And the said Ships or Vessels so apprehended as aforesaid, and as Prize taken, to carry into any Port or Harbour within the Dominions of any neutral State willing to admit the same, or into any Port within the said United States, in Order that the Courts there instituted to hear and determine Causes Civil and Maritime, may proceed in due Form to condemn the said Captures, if they be adjudged lawful Prize, or otherwise, according to the Usage in such Cases at the Port or in the State where the same shall be carried. The said *Stephen Buxton* having given Bond, with sufficient Sureties, that Nothing be done by the said *Stephen Buxton* or any of his Officers, Marines or Company thereof, contrary to or inconsistent with the Usage and Customs of Nations, and that he shall not exceed or transgress the Powers and Authorities contained in this Commission. And we will and require all our Officers whatsoever in the Service of the United States to give Succour and Assistance to the said *Stephen Buxton* in the Premises. This Commission shall continue in Force until the Congress shall issue Orders to the contrary. DATED at *London* the *13* Day of *May* and in the *fourth* Year of the Independence of the United States of America.

ATTEST. *Charles Thompson* By Congress, *John Jay* PRESIDENT.

Figure 9. Letter of Marque for the North Carolina Privateer *Jenny*⁴⁵

⁴⁵ Condemnation Proceedings of the *Jenny*, HCA 32/366.

of these directions was included in British instructions throughout the eighteenth century. The thirteen colonies, therefore, so thoroughly embedded in British tradition, could not make naval war on Britain without looking to British forms for guidance.⁴⁶

One of the most important parts of the letter of marque and bond procedure involved identifying the vessel. Names for North Carolina privateers range from the prosaic *Polly* to the patriotic *Fair American* and the somewhat scandalous *Willing Maid*. Some privateer owners named their vessels after family members. John Wright Stanly named vessels after his wife, children, father-in-law, and business partner. Other vessels carried optimistic monikers such as the *Success* and the *Triumph* while others were named after political and military figures such as the *Governor Burke*, the *Governor Moore*, or the *General Nash* and *General Gates*.⁴⁷

Besides listing the name, the bond also required establishing the vessel's size. For craft less than one hundred tons, the required bond cost \$5,000 in Continental money. For vessels exceeding hundred tons, the price was \$10,000 (See Figure 9). A wide variety of vessel types saw service as North Carolina privateers. The eighty-four privately armed vessels included thirty-eight brigs or brigantines, eighteen sloops, fourteen schooners, six galleys, and eight whose type is unknown (See Table 1). According to congressional records, American privateers sent 301 ships, 541 brigs, 751 sloops and schooners, and

⁴⁶ Bourguignon, *The First Federal Court*, 54-56.

⁴⁷ See Appendix B, North Carolina Privateer and Letter of marque Vessels; Marshall D. Heywood, "The State Navy of North Carolina in the War of the Revolution," *The North Carolina Booklet*, XVII (1917), 50; Privateering Bond of the *Polly*, October 1776, Treasurer and Comptroller Papers, Ports Records, Box 15, North Carolina Division of Archives and History, Raleigh; Condemnation Proceedings of the *Fair American*, HCA 32/328-3; Condemnation Proceedings of the *Triumph*, HCA 42/155; Condemnation Proceedings of the *Governor Moore*, HCA 32/344-16; Condemnation Proceedings of the *General Gates*, HCA 32/339; Clark, *State Records*, XV, 150, XVI, 520.

104 galleys to sea. North Carolina, therefore, differed considerably from the average. None of the state's privateers were ships, and there were more brigs than schooners and sloops. This may be because of the uniqueness of the North Carolina sound systems and their influence on ship types.⁴⁸

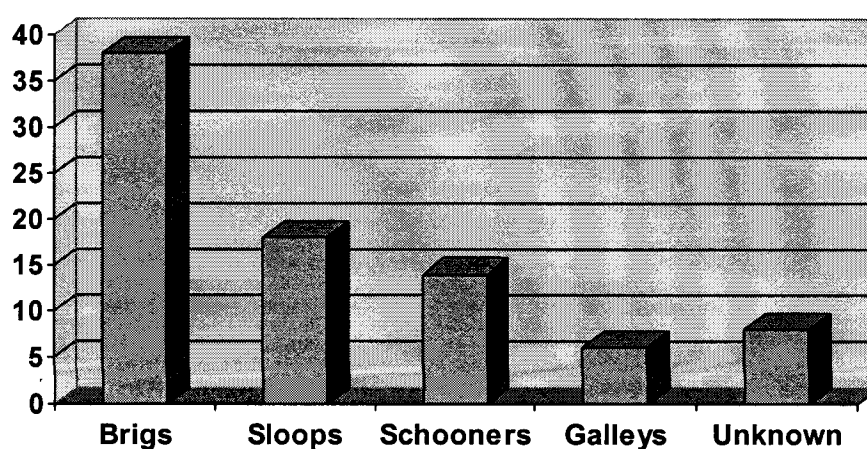


Table 1. North Carolina Privateer Vessel Types

North Carolina private men-of-war can be divided into letter of marques and privateers. The letter of marque was primarily interested in hauling cargo but would attack an enemy merchant vessel if the opportunity presented itself. A privateer, in contrast, set out exclusively to attack enemy commerce. Nevertheless, the intentions of owners and captains were easily determined by simply analyzing the armament of the vessel. Lightly armed vessels such as the schooner *Johnston*, with a crew of only twelve men and an armament of only four carriage guns, were most likely letter of marques, while predators such as the brig *Bellona*, which carried sixteen carriage guns,

⁴⁸ Charles B. Lincoln, *Naval Records of the American Revolution*. Washington: Government Printing Office, 1906. See Appendix B, North Carolina Privateer and Letter of marque Vessels.

IN CONGRESS,

MAY 2, 1780.

INSTRUCTIONS

TO THE

CAPTAINS AND COMMANDERS

OF PRIVATE ARMED VESSELS,

Which shall have COMMISSIONS, or LETTERS of
MARQUE and REPRISAL.

I. YOU may by force of arms attack, subdue and take all ships and other vessels belonging to the Crown of Great-Britain, or any of the subjects thereof, on the high seas, or between high water and low water marks, (except the ships or vessels together with their cargoes, belonging to any inhabitant or inhabitants of Bermuda, and such other ships and vessels bringing persons with intent to settle and reside within the United States; which you shall suffer to pass unmolested, the Commanders thereof, permitting a peaceable search, and giving satisfactory information of the contents of the ladings and destination of the voyages.) And you may also annoy the enemy by all the means in your power, by land as well as by water, taking care not to infringe or violate the laws of Nations or the laws of neutrality.

II. You are to pay a sacred regard to the rights of neutral Powers and the usage and custom of civilized Nations, and on no pretence whatever, presume to take or seize any ships or vessels, belonging to the subjects of Princes, or Powers in Alliance with these United States; except they are employed in carrying contraband goods or soldiers to our enemies, and in such case, you are to conform to the stipulations contained in the treaties, subsisting between such Princes or Powers and these States: And, you are not to capture, seize or plunder, any ships or vessels of our enemies, being under the protection of neutral coasts, Nations or Princes, under the pains and penalties expressed in a Proclamation, issued by Congress, the ninth day of May, Anno Domini, 1778.

III. You shall bring such ships and vessels as you shall take, with their guns, rigging, tackle, apparel, furniture and ladings, to some convenient port or ports, that proceedings may thereupon be had in due form of law, concerning such captures.

IV. You shall send the Master or Pilot, and one or more principal person or persons of the company of every ship or vessel by you taken, in such ship or vessel, as soon after the capture as may be, to be, by the Judge or Judges of such Court as aforesaid, examined upon oath, and make answer to such interrogatories as may be propounded, touching the interest or property of the ship or vessel and her lading; and at the same time, you shall deliver or cause to be delivered, to the Judge or Judges, all passes, sea brieves, charter parties, bills of lading, cockets, letters, and other documents and writings found on board, proving the said papers by the affidavit of yourself, or of some other person present at the capture, to be produced as they were received, without fraud, addition, subtraction or embezzlement,

Figure 10. Instructions from Congress for Privateer Commanders⁴⁹

⁴⁹ Condemnation Proceedings of the *Fair American*, HCA 328-3.

V. You shall keep and preserve every ship or vessel and cargo by you taken, until they shall by sentence of a Court properly authorized, be adjudged lawful prize, or acquitted, not selling, spoiling, wasting or diminishing the same, or breaking the bulk thereof nor suffering any such thing to be done.

VI. If you, or any of your officers or crew, shall in cold blood, kill or maim, or by torture or otherwise, cruelly, inhumanly, and contrary to common usage and the practice of civilized Nations in war, treat any person or persons surprized in the ship or vessel you shall take, the offender shall be severely punished.

VII. You shall, by all convenient opportunities, send to the Board of Admiralty, written accounts of the captures you shall make, with the number and names of the captives, and intelligence of what may occur or be discovered concerning the designs of the enemy, and the destinations, motions and operations of their fleets and armies.

VIII. One third at least, of your whole company, shall be land-men.

IX. You shall not ransom or discharge any prisoners or captives; but you are to take the utmost care to bring them into port; and if from any necessity, you shall be obliged to dismiss any prisoners at sea, you shall on your return from your cruise, make report thereof on oath, to the Judge of the Admiralty of the State to which you belong, or in which you arrive, within twenty days after your arrival, with your reasons for such dismissal. And you are to deliver at your expence or the expence of your owners, the prisoners you shall bring into port, to a Commissary of Prisoners nearest the place of their landing, or into the nearest County Goal.

X. You shall observe all such further instructions as Congress shall hereafter, give in the premises, when you shall have notice thereof.

XI. If you shall do any thing contrary to these instructions, or to others hereafter to be given, or willingly suffer such thing to be done, you shall not only forfeit your commission, and be liable to an action, for breach of the condition of your bond, but be responsible to the party grieved, for damages sustained by such malversation.

Resolved, That the Board of Admiralty be empowered and directed, to cause to be printed, so many copies of said forms as they shall judge necessary.

Resolved, That the President transmit to the Governors, or Presidents of the respective States, so many copies of said forms, as the Board of Admiralty shall advise, and at the same time inform them, that it is the intention of Congress, that all commissions and instructions now in force, be cancelled as soon as possible, and commissions, bonds and instructions of the new form, be substituted in the place thereof.

Extract from the Minutes,
CHARLES THOMSON, Secretary.

Figure 10. Instructions from Congress to Privateer Commanders (continued)⁵⁰

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

K NOW all Men by these Presents, That
 WE *Joseph Mordeith, William Williams*
And John Fryer —
 Are held and firmly bound to *Mrs. Hon. John Hancock Esq.*
 PRESIDENT of the CONGRESS of the United Colonies
 of New-Hampshire, Massachusetts-Bay, Rhode-Island, Connecticut,
 New-York, New-Jersey, Pennsylvania, the Counties of New-
 Castle, Kent, and Sussex on Delaware, Maryland, Virginia,
 North-Carolina, South-Carolina, and Georgia, to be paid to the
 said *John Hancock* — or his certain Attorney, Execu-
 cutors, Administrators, or Assigns, in Trust for the Use of the
 said United Colonies: To which Payment well and truly to be
 done, We do bind Ourselves, our Heirs, Executors, and
 Administrators jointly and severally, firmly by these Presents.
 Sealed with our Seals, and dated *the 20th* Day of
June in the Year of our Lord *One thousand seven hundred*
Twenty seven, and in the first Year of our Independence
T HE Condition of this Obligation is such, That
 if the Above-bounden *Joseph Mordeith* —
 who is Commander of the *Barge* called *The Resolution*
 belonging to *Quene Rosette Anson* No. 6 of *Wilmington*
 in the Colony of *North Carolina* mounting *Eight* Carriage
 Guns, and navigated by *Twenty* Men, and who hath
 applied for a Commission or Letters of Marque and Reprisal, to arm,
 equip, and set forth to Sea, the said *Barge* as a private Ship of War,
 and to make Captures of British Vessels and Cargoes, shall not exceed or
 transgress the Powers and Authorities which shall be contained in the said
 Commission, but shall in all Things observe and conduct himself, and
 govern his Crew, by and according to the same, and certain Instructions
 therewith to be delivered, and such other Instructions as may hereafter
 be given to him; and shall make Reparation for all Damages sustained by
 any Misconduct or unwarrantable Proceedings of Himself or the Officers
 or Crew of the said *Barge*. Then this Obligation shall be void,
 or else remain in Force.

Sealed and Delivered in
 the Presence of
Francis Brice

Joseph Mordeith
Wm. Williams
John Fryer

Figure 11. Bond for the North Carolina Privateer Resolution⁵¹

⁵¹ Treasurer and Comptroller Papers, Ports Records, Box 15.

served as privateers.⁵² This is important because letter of marques enabled the state to continue trade, while privateers focused mainly on commerce destruction. Having paid the bond and obtained a commission and set of instructions, the privateer owner next needed a crew.

The traditional way of securing seamen was “beating up” for volunteers. An individual wishing to recruit sailors would simply beat a drum along the waterfront to gain their attention. Attracted to the drummer, sailors would be offered the chance to sign on onboard a vessel. With the small size of North Carolina’s ports, this would have been a relatively easy way to attract a crowd, if not a crew. If mariners did not see or hear a “beating up,” men desiring to enlist could simply frequent a dockside tavern where advertisements for privateering voyages were often displayed.⁵³

Newspaper advertisement provided another method of raising a crew. This technique, however, may indicate a manpower shortage in the port. If a newspaper advertisement was necessary, then there must not have been enough seamen dockside for a “beating up.” Moreover, since most sailors were probably illiterate, advertising could reflect a last resort. Only one example of an advertisement exists in a North Carolina newspaper. Ironically, the ad was not for a North Carolina vessel. On August 4, 1777, the commander of the *Sturdy Beggar*, a Maryland privateer, advertised in the *North Carolina Gazette* (See Figure 10):

⁵² Inventory of the Privateer schooner called the *Johnston*, Treasurer and Comptroller Papers, Ports Records, Box 5, North Carolina Division of Archives and History, Raleigh; Clark, *State Records*, XIV, 482.

⁵³ Carl Swanson, *Predators and Prizes: American Privateering and Imperial Warfare, 1739-1748* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1991), 88-89.

NEW BERN August 4, 1777

Wanted immediately for the celebrated and well known Brig of War, *Sturdy Beggar*, under command of James Campbell, Esq; now fitting out at this place for a short Cruize against the Enemies of the Thirteen United States, a few good Seamen and Marines. The *Sturdy Beggar* is allowed to be the handsomest Vessel ever built in America, is completely furnished with all kinds of war-like Stores, Ammunition, &c. is remarkable for fast sailing, having never chased a Vessel but she soon came up with.⁵⁴

The *Sturdy Beggar* was refitting on the North Carolina coast in preparation for a cruise to Jamaica where it was subsequently taken by a British vessel.⁵⁵

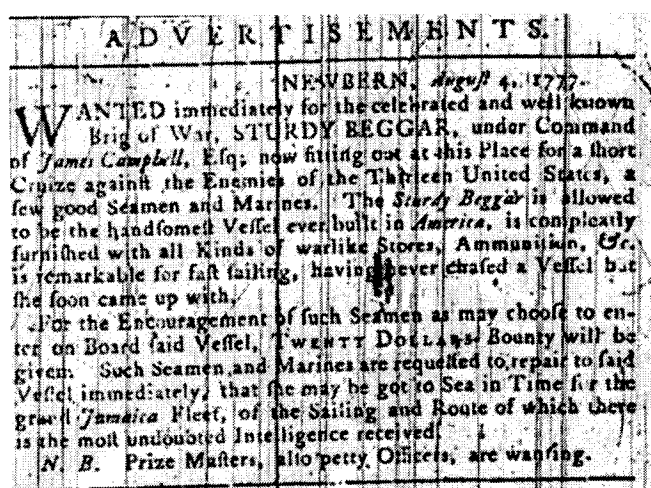


Figure 12. Advertisement of the *Sturdy Beggar*⁵⁶

Part of the recruitment process involved setting terms between the crew, captain, and owner. An agreement, commonly called "the articles," stipulated the length of the cruise and destination as well as the division of prize money between owner and crew.

For example, the *Fair American*'s agreements stated, "in case the said Brig should

⁵⁴ *North Carolina Gazette* (New Bern), August 4, 1777; Clark, *State Records*, XI, 747; Swanson, *Predators and Prizes*, 90-96, offers an analysis of the privateer newspaper advertisements and their effectiveness during the War of Jenkins' Ear and King George's War, the conflicts of 1739-1748.

⁵⁵ Clark, *State Records*, XI, 748.

⁵⁶ *North Carolina Gazette* (New Bern), August 8, 1777.

be so fortunate to meet with and make Prize of any Vessel belonging to the Enemies of the United States of America during the Course of the Said Voyage the officers and men all have a right to their share or shares of Every Prize (See Figure 11)."⁵⁹ In addition, the agreement typically asserted the captain's complete authority over the vessel and stipulated that discipline would be maintained. The *Hero's* articles stated that the crew would be held to the discipline of the Continental Navy and stipulated: "that four and twenty hours absence shall be deemed a total desertion (without leave) and render such seamen liable to forfeit his or their wages which may become them (See Figure 12)."⁶⁰

Although disciplinary regulations generally followed those set forth by the Continental Congress, discipline appears to have broken down often on privateers. In 1782, the crew of the *Marquis de Lafayette* murdered their commanding officer, Captain Cornelius Schlemmerhorn. Captain John Davis, one of John Wright Stanly's men, offered one of the only extant observations of a "walking-the-plank" episode from the eighteenth century. Abner Nash described the incident in a letter,

Two days ago Capt. Davise in the employ of Mr. Stanly arrived from the French West Indies – he brings an acct of a matter similar to this exactly - a vessel of the US put into St. Thomas's the Capt. Went ashore & the majority of the seamen being English they mutinied lashed a plank on the Bows and told the mate to take his choice either to walk over Board or navigate that vessel into Tarbola, that course was embraced the vessel carried into Tarbola condemned & distributed among the seamen.⁶¹

⁵⁹ Condemnation Proceedings of the *Fair American*, HCA 32/328.

⁶⁰ Condemnation Proceedings of the *Hero*, HCA 32/354.

⁶¹ Abner Nash to [?], April 19, 1777, in *Clark, State Records*, XI, 719-720.

Similarly, Captain Charles Biddle of the *Eclipse* narrowly avoided death when attempting to quell a mutiny onboard a fellow privateer docked at Beaufort in 1778. The captain had locked himself in the cabin after a disagreement with the crew, and Biddle investigated:

The one who appeared the ringleader, coming up behind me would have struck me with a handspike, and probably killed me, but for a stout young man who caught hold of him and took the handspike from him, declaring at the same time in broad Scotch, that no man on board should hurt Capt. Biddle. Hearing us upon deck, the captain came out of the cabin, when the crew and captain began to accuse each other of behaving ill. Upon inquiring of the young Scotchman, whose name was Smith, I found that the captain had not behaved well and the crew worse.⁶²

No evidence of floggings imposed on unruly North Carolina privateersmen is extant, nor are there any court cases concerning the actions of ships' masters against sailors.

One account exists, however, that indicates other forms of disciplinary punishment did take place. Lieutenant John Harris of the *Eclipse*, considered a man of "uncommon size and strength," had severe trouble with one sailor, a Spaniard, who "behaved with great insolence." While they were in a small boat headed to shore, Harris struck the sailor, who subsequently drew his knife and attempted to stab the lieutenant. Harris responded by taking the Spaniard, "a stout fellow who valued himself for his strength," and held his head overboard under water until the man almost drowned. He let the Spaniard up to breath, then repeated the treatment several times until the sailor

⁶² Charles Biddle, *Autobiography of Charles Biddle, Vice President of the Supreme Executive Council of Pennsylvania, 1745-1821* (Philadelphia: [?], 1883), 130.

begged for his life. Charles Biddle, the ship's owner, stated that the sailor behaved quite well after this incident.⁶³

Recruitment, however, did not always prove successful. Manpower problems played a major theme throughout eighteenth-century maritime conflicts. There simply were not enough sailors to meet the demand. Competition among privateers, as well as state and Continental navy vessels, was stiff. Some owners even resorted to recruiting British prisoners. In 1779, David Owen and Isaac Guion enrolled "thirty-seven Irishmen" captured onboard the British privateer *Harlequin* onboard one of their vessels.⁶⁴ Although no direct statement substantiating manpower problems to a specific privateer exist, the evidence suggests that finding sailors for crewmen was not easy.

North Carolina's privateer crews came from a variety of locales (See Table 2). Native North Carolinians probably provided a large number of the sailors onboard privateers. Of the 133 men whose native home can be determined, 57 were from North Carolina. Brothers John and Robert Avery of Edenton served as first mate and drummer of marines onboard the brig *Wolfe* in 1782. Another Edenton resident, twenty-six year old landsmen Richard Dillon, served onboard the brig *Greyhound* during 1781. James Canady, a seaman onboard the *Fair American*, hailed from Beaufort. Others, such as brothers Simon and Thomas Alderson of New Bern, had served in the North Carolina Continental line before becoming privateer officers.⁶⁵

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 118.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 120.

⁶⁵ See Appendix C, North Carolina Privateersmen; Robert Avery Pension, 1832, National Archives, Washington, D.C.; Richard Dillon Pension, 1832, National Archives, Washington, D.C.; Condemnation Proceedings of the *Fair American*, HCA 32/328-3; Condemnation Proceedings of the *Anne*, HCA 32/270; Francis B. Heitman, *Historical Register of the Officers of the Continental Army* (Baltimore: Genealogical

North Carolina did not have a major seafaring tradition in the eighteenth century, compared to the northern colonies. North Carolina had less maritime commerce than New England, and did not have a large whaling or fishing tradition. Unlike northern fishing expeditions, that extended into the open ocean, most North Carolina fishing was confined to the sounds and estuaries during the eighteenth century. When the British captured or blockaded New England ports in 1775-1777, however, some northern seamen came south. Many became officers on North Carolina privateers. The *Eclipse*, which sailed from New Bern in 1778, provides a perfect example. The commander, Charles Biddle, hailed from Philadelphia, as did his first lieutenant, a man only known as Simpson. The second lieutenant, John Harris, described as "a man of uncommon size and strength, very active and brave," came from Boston.⁶⁶ Several other vessels had similar complements. Sylvanus Pendleton, who left the North Carolina state navy for command of the *Bellona*, hailed from Newport, Rhode Island, while the commanders of the *Fair American*, John Smith and Luke Matthewman, came from Baltimore, Maryland. In addition, an entire family of Connecticut privateersmen, the Tinkers, commanded North Carolina vessels between 1777 and 1782.⁶⁷

Aside from northerners, foreigners also served onboard North Carolina privateers. When the Royal Navy captured the brig *L'Amite* in 1779, the British listed the crew as

Publications, 1982), 65, 71; Marion J. Kaminkow and Jack Kaminkow, *Mariners of the American Revolution* (Baltimore: Magna Carta Books, 1967), 3; Charles E. Claghorn, *Naval Officers of the American Revolution: A Concise Biographical Dictionary* (Metuchen, N.J., Scarecrow Press, 1988), 2.

⁶⁶ Biddle, *Autobiography*, 116-120.

⁶⁷ See Appendix C, North Carolina Privateersmen; Condemnation Proceedings of the *Anne*, HCA 32/270; Condemnation Proceedings of the *Fair American*, HCA 32/328-3. These men commanded the *Betsey*, *Cogdell*, *Johnston*, and *Goodwill*.

"fifty-three men of various nationalities."⁶⁸ Marshall Boitar, commander of the galley *La Fortune*, was French, as were Dominique Dascomb of the brig *Le Basque*, Claude Guillard of the brig *Peggy*, and Andre Trebaux of the brig *Favourite American*. Emanuel and Marino Spaniard of the galley *Tartar* were Spanish, while Peter Sordenson of the *Fair American* was probably from Scandinavia. Still others came from the British Isles. George Nichols, first mate of the *Fair American*, was a Scot, while Patrick Flanagan of the *Favourite American* likely called Ireland home. Former members of the British army even found berths onboard North Carolina privateers. Smith, a young Scot who saved Captain Biddle's life, had been a private in the Seventy-First Foot.⁶⁹

In addition to native North Carolinians, northerners, and foreigners, a number of Africans and African-Americans served onboard North Carolina's private men-of-war. Of the 263 identifiable officers and crew onboard North Carolina predators, 19 (7%) are noted as black or "Negro." The actual percentage, however, is probably much higher because of incomplete crew lists. It indicates black sailors did man North Carolina privateers. Whether these men were slave or free is unknown. Of the forty-one men captured onboard the *Favourite American*, twelve (29%) were listed as "Negro." When captured off of Marseilles in November 1780 the crew had thirty-six cutlasses and a

⁶⁸ Condemnation Proceedings of the *L'Amite*, HCA 32/267.

⁶⁹ Alice Barnwell Keith, ed., *The John Gray Blount Papers* (Raleigh: Dept. of Archives and History, 2 volumes, 1952), I, 45; Condemnation Proceedings of the *Fair American*, HCA 32/328-3; Robert B. Drane, "The Expedition Against the Row Galley General Arnold, a sidelight of colonial Edenton," *The North Carolina Booklet*, VII (1908), 275; Condemnation Proceedings of the *Le Basque*, HCA 32/277-7; Admiralty Papers, 36/9448, Public Records Office, London, copy in the British Collection, North Carolina State Archives, Raleigh; Admiralty Papers 36/8179; hereafter cited as ADM; Biddle, *Autobiography*, 130-132. Smith, called by Biddle a "sensible, intelligent young man," was formerly a private in the British army. Captured in 1776 onboard a transport by the Continental Navy vessel *Andrea Doria*, commanded by Nicholas Biddle, Charles's brother, Smith signed on with the *Doria* as a cabin boy. Smith was murdered in the summer of 1779 by a Loyalist in Beaufort named Gibbons.

similar number of muskets. Although the twelve blacks onboard the *Fair American* included Dartijoller and Jackbean, nine of the remaining ten had last names that did not match those of any of the officers, crew, or owners of the vessel suggesting that the blacks were not the property of those individuals.⁷⁰

Having found officers and a crew, the owner next needed to outfit the vessel with proper provisions and weaponry. Most privateering cruises lasted four to seven months,

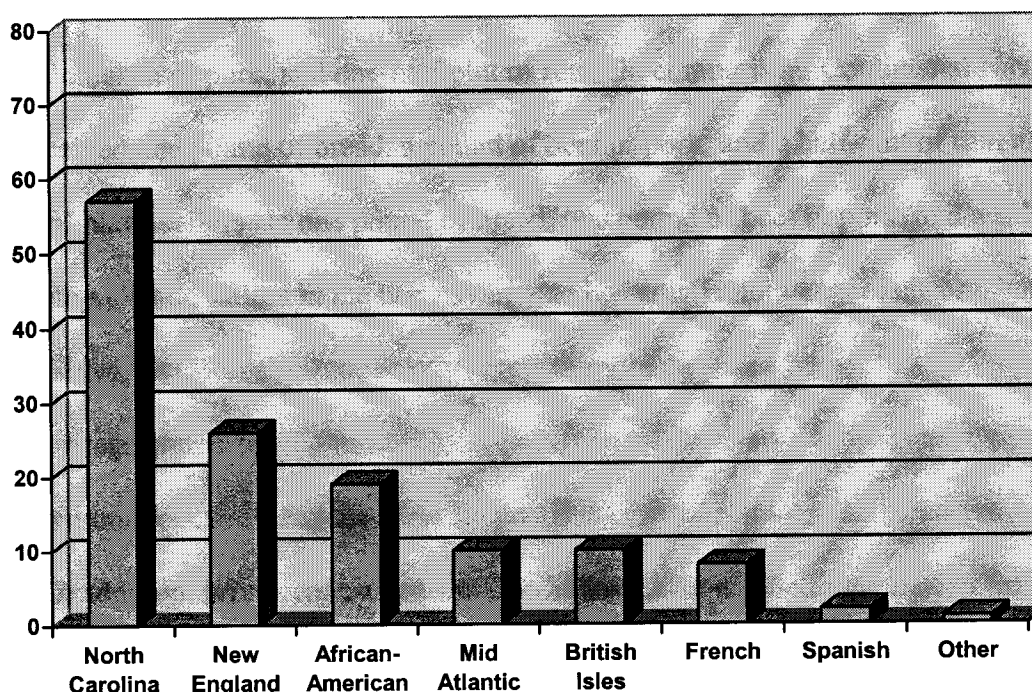


Table 2. North Carolina Privateersmen Place of Origin

although letter of marque voyages varied in relation to the port with which the vessel intended to trade. Only one list of provisions from a North Carolina letter of marque

⁷⁰ See Appendix B, North Carolina Privateersmen; The nineteen blacks include Corromantee, Duke, Limmerick, Peter, William and William Fanstead onboard the *Peggy*; Dartijoller, Jackbean, Joseph Dickinson, Dick Lambert, Peter Lunker, Van Lunker, William Rains, Peter Savage, John Senior, James Smith, Proverb Tucker and Tom Tucker on the *Favourite American*; Dick Ellis onboard the *Triumph*.

exists. In June 1776, the *Johnston* departed New Bern for Martinique with a crew of twelve outfitted with ten barrels of pork, one thousand pounds of bread, twenty gallons of rum, one hundred pounds of sugar, twenty-five pounds of coffee, ten small "hoggs", and fifty "Fowls."⁷¹ Determining sailor's individual rations remains difficult because the voyage length and the method of how the "hoggs" and "Fowls" were divided are unknown. The amount of pork in each barrel is also undetermined. If the voyage took one month, then each man's daily ration consisted of nearly three pounds of bread, two pounds of chicken or pork, and one-half pint of rum. In comparison, Continental Navy sailors received one pound of bread, a pound of beef or pork, and a half-pint of rum a day. Royal Navy sailors ate one pound of bread, one pound of beef or pork, and a gallon of beer a day. While sailors in the two navies also had small allotments of cheese, butter, and vegetables, privateersmen apparently received more meat and bread.⁷²

Carriage guns were the most important privateer armament. These guns, typically four or six-pounders, provided the main firepower for both defensive and offensive actions. In addition, privateers carried smaller, lighter cannon called swivels that fired a smaller ball, typically one pound in weight. Most North Carolina privateers had an assortment of both. For example, the *Fanny* carried ten carriage guns and four swivels, while the more heavily-armed *L'Amite* mounted sixteen carriage guns and ten swivels.⁷³

⁷¹ Inventory of the schooner called the *Johnston*, Treasurer and Comptroller Papers, Ports Records, Box 5. North Carolina Division of Archives and History, Raleigh.

⁷² N.A.M. Rodger, *The Wooden World: An Anatomy of the Georgian Navy* (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 1986), 82-84; Jack Coggins, *Ships and Seamen of the American Revolution* (Harrisburg: Stackpole, 1969), 210-211.

⁷³ See Appendix A, North Carolina Privateer and Letter of Marque vessels.

Aside from artillery, weapons were needed for boarding parties, including muskets, pistols, cutlasses, hatchets, and knives. Unfortunately, the boarding armament of only three North Carolina vessels is known. Twelve men of the lightly armed letter of marque *Johnston* had at their disposal six pistols and four cutlasses. In contrast, fifty-three men on *L'Amite* sailed with thirty-six muskets, thirty-six pistols, and forty cutlasses. Similarly, the crew of the *Favourite American* had thirty-six muskets and a "large" number of cutlasses.⁷⁴

Once an owner obtained the paperwork, found a crew, and outfitted the vessel, the privateer or letter of marque sailed. If the vessel captured a prize, the captain followed a fairly set procedure. First, a prize master and crew would be sent to the vessel. Then the prize and its cargo would set sail, with or without the captor, to a convenient American port for adjudication. The trial would be by jury, something unheard of in the British system, and if the judge and jury condemned the vessel, the privateer crew and owners would divide the money from the sale of the boat and cargo.⁷⁵

What types of vessels did North Carolina privateers engage most frequently in prize actions? Evidence indicates that the vessels most commonly attacked were brigs, the major cargo carriers of Britain's transatlantic maritime commerce. These vessels would have been outpaced by faster privateer sloops and schooners and outgunned by privateer brigs. Ships of course carried more cargo, but may have also been much better defended. As Table 3 shows, North Carolina private men-of-war also captured

⁷⁴ Inventory of the schooner called the *Johnston*, Treasurer and Comptroller Papers, Ports Records, Box 5; Condemnation Proceedings of *L'Amite*, HCA 32/267; ADM, 36/9448.

⁷⁵ Bourguignon, *The First Federal Court*, 54-58.

schooners, sloops, and at least one ship. In addition, the state's predators engaged British privateer sloops, a Royal Navy frigate, and captured two navy transports. Not only defending against enemy warships, but actually attacking them, indicates a level of patriotism and illustrates that privateers fought for a cause as well as a profit.

A good example of a typical, albeit unsuccessful voyage is that of the *Eclipse* commanded by Charles Biddle. Armed with "six iron and fourteen wooden ["Quaker cannons"] guns," with a crew of seventy, the sloop set sail from New Bern for St. Eustatia on September 22, 1778. A few days out, the *Eclipse* encountered two British letters of marque but passed them without incident. The next day, the Americans entered St. Eustatia where they traded a load of tobacco for gunpowder with the Dutch. Word of an impending hurricane spread, prompting Biddle to set sail again. The *Eclipse* sailed directly into a squall, and one crewman, Samuel Rogers, "fell from the futtock overboard, and it was with great difficulty that he was saved." The next day, Biddle encountered an "Anguilla privateer" and:

Hoisted English colors in hope she would bear down upon us. As soon as our colors were hoisted she did as I expected, and made preparations to engage us. As I found she intended to get upon our weather quarter, I had two of the guns loaded with grape run aft, and all the marines lying on quarter-deck with a bullet and two buckshot in their muskets; and as her crew were entirely exposed in coming up, which they did with their drums beating, I expected to make great havoc among them; but just as we hauled down the English colors, and hoisted our own, and were going to fire on them, they hoisted American colors, and we found she was a privateer from Charleston, I believe commanded by Capt. Milligan.⁷⁶

⁷⁶ Biddle, *Autobiography*, 111-116.

After this near fiasco, the voyage continued unabated until the *Eclipse* reached Beaufort on November 16. Another tragedy, however, befell the sloop before the voyage concluded. While entering the harbor, Biddle saluted the port with a broadside. Seeing Chief Mate Sumeral hesitating to fire his gun, Biddle questioned him, upon which the mate touched the match to the gun. Biddle stated: "Upon my speaking he fired, and the gun burst into a hundred pieces." Several crewmen were severely wounded, and Sumeral died from multiple injuries to his thighs. The cause of the misfire was later determined to be that the mate had forgotten to remove the wadding before

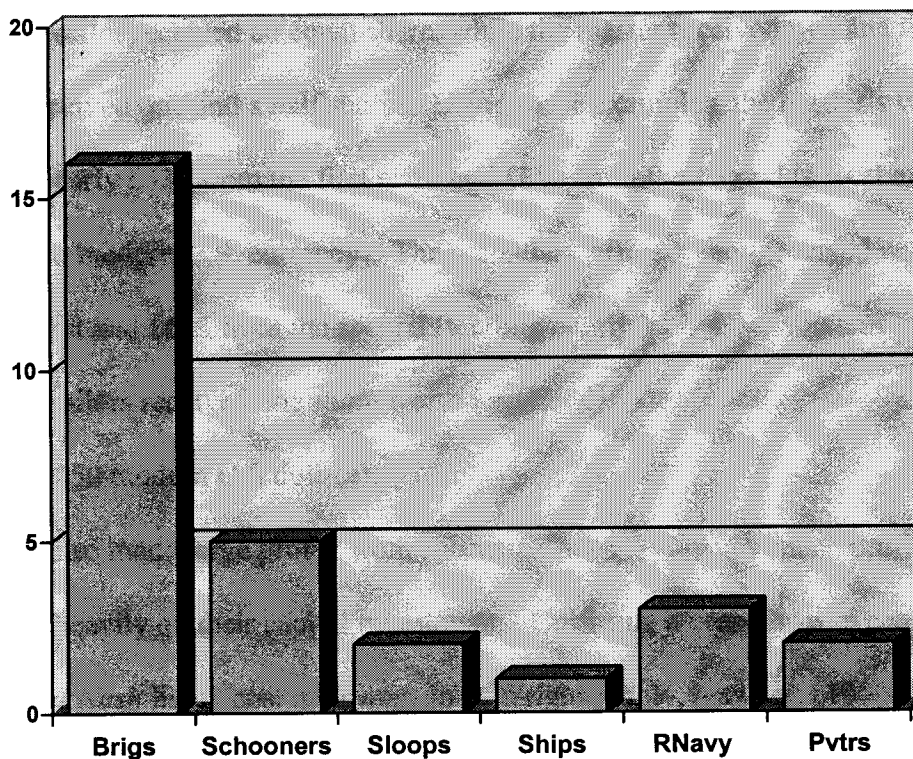


Table 3. Prize Actions Fought by North Carolina Privateers

firing, and the cannon had become "jammed." This unfortunate episode ended the *Eclipse's* eight week voyage.⁷⁷

Profitability dominated the minds of most privateer owners and crews. A young sailor onboard a successful privateer could make an enormous amount of money. For example, in 1780, the brig *General Nash* took one prize worth £15,000 (or \$852,000 in modern United States currency) and another whose estimated value was £40,000 (or nearly \$2,272,000 in today's money). At the time, the vessel had a crew of thirty-seven sailors and three officers. In the six extant North Carolina privateer agreements that stipulate prize division, the crew received one-half the value while the owner received the other half. Each sailor received an equal share, while the master received two and the other officers received one and a half shares. Using those examples, the master's two shares equaled nearly £332 from the first prize and £888 from the second (a total of nearly \$70,000 in modern U.S. currency). The secondary officers each received nearly £250 from the first and £626 from the second (totaling nearly \$49,500 in modern U.S. currency). The sailors received one share worth roughly £166 and another nearing £444 (or roughly \$34,450 modern U.S dollars).⁷⁸

Owners also made large profits from successful voyages. How much profit they made depended heavily on their capital investment. Outfitting a vessel was expensive. The brig *General Nash* likely cost its owner, John Wright Stanly, between £1000-£2000,

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 116.

⁷⁸ Richard Cogdell to Governor Abner Nash, September 4, 1780, Clark, *State Records*, XV, 68-69; Michael Gorman to Governor Nash, September 5, 1780, *ibid.*, XV, 71-72; These statistics are derived using McCusker's conversion rates. Using the conversion rate of £1 sterling = \$4.44 silver dollars (Spanish) the first prize was worth \$66,600. Then utilizing the conversion rates from consumer price indexes for the years 1778 and 2001 (a multiple of 12.79) the vessel was worth \$851,814 in modern US currency. The second prize was worth \$2,271,504.

a price comparable to that paid for the state navy brigs. The vessel had sixteen carriage guns whose cost would have been nearly £1450. Arms and food for the crew likely consumed another £500. If Stanly paid the men wages in addition to their shares, he probably spent another several hundred pounds as well. All told the cost of outfitting the *General Nash* would have been nearly £4,000-5,000. Stanly's share of the vessel's prizes, however, was £27,500, a profit of nearly 550 percent. Although this is an extreme example, privateering success clearly meant profits for both crew and owner.

Patriotism, however, motivated privateering as well. Predators repeatedly proved their loyalty for the American cause by engaging British privateers and Royal Navy vessels, prizes whose worth clearly did not equal the risk undertaken to capture them. For example, Captain Thomas Singleton, commander of the brig *Sally & Betsey*, received a gunshot wound to the head during a three and one-half hour battle with a British fourteen-gun privateer in December 1779. Similarly, the *Wolfe*, a twenty gun brig, fought the HMS *Heartless*, a thirty gun British frigate, to a draw in the Mediterranean Sea in 1782.⁷⁹

Another patriotic example involves the actions of John Wright Stanly and Richard Ellis during July 4 celebrations in New Bern in 1778. Richard Cogdell described the incident: "In celebration of this day great numbers of Guns have been fired, at Stanley's Wharf, and Mr. Ellis' ship three different firings from each from early morning in the midday and evening, and Liquor given to the populace. Stanley and Ellis seemed to vie

⁷⁹ Isaac Guion to Governor Caswell, December 3, 1779, Clark, *State Records*, XIV, 229. Robert Avery Pension, 1832.

with each other, in a contest who should do the most honor to the day, but Mr. Ellis had the most artillery.”⁸⁰

Stanly and Ellis validated their patriotism by supplying the American army with weapons, provisions, and equipment. These supplies often came at times of dire need. Stanly supplied Washington’s army at Valley Forge in early 1778 with much-needed tents and clothing allotments from his prize captures. In 1779, he supplied arms and equipment to the beleaguered Continental forces defending Georgia and lower South Carolina, and in 1780 he outfitted the remnants of Horatio Gates’s southern army after the debacle of Camden with equipment captured by the *General Nash*. Stanly either donated these goods to the army or sold them at rates much lower than their normal cost. Joseph Clay, Gates’s commissary general, reported from New Bern, after purchasing weaponry from Stanly’s business partner, “I have agreed with Mr. Green much more to my Satisfaction & to the Interest of the United States.”⁸¹

Similarly, Ellis also supplied the Continental army with necessary goods. In 1776-1777, Ellis imported arms and gunpowder from the West Indies and, as Continental agent, purchased necessary equipment from prize cargoes. In early 1776, he imported from Guadalupe in the Sloop Heart of Oak & Sloop Polly, 2,000 wght of powder and 20 stand of small arms, Compleat with Iron ramrod, bayonets, &c. the powder cost a piece of eight Pwte & the arms 64d each; I am willing the Province should have them on their paying me a resasonable profit, which I think to be a Cent at least for running so great a

⁸⁰ Richard Cogdell to Governor Caswell, July 4, 1778, in Clark, *State Records*, XIII, 187.

⁸¹ Gertrude Carraway, *The Stanly (Stanley) Family and the Historic John Wright Stanly House*, (New Bern, N.C.: Tryon Palace Commission, 1969), 10-11; Joseph Clay to Major General Gates, Oct 23, 1780, in Clark, *State Records*, XIV 706-707.

risqué and being obliged to sell the Cargoes for Cash, salt, or warlike Stores.⁸² Later in the war, Ellis was unafraid to deliver the supplies himself. In 1782, he wrote the governor explaining, "I shall in 2 weeks From this set off for the Southern Army. This is not altogether a Jant of pleasyr., as I intend to mix it with a little Bisness as I shall Expect some arrivals at George Town wch. I hope to make usefull to our Army in that Quarter."⁸³ Through these actions, both Ellis and Stanly indicated their fidelity towards the American cause.

Loyalty to the American cause can also be found in the response of many North Carolina privateers after they were captured. Typically, any British vessel that captured a prize offered the prisoners a chance to escape hellish British prisons by joining the Royal Navy. Out of 159 identifiable North Carolina privateersmen who were captured, only 8 (5%) enlisted in the British service. In addition, of those who chose prison, many attempted escape, and a lucky few succeeded. In 1780, Captain John Smith and Lieutenant Luke Matthewman of the *Fair American* tunneled out of Forton Prison along with sixty other prisoners. In his memoirs, Matthewman states that he had Smith dug "42 feet" and "broke up in the cellar kitchen of an old woman, who, being frightened, fell backward, but recovering called the guard! However, we soon gagged her, and about 60 got out of the hole." Most escapees were recaptured, but Smith and Matthewman escaped to France with the assistance of a sympathetic British doctor.⁸⁴

⁸² Richard Ellis to Cornelius Harnett, 13 June 1776, in Clark, *State Records*, XXII, 744-745.

⁸³ Richard Ellis to Governor Burke, 7 Apr 1782, in *ibid.*, XVI, 584.

⁸⁴ See Appendix C, North Carolina Privateersmen; Luke Matthewman, "Narrative of Lieut. Luke Matthewman of the Revolutionary Navy," *Magazine of American History*, II, (1878), 181-183; See Thomas C. Parramore, "The Great Escape from Forten Gaol: An Incident of the Revolution," *North Carolina Historical Review*, XLV, (1968), 349-356. Although patriotic, it must also be stated that many sailors

The most striking example of patriotic courage by a North Carolina privateer in the face of British captors, however, comes from John Davis, commander of the *Peggy*. Captured near Ocracoke Inlet and imprisoned onboard a prison galley off Charleston in April 1781, Davis refused a British officer's request to help clean the vessel. Summarily flogged, Davis again refused an order to draw water from the ship's side. Upon being told that the punishment would continue until he consented, Davis replied, "If His Majesty's whole Navy was on fire, and one bucket of water, drawn by me, would extinguish the flames, I would not draw it." Enraged, the British flogged him until he died.⁸⁵ The example, although extreme, indicates that privateers fought for a cause as much as they did for a dollar.

From 1776-1783, North Carolinians outfitted at least 84 privateers and letter of marques. Comparison with other states is difficult because of a lack of diligent research on the part of past historians and incomplete records. For example, of the 1,697 letter of marque commissions on file in Congressional records, not a single North Carolina vessel is listed. Similarly, no Georgia vessels and only four New Jersey predators are recorded. Furthermore, only one South Carolina vessel and one New York predator are accounted for, while New Hampshire is listed as having forty-three. Sixty-four Virginia privateers are on the list, while over two hundred are listed for both Maryland and Connecticut. The

simply realized that life in the Royal Navy with harsh discipline and battle could mean a higher risk of death than being in prison. See Jesse Lemisch, "Jack Tar in the Streets: Merchant Seamen in the Politics of Revolutionary America," *William and Mary Quarterly*, 3d. ser., XXV, (1968), 371-407, and Jesse Lemisch and John K. Alexander, "The White Oaks, Jack Tar, and the Concept of the 'Inarticulate'," *William and Mary Quarterly*, 3d. ser., XXIV, 1972, 109-142.

⁸⁵ Heywood, "The State Navy of North Carolina," 54. Davis was the son of *North Carolina Gazette* (New Bern) editor James Davis of New Bern. He had formerly been a lieutenant onboard the *Pennsylvania Farmer* but resigned in disgust over the officers and crew. See Clark, *State Records*, XI, 719.

two largest contingents listed are Pennsylvania's 500 vessels and Massachusetts's 626. Although logically, states with maritime economies would have the largest number of predators, only fifteen Rhode Island vessels are listed. Unfortunately, little research has been done on American privateers that extended past simply looking in the congressional records, and not those of each state. This thesis illustrates that many more privateers served than has been previously reported.⁸⁶

Determining the number of prizes taken by North Carolinians, and what percentage of vessels captured by American privateers as a whole, is equally difficult because of incomplete records. Lloyd's of London lists over 3,000 vessels as being taken by American predators.⁸⁷ North Carolina privateers took at least 29 prizes (See Table 3). Not every North Carolina privateer captured a vessel. The *General Nash*, *Bellona*, *Lydia*, and *Nancy*, however, did quite well. These four vessels accounted for one-half of the prizes known to have been taken by North Carolina private men-of-war. The most successful, the *Bellona*, captured at least five vessels. Unfortunately, because of the incomplete records, an accurate reckoning of how many prizes were captured is impossible.⁸⁸

⁸⁶ These records are published in Charles B. Lincoln, *Naval Records of the American Revolution*. Washington: Government Printing Office, 1906. A breakdown of them exists in both Gardner W. Allen, *A Naval History of the Revolution* (New York: Russell & Russell, 2 volumes, 1962), II, and Coggins, *Ships and Seamen of the American Revolution*, 74-75.

⁸⁷ Sir George Trevelyan, ed., *George the Third and Charles Fox, The Concluding Part of the American Revolution* (New York: Longmans, Green, and Company, 2 volumes, 1912), I, 176.

⁸⁸ *North Carolina Gazette* (New Bern), September 19, 1777, October 3, 1777, and September 11, 1778; Richard Ellis to Cornelius Harnett, 13 June 1776, in Clark, *State Records*, XXII, 744-745; Richard Cogdell to Governor Abner Nash, September 4, 1780, *ibid.*, XV, 68-69; *Virginia Gazette* (Williamsburg), October 16, 1778.

Establishing the value of these prizes is just as difficult. Although the records are woefully incomplete, American privateers captured vessels and cargoes likely worth several million pounds sterling.⁸⁹ Accurately determining North Carolina privateers' share of that prize money is virtually impossible because North Carolina admiralty court records indicating prize values are virtually non-existent. The one extant trial document concerns condemnation of the *Hanover*, a British supply vessel captured by North Carolina militiamen in longboats. Unfortunately, that document does not list the value of the vessel or its cargo. Newspaper records and personal correspondence, however, offer references to the values of eight North Carolina prizes. The *General Nash* took two prizes worth £55,000, while the *Bellona* captured a brig worth £15,000. In addition, the *Resolution*'s capture of a "Jamaica man" was assessed at £40,000, while the *Lydia* and the *Nancy* captured four vessels estimated at £150,000. The total of £260,000 for those eight vessels would be worth nearly \$15,000,000 in modern United States currency.⁹⁰

Whether from profitability or patriotism, or a combination of the two, North Carolinians invested in, commanded, and served onboard private men-of-war in large numbers. North Carolina merchants bought and sold prize cargoes and Continental agents procured much needed supplies from vessels captured by privateers. While the state navy proved completely ineffective, privateers demonstrated an effective method of

⁸⁹ Sir George Trevelyan, ed., *George the Third and Charles Fox, The Concluding Part of the American Revolution* (New York: Longmans, Green, and Company, 2 volumes, 1912), I, 177.

⁹⁰ *North Carolina Gazette* (New Bern), September 19, 1777, October 3, 1777, and September 11, 1778; *Virginia Gazette* (Williamsburg), October 16, 1778; Richard Ellis to Cornelius Harnett, 13 June 1776, in Clark, *State Records*, XXII, 744-745; Richard Cogdell to Governor Abner Nash, September 4, 1780, *ibid.*, XV, 68-69; Condemnation of the brig *Hanover*, Treasurer and Comptroller Papers, Ports Records, Box 15, North Carolina Division of Archives and History, Raleigh; The financial statistics were derived using McCusker's conversion rates cited earlier.

waging maritime war against the British. The entire nation agreed, and during the years 1776-1783 American privateers operated throughout the Atlantic, Caribbean, and the Mediterranean. *North Carolina Gazette* printer James Davis had been correct in proclaiming North Carolina's sword drawn. Once drawn, North Carolina's privateers thrust it directly at Britain's maritime commerce.

CHAPTER FOUR

PROFESSIONALS AND AMATEURS

On a business trip to New Bern in the fall of 1787, Philadelphia merchant William Attmore met privateer owner John Wright Stanly. Attmore recorded in his journal that Stanly was a "Man of whom the first knowledge I had, was, his being confined a prisoner in the Gaol of Philadelphia for debt, upon his liberation removed to this Country, where by a Series of fortunate events in Trade during the War he acquired a great property, and has built a house in Newbern where he resides, that is truly elegant and convenient; at an expense of near 20,000 Dollars—He has a large Wharff and Distillery near his house upon Neuse River side of the Town and a fine plantation with sixty slaves thereon."¹

Attmore's description accurately illustrates the wealth a privateer owner could accumulate. Why did men like Stanly succeed while others failed? Many North Carolinians sent privateers to sea, but not all predators returned with prizes, and others simply never returned. Although often lucrative, privateering could also be extremely dangerous. A privateer or letter-of-marque faced threats from harsh weather, diseases such as smallpox and scurvy, and the ever present danger of being captured by British predators. Yet, how the owner prepared and managed his vessels often determined whether the voyage would succeed. This chapter examines the operations of North Carolina's privateer owners and illustrates the division between professionals and amateurs that separated success from failure.

¹ Lisa Rodman, ed., "Journal of a Tour to North Carolina by William Attmore, 1787," *The James Sprunt Historical Publications*, XVII, (1922), 16-17.

Managing a successful privateering operation required professionalism and business skills. Unsurprisingly, successful North Carolina privateers came from mercantile backgrounds. Merchants handled privateering operations as professional businessmen. They exploited commercial connections, both domestic and foreign, and used profits from successful voyages to fund further operations. They understood the importance of finding trustworthy subordinates and ensuring their loyalty. Professionals knew how to dispose of cargoes efficiently. They owned warehouses for stockpiling cargoes and understood how to gain the largest profit possible. In addition, successful owners learned to diversify their interests, so that if one vessel failed, the entire operation would not collapse. Even more importantly, merchants already had vessels and crews at their disposal. Therefore, they did not need to purchase purpose-built vessels for privateering.

In contrast, those owners who failed at privateering operated amateurishly. These individuals were often politicians, doctors and lawyers with little understanding of commerce. They did not comprehend the need to reinvest profits, hire trustworthy, experienced ship captains, or rely on valuable mercantile and political connections. Many were simply interested in making a quick payoff without investing the proper time or money necessary to insure a good chance of success. Without professional business skills, amateurs ruined their chances as privateer owners.²

² Amateurs and professionals are not unique to American Revolutionary War privateering. Kenneth R. Andrews, *Elizabethan Privateering: English Privateering During the Spanish War, 1585-1603* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1964), provides a thorough analysis of the roles of amateur and professional owners, commanders, and sailors during England's war with Spain. Andrews argues that merchants who acted professionally reaped profits, while nobles and "adventurers" who went to sea largely failed miserably.

North Carolina's most successful privateer owner, John Wright Stanly, accumulated an impressive fortune from his privateering and commercial activities by acting as the consummate professional. By the end of the war, Stanly owned two town houses in New Bern, one in Philadelphia, a plantation along the Neuse River, over one hundred slaves, as well as a distillery and a sawmill (See Figures 13 and 14). He was "familiarily acquainted with many of the principal officers of the army and other distinguished public men" including, "Gen. N. Greene, Gov. Caswell, Col. Spaight, Gov. Nash, Dr. Gaston, and was known to numerous other persons of less fame though of importance to the state and country." Don Francisco de Miranda, a Spaniard passing through New Bern in 1783, noted that Stanly was "the principal merchant of this town."³

Stanly's career started with less than glorious beginnings. As William Attmore stated, Stanly was no stranger to a jail cell. In October 1763, Virginia authorities arrested Stanly, then twenty-one years-old, for aiding the operation of a counterfeiting ring in Williamsburg. Described as "a youth of low stature, down look, red hair, with a particular mark under one of his eyes," Stanly escaped the gallows by reportedly testifying against his associates. Exonerated, he soon left Virginia for Nova Scotia, and eventually Jamaica, where he intended to open a mercantile business.⁴

In Jamaica, Stanly entered a partnership with Jonathan Cowpland, a prosperous Philadelphia merchant. On March 26, 1766, Cowpland and Stanly signed agreements

³ Gertrude Carraway, *The Stanly (Stanley) Family and the Historic John Wright Stanly House*, (New Bern, N.C.: Tryon Palace Commission, 1969), 15; William S. Robertson, ed., *The Diary of Francisco de Miranda's Tour of the United States, 1783 - 1784* (New York: The Hispanic Society of America, 1928), 8.

⁴ "Records of the Trial of John Wright Stanly," in Gertrude Carraway, *The Stanly (Stanley) Family and the Historic John Wright Stanly House*, (New Bern, N.C.: Tryon Palace Commission, 1969), 6-7.

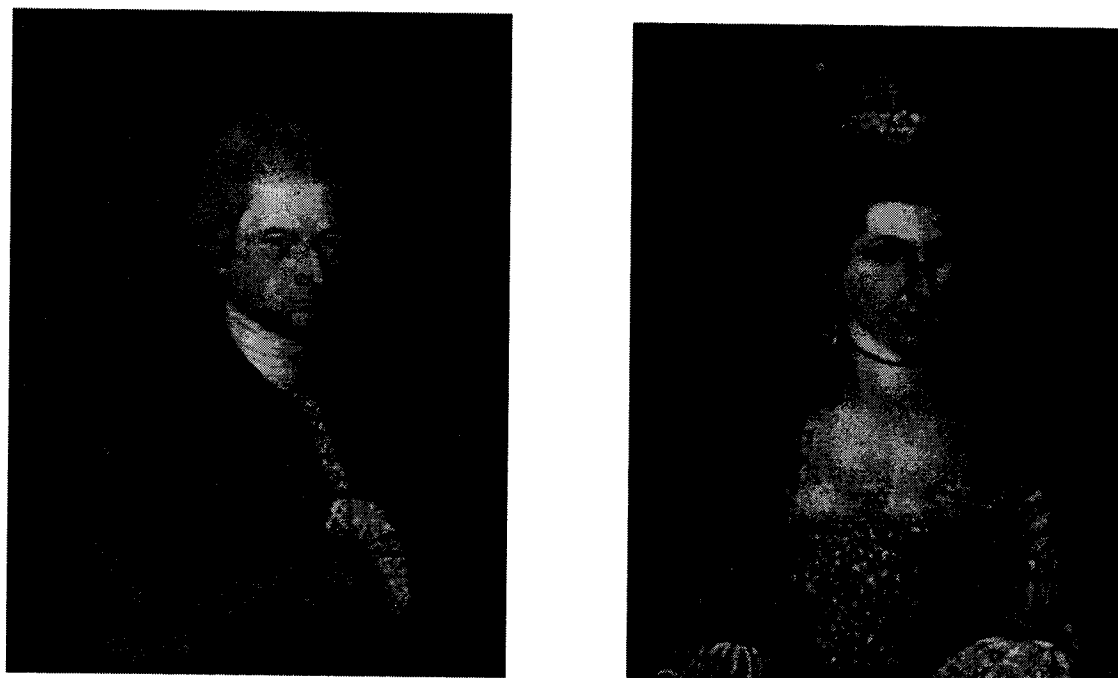


Figure 15. John Wright Stanly and Ann Cogdell Stanly⁵

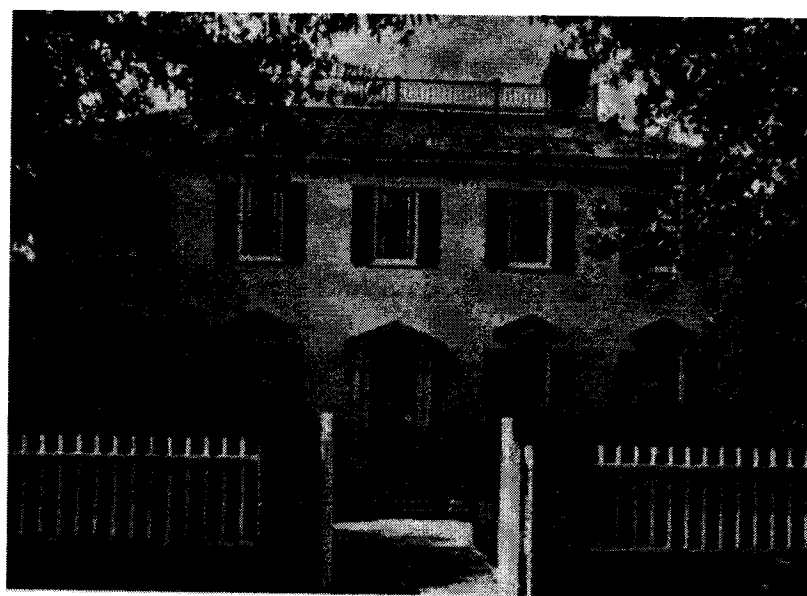


Figure 16. The Stanly House in New Bern

⁵ Portraits by an unknown artist hanging in the Stanly Mansion, New Bern, North Carolina.

stipulating that they would ship cargoes from Jamaica to Philadelphia. Stanly handled the Jamaica business, while Cowpland covered Philadelphia, with profits split equally between the two. In addition, neither individual could dissolve the business until three years had passed. Their first vessel, the *Rachel*, left in August with a cargo of molasses and sugar. While in Philadelphia, Cowpland learned of Stanly's reputation in Virginia and apparently decided to use the evidence to his own advantage. When he returned to Jamaica, Cowpland dissolved the business, claimed all goods on hand as his own, and charged Stanly with all of the company's debt.⁶

With Pennsylvania and New England creditors pressing for payment, Stanly panicked, playing directly into Cowpland's hands. Selling what possessions he had, Stanly outfitted a vessel and sailed for the Bay of Honduras. There he began a logwood cutting operation that he hoped would provide the money necessary to pay the creditors. Cowpland, however, pursued him, and in June 1768 forcibly detained Stanly and sent him to Philadelphia for prosecution.⁷ As the court date neared, Stanly and Cowpland challenged each other with a series of pamphlets and letters published in the *Pennsylvania Journal* and *Pennsylvania Chronicle*. Stanly admitted, "As to the Virginia affair, I am as sensible of my errors as any man, and as ready to acknowledge them," but, "I defy Mr. Cowpland to say that I ever lost any of his money, for during our concern I never lost Twenty Pounds."⁸

⁶ Mary Stanley Hessel, *Profile of a Patriot: The Story of John Wright Stanly: Revolutionary War Privateer* (New Bern, N.C.: Tryon Palace Commission, 1983), 15-19.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 19-21.

⁸ "A State of the Accounts and Disputes betwixt Jonathan Cowpland and John Wright Stanly," in the *Pennsylvania Chronicle* (Philadelphia), September 12, 1768.

Cowpland responded in the September 19 issue of the *Chronicle*, calling Stanly a "dirty fellow" and providing "anonymous" letters concerning Stanly's bad character. Stanly responded with *Remarks on Scurrility and Oppression*, in which he attacked Cowpland directly: "If by representing me as the most abandoned and profligate Miscreant or you can transform me into Something so far below mortal, as not to be entitled to the Benefit of the Laws, Liberties, and Properties of Mankind, then you may gain your point; then you may escape with Impunity for a Crime, which, if committed in the River Thames, could be atoned for but by depriving you of your miserable Existence."⁹ Unfortunately for Stanly, the editor of the *Chronicle* retorted in the next issue, "Mr. Cowpland is a settler in this place, you are a stranger. Mr. Cowpland's friends are our friends." The newspaper man then considered his self interest. Stanly's statement reflected "great dishonour on him, and we might thereby disoblige and lose the countenance of such Gentlemen as are our mutual friends."¹⁰

Stanly, however, eventually gained his revenge on Cowpland and saved his reputation. In the ensuing trial, the judge acquitted Stanly of any wrongdoing. The court decreed that Cowpland actually owed Stanly for debts incurred during the summer of 1766. Stanly followed the decision by suing Cowpland for slander, illegal arrest, and the balance of the money owed from their former business. Stanly won the case and relocated to New Bern in 1772 fully prepared to rebuild his business.¹¹

⁹ *Pennsylvania Chronicle* (Philadelphia), September 19, 1768; "Remarks on Scurrility and Oppression," in the *Pennsylvania Chronicle* (Philadelphia), February 14, 1769.

¹⁰ *Pennsylvania Chronicle* (Philadelphia), February 21, 1769.

¹¹ Hessel, *Profile of a Patriot*, 25-27.

From these experiences, John Wright Stanly learned valuable lessons concerning business connections and the importance of trustworthy partners. He used these lessons to his advantage in his marriage to the daughter of Richard Cogdell, New Bern's most influential politician and a state admiralty court judge. Stanly married Ann Cogdell within one year of arriving in New Bern. He also joined the Sons of Liberty and became a member of the local Committee of Safety. In doing so, Stanly, a newcomer, eliminated any misgivings other merchants might have had about him or his patriotic loyalty. In 1775, the General Assembly offered Stanly the opportunity of shipping supplies to the beleaguered inhabitants of Boston, further indicating the level of trust he held among the state's leaders.¹² William Tisdale, an admiralty court judge and New Bern politician, described him as "a steady, invariable and generous Friend to the Liberties of America. He was early a Member of our Committee, & by his Judicious & well tim'd Observations, has been very instrumental in opening the Eyes of his Neighbours, & rousing them in defence of our common Cause."¹³

Stanly also understood the importance of establishing both domestic and foreign business connections. Just before the Revolutionary War, Stanly traveled several times to Philadelphia repairing lost friendships and building new ones. There he met and befriended Thomas Turner, a Philadelphia merchant who later became his business partner in 1781. Stanly also undertook several voyages in late 1775 to the French ports of Guadalupe and Martinique, and to the Dutch port of St. Eustatia. In these towns,

¹² Hessel, *Profile of a Patriot*, 37-38; Carraway, *The Stanly (Stanley) Family*, 10.

¹³ William Tisdale to the Council of Safety, August 31, 1776, William Saunders, *Colonial Records of North Carolina*, (Raleigh: State of North Carolina, 10 volumes, 1886-1890), X, 788; Hessel, *Profile of a Patriot*, 28-35.

Stanly made valuable foreign connections with French and Dutch mercantile firms such as Rouleau and Van Dyk & Company that later aided him in the trade operated by his letter of marques.¹⁴

Another lesson Stanly learned from his experiences with Cowpland was the importance of finding a loyal, trustworthy business partner. Stanly's first partner was his own flesh and blood.¹⁵ Wright Stanly, John's older brother, joined him in New Bern in 1774 as senior ship captain and business agent. Almost as if to instill complete loyalty, Stanly arranged the marriage between Wright and Susannah, Richard Cogdell's third daughter. Wright commanded several of Stanly's privateers, and was captured onboard the *Lydia* in 1778. Imprisoned in Jamaica, he and several other privateer officers escaped and eventually returned to New Bern.¹⁶

In 1777, the brothers entered a partnership with James Green, Jr., and formed Stanly, Green, & Company. A small-time merchant and clerk of the General Assembly, Green further enhanced John Wright Stanly's political connections within the community. In 1781, Green became a state admiralty court judge, although the appointment was only temporary. Nevertheless, within four years Stanly had a father-in-law and a business partner adjudicating his prize cases. In virtually the same pattern as his brother, Stanly helped establish the marriage of James Green, Jr., to Margaret

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 36-43.

¹⁵ Partnering with a brother or other family member was a common practice of seventeenth- and eighteenth-century merchants. See Bernard Bailyn, *The New England Merchants in the Seventeenth Century* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1955); David Hancock, *Citizens of the World: London Merchants and the Integration of the British Atlantic Community, 1735-1785* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995); Walter B. Edgar, ed., *The Letterbook of Robert Pringle* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2 volumes, 1972).

¹⁶ Carraway, *The Stanly (Stanley) Family*, 20; Stephen F. Miller, *Recollections of New Bern Fifty Years Ago* (Raleigh: State of North Carolina, 1874), 16; A lengthy account of Stanly's escape appears in the February 13, 1778, issue of the *North Carolina Gazette*.

Cogdell, Richard's second daughter, labeled by Don Francisco de Miranda as, "one of the prettiest blonds in all America."¹⁷

Aside from proper connections and trustworthy partners, successful privateer owners most importantly needed good crews and fast-sailing vessels. Stanly excelled at recruiting capable captains and sailors. The majority of his commanders were seasoned New Englanders, and Stanly was known for his capability in recruiting experienced northern sailors. Benjamin Appleton, a Massachusetts native who commanded Stanly's sloop *Lydia*, reportedly had been at sea for "near on twenty-five years."¹⁸ In 1780, Richard Cogdell wrote to Governor Abner Nash, "15 or thereabout New England men have entered on the Privateer Nash, and very lucky for Stanley, as work Hands."¹⁹

As for fast-sailing vessels, Stanly outfitted mostly brigs, a few schooners and sloops, and at least one ship. These vessels were armed with fourteen to sixteen cannon and manned by twenty to seventy men. Stanly even sent out some privateers in consort including a group he referred to as "The Family," that included the *Hannah*, *William*, *Cogdell*, and *Green*. For these vessels, Stanly even developed a series of operating signals. (See Figure 15) In an age without wireless radio, signal flags were the primary line of communication between vessels, and Stanly wanted his captains and crews fully prepared for any occurrence that might arise. As the signal chart stated, "In the Night to Show 2 Lights to be Answered by Showing three to Hail what vessel is that to be

¹⁷ William S. Powell, *Dictionary of North Carolina Biography* Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1979), II, 355-356. Robertson, *The Diary of Francisco de Miranda's Tour*, 6.

¹⁸ Condemnation Proceedings of the *Smithfield*, British High Court of Admiralty Papers, 32/452-15, Public Records Office, London, copy in the British Collection, North Carolina State Archives, Raleigh; hereafter cited as HCA.

¹⁹ Colonel Richard Cogdell to Gov. Nash, August 15, 1780, in Walter Clark, ed., *State Records of North Carolina* (Winston-Salem: State of North Carolina, 14 volumes, 1890-1906), XXII, 552.

Answered Stony Point,” and reminded the captains to “Speake one another every day once or twice.”²⁰ Having such passwords prevented a British vessel from moving in between the Americans at night without being discovered.

As a merchant, Stanly understood how to dispose of his cargoes efficiently. As soon as a prize had been taken, he and his agents began estimating likely prices for captured commodities. With this knowledge, he could decide to which ports various cargoes should be sent. For example, in 1780, the *General Nash*'s prizes were originally intended for sale at Wilmington, but instead went to Beaufort and New Bern where their cargoes were expected to sell for higher prices. Stanly also owned warehouses in New Bern where he could simply “sit” on a cargo to wait for higher prices. If two vessels carrying rum came in at the same time, the profitable decision was to send one vessel to a port that had none for sale. Stanly, a professional merchant, understood the importance of knowing when and where to sell cargoes for maximum profitability.²¹

Stanly also knew the importance of reinvesting profits and diversifying interests. When his prizes were condemned and their cargoes sold, Stanly used the proceeds to purchase and outfit new vessels and recruit more men. When he began his privateering operations in 1776, Stanly owned only two vessels, the *William* and the *Anne*. By 1777, however, Stanly operated seven vessels and had even been able to sell the *Anne* for

²⁰ “Signals between the Hannah Ship, William Brigg, Cogdell & Schooner Green,” Condemnation Proceedings of the *Cogdell*, HCA 32/294.

²¹ Richard Cogdell to Governor Abner Nash, September 4, 1780, Clark, *State Records*, XV, 68-69; Michael Gorman to Governor Nash, September 5, 1780, *ibid.*, XV, 71-72.

Signals Between the Ship Hannah Ship William
 Brigg Cogdell & Schooner Green.

To see the Land a Jack at the fore top Gallant mast
 head.

To see a Sail a Jack at the Main Top Gallant
 mast head.

In Case of Parting and meeting a gain to Blue
 the fore top sail up and Keep the Hallards
 fast. - To be answered by Clueing the
 Main Top sail up and Keeping the Hallards
 fast.

In the Night to Show 2 Lights to be Answered
 by Showing three to Shew what Vessel is that
 to be Answered Stony Point.

N.B. Speake one on other every day once or twice.

For Cap! Stephen Imker.




Figure 17. Signals Chart²²

²² "Signals between the Hannah Ship, William Brigg, Cogdell & Schooner Green," Condemnation Proceedings of the Cogdell, HCA 32/294.

£5,000 (NC).²³ From his profits, Stanly also shipped full cargoes on letter of marques to the Caribbean. His brigs dominated North Carolina trade to the West Indies during the war. He also distilled molasses in New Bern and purchased a saw mill on the banks of the Neuse, evidently with the intent of producing his own barrel staves to pack the rum he manufactured.²⁴

Adapting to adverse circumstances proved another of Stanly's major assets. In August 1781, when British forces entered New Bern, they found Stanly's home, wharves, and warehouses abandoned. Knowing that the British commander had orders to arrest or kill him, Stanly fled with his family to Philadelphia. His family's vessel, the *General Nash*, completed the voyage, but the *Peggy*, carrying his furniture, was captured by a British frigate. Nevertheless, aided by prewar commercial and political connections, Stanly renewed his privateering efforts from Philadelphia. In addition, he outfitted at least one vessel, the *Carolina*, a brig of sixty men and sixteen guns from Baltimore, in 1782. While the British burned his New Bern operation to the ground, Stanly adapted and continued his activities from another city.²⁵

Several other North Carolina privateer owners acted professionally as well. Richard Ellis, whose wartime profits were second only to Stanly's, also began his career in trouble with authority. Ellis fled his homeland of Ireland amidst a series of debts and

²³ Condemnation Proceedings of the *Anne*, HCA 32/270.

²⁴ Hessel, *Profile of a Patriot*, 49-54, 57. According to his will, Stanly also owned 600 acres of land on the Georgia coast and over 4,000 acres of North Carolina property at the time of his death.

²⁵ Hessel, *Profile of a Patriot*, 82; Admiralty Papers 36/8179, Public Records Office, London, copy in the British Collection, North Carolina State Archives, Raleigh, hereafter cited as ADM; Henry C. Peden, Jr., ed., *Revolutionary Patriots of Baltimore Town and Baltimore County, Maryland, 1775-1783* (Westminster, Md., Family Line Publications, 1997), 7.

other criminal activities in the 1760s. He arrived in New Bern in 1765, along with his brother James, and began building their business. In 1768, Ellis apparently attempted to start a whaling enterprise. He ordered harpoons and dories from Boston for his sloop, *Sally*, but the vessel sank later that year. Governor William Tryon stated that Ellis was "accustomed to the sea from his youth, & consequently pretty well acquainted with maritime affairs." By the early 1770s, however, Ellis's ventures competed with other local merchants, and he evidently also opened a shop in Wilmington.²⁶

Like Stanly, Ellis handled his privateers like a businessman. He knew the importance of commercial and political connections. Ellis helped found the Friends of Liberty, a New Bern form of the Sons of Liberty, and served as a member of the safety committee. By 1777, Ellis had obtained appointments as commissioner for Port Brunswick and as a commissioner to outfit the state navy vessel *Pennsylvania Farmer*. In addition, Ellis accepted an appointment as Continental army agent for Port Beaufort, a post that allowed him to sell to Congress the very cargoes captured by his own privateers.²⁷

Ellis's exploits also shared, and in some respects exceeded, Stanly's boldness and daring. In June 1775, Ellis, accompanied by several sailors, stole three swivel guns and a small boat from Tryon Palace. Governor Josiah Martin, noting that the guns were taken to "Mr. Ellis's wharf," responded with an offer of a £20 reward for the capture of the

²⁶ Powell, *Dictionary of North Carolina Biography*, II, 152. William S. Powell, ed., *The Correspondence of William Tryon and Other Selected Papers*, (Raleigh: Division of Cultural Resources, 2 volumes, 1980), II, 234.

²⁷ Powell, *Dictionary*, II, 152.

"Thief or Thieves that committed this Robbery."²⁸ In the early months of the Revolutionary War, Ellis ran the British blockade with supplies of arms and provisions from Guadalupe and Martinique. In April 1777, he offered his privateers as participants in a rumored invasion of Bermuda stating that, "it would be of great service to me."²⁹ In 1778, Ellis approached several ship captains with a plan to attack linen yards located near his former home on the northern tip of Ireland. His arguments, however, fell on deaf ears, and the planned attack never took place. Approached by Ellis, Charles Biddle flatly refused stating, "No man but a thief would think of making money by such base means."³⁰

Ellis also benefited from the friendship of the state's leading politicians. Between 1778-1781, three successive North Carolina governors bought shares in his operations (See Figure 18). For example, Ellis wrote Richard Caswell in 1778 that the letter-of-marque *New Bern* had arrived and "should be glad to know in a day or two, what to do with your part of the Cargo."³¹ Later that year, Ellis wrote Caswell concerning an interest in the *Chatham*: "What part of the brig shall I charge you with, I do not think we can spare you more than 1/8, that will cost your 3,000 or very near it, but you may have 1/16 or less if you choose it." Abner Nash and Thomas Burke also owned shares in

²⁸ *North Carolina Gazette* (New Bern), July 7, 1775

²⁹ Richard Ellis to Cornelius Harnett, June 13, 1776, in Clark, *State Records*, XXII, 744-745; Richard Ellis to Governor Burke, January 15, 1779, in Clark, *State Records*, XIV, 252.

³⁰ Charles Biddle, *Autobiography of Charles Biddle, Vice President of the Supreme Executive Council of Pennsylvania, 1745-1821* (Philadelphia: [?], 1883), 120.

³¹ Richard & James Ellis to Governor Caswell, February 9, 1778, in Clark, *State Records*, XIII, 36.



Figure 18. Privateer Governors: Richard Caswell, Abner Nash, Thomas Burke³²

Ellis's vessels. Nash owned part of the *Fair American*, while Burke invested in the *Bellona*.³³

Unlike Stanly, Ellis never entered a formal partnership with any North Carolina merchants. He did, however, form associations with French merchants through the aid of Benjamin Franklin. Ellis most likely provided the impetus for French merchants moving their operations to Edenton and New Bern in 1778. In early 1781, the mercantile houses of L. Depaux, M. Sambeuax, and Messrs. Rainbeau and Roulhac began operating shops in North Carolina with Ellis's aid. Several of Ellis's vessels were actually outfitted in France, including the *Fair American*. French shipbuilders in Marseilles constructed the brig, owned by Ellis and Benjamin Franklin, but the British captured it off Portugal in

³² These three portraits are all in the collections of the North Carolina State Archives. Their origins are unknown, but the Caswell portrait is actually from a miniature dated to the 1770s. The Burke portrait is evidently from a sketch made of him before his death in 1783.

³³ Richard Ellis to Governor Caswell, June 28, 1778, *ibid.*, XIII, 174-175; Richard Ellis to Governor Burke, 7 Apr 1782, *ibid.*, XVI, 584; Condemnation Proceedings of the *Fair American*, HCA 32/328-3.

1780. Ellis and several French merchants also owned the brig *Favoruite American* taken off Corsica in 1781.³⁴

Like Stanly, Ellis also knew how to dispose of prize cargoes effectively. He owned warehouses in both New Bern and Edenton where he could store excess goods and wait for rising prices. Ellis had agents in America and France, as well as the West Indies, to determine the best places for cargoes to be sent. Although he outfitted several vessels for European operations, he also sent predators to the Caribbean. In June 1776, Ellis's letter-of-marques *Heart of Oak* and *Polly* returned to New Bern from Guadeloupe with two thousand pounds of gunpowder and sixty muskets with bayonets, all of which he sold to the state. His most successful privateer, the *Bellona*, commanded by Sylvanus Pendleton, sailed into New Bern with "the brig Elizabeth, Capt. Kelly, laden with indigo, and lumber, from St. Augustine, schooner Actaeon, Capt. Bunch, from New York bound to New Providence in ballast, a considerable sum in specie on board; sloop Capt. Tinker, from New York bound for New Providence, with dry goods; and privateer sloop Harlecan, of 6 carriage guns, 4 brass cahorns, and 8 swivels, fitted out of New York, commanded by Steven Snell. She had taken two prizes before Capt. Pendleton fell in with her."³⁵ In addition, the *Bellona* captured a British merchant vessel, the *Georgia*, in April 1779, and escorted it into Williamsburg presumably because prices for the vessel's cargo of wine were higher than at ports in North Carolina. The prize sold for nearly £15,000

³⁴ Condemnation Proceedings against the *Fair American*, HCA 32/328-3; ADM 36/9448.

³⁵ Richard Ellis to Cornelius Harnett, 13 June 1776, in Clark, *State Records*, XXII, 744-745; *North Carolina Gazette* (New Bern), September 11, 1778.

sterling or nearly \$850,000 in modern U.S. currency. As a professional, Ellis understood the importance of knowing when and where to ship his cargoes to find the best prices.³⁶

Ellis also understood the importance of good crews and fast vessels. Most of his captains and evidently some of his sailors came from the North. Ellis was known for recruiting "an uncommon Number" of New England sailors, "well acquainted with and trained to the Artillery."³⁷ Sylvanus Pendleton, a Rhode Island native, served for Ellis for nearly five years before the war in addition to commanding several of Ellis's privateers during the conflict. Ellis even lured officers away from the Continental Navy, such as Luke Matthewman. Ellis also understood that fast-sailing, heavily-armed vessels were necessary for success. His privateers were typically brigs armed with fourteen to sixteen guns and crewed by thirty to fifty men. Well armed and strongly manned, these vessels were prepared for prize taking.³⁸

Ellis also understood the importance of reinvesting profits and diversifying interests. For example, two months after the *Bellona* returned with the prize *Harlecan*, a former British privateer, Ellis sent out the same vessel with its original armament.³⁹ From his profits, Ellis bought and outfitted more predators for his operations. Although Ellis never achieved Stanly's level of success, he did invest in interests other than privateering. He operated a saw mill along the Neuse River, a small salt manufactory in

³⁶ *Virginia Gazette* (Williamsburg), October 16, 1778. The conversions are from John J. McCusker, *How Much Is That In Real Money?: A Historical Commodity Price Index for Use as a Deflator of Money Values in the Economy of the United States* (Worcester, Mass.: The American Antiquarian Society, 2001).

³⁷ Waightstill Avery to General Lillington, August 17, 1781, in the Emmet Collection, New York Public Library, copy in the North Carolina State Archives, Raleigh.

³⁸ Condemnation Proceedings of the *Fair American*, HCA 32/328-3.

³⁹ Bond for N.C. privateer *Harlequin*, December 16, 1778. Located in Treasurer and Comptroller Papers, Port Records Box 25, North Carolina State Archives.

Beaufort, and bought confiscated Tory land on the Georgia coast near Tybee Island with the idea of planting rice.⁴⁰

Ellis's professionalism, however, did not include adaptation to adversity. His inability to adapt and rebuild limited his success. In 1781, the British burned Ellis's wharves, warehouses, and several vessels. He evidently escaped harm, despite being named as an individual the British intended to take dead or alive. He apparently never recovered from these losses, since there are no vessels recorded as being outfitted by him after 1781.⁴¹

Other North Carolina merchants also acted professionally in their privateering enterprises, but none surpassed Stanly or Ellis in operational scale or success. Charles Biddle, a Philadelphia merchant, came to New Bern in 1777 when his home town fell to the British. In New Bern, he became a privateer owner, outfitting the sloops *Cornelia* and *Eclipse* during 1778-1779 (See Figure 16). Biddle never held the political or commercial clout of Stanly or Ellis, since most North Carolinians considered him a stranger. He married Hannah Shepherd, however, the daughter of one of the most influential politicians in Beaufort. In addition, for a short while he was business partners with New Bern merchants Spyers Singleton and William Hodge.⁴²

Biddle's management techniques highlight his professionalism. He commanded the vessels that he owned. This allowed him complete control over his investments. For example, Biddle, a seasoned ship captain, realized the necessity of properly trained

⁴⁰ Powell, *Dictionary*, II, 152.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*

⁴² Biddle, *Autobiography*, 111-112, 128.

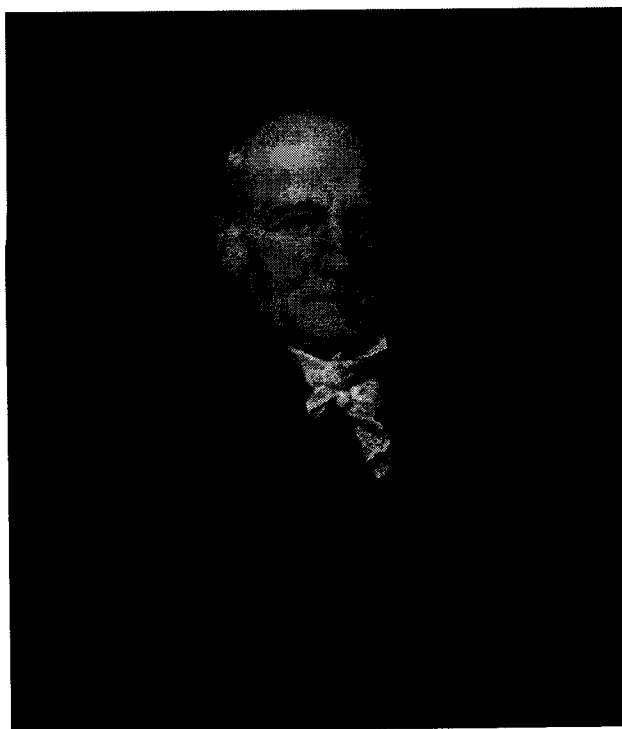


Figure 19. Charles Biddle (c. 1811)⁴³

crews. Departing on a voyage in the *Cornelia* in late 1778, Biddle had a crew of “seventy men, not more than five of whom could be called seamen.” In response, Biddle trained them by tying “a tally upon all the running rigging, with what it was called written upon it. By this means they were soon useful.”⁴⁴

Another example of Biddle’s attention to crew proficiency occurred during a voyage on the *Eclipse* in early 1779. Landsmen dominated the crew, so Biddle had to prepare them for rough seas. Having been at sea most of his life, Biddle understood that

⁴³ Portrait in private collection of Mr. Henry Windsor, on temporary display at the Lancaster County Historical Society, Lancaster, Pennsylvania. Painting by Jacob Eichholtz. In Thomas R. Ryan, ed., *The Worlds of Jacob Eichholtz: Portrait Painter of the Early Republic* (Lancaster, Penn.: Lancaster County Historical Society, 2003), 106.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 110-111.

exercise is an excellent remedy for sea-sickness, and wishing to make the young men on board learn to go aloft, whenever the weather was fair I had the hand pump taken up to the head of the main top-mast and there lashed, and every one of them that wanted a drink of water was obliged to go up, bring the pump down, and after they had taken a drink, carry it up again. For the first five or six days many of them would come upon deck, look up wistfully at the pump, but rather than go aloft would go down again. However, they were soon reconciled to it, and I believe it was of great service to them.⁴⁵

Although extreme, such methods turned landsmen into able-bodied seamen. These actions illustrate Biddle's professional management of his vessels.

Unlike Stanly and Ellis, Biddle could not afford heavily-armed brigs, and instead relied on small sloops manned by seventy men each. Unable to purchase a large armament for his ships, Biddle instead relied on ingenuity. In addition to the *Cornelia's* armament of six iron carriage guns, he added another fourteen wooden "dummy" guns. With these "weapons," Biddle successfully bluffed a British privateer and a merchantman into surrendering. As he stated, "I made all the show we could with our men and wooden guns, hoisted our Jack, ensign and pennant, filled the tops with men, and prepared to engage should they come out."⁴⁶ Although handicapped by a weak armament, he overcame the disadvantage through good tactics and professional management.

Biddle operated North Carolina privateers until the spring of 1779. His predators captured one more prize, and although the owners claimed the brig was actually American property, the admiralty court in New Bern condemned it. Biddle decided to return to Philadelphia in 1779, but the decision was not entirely his own. Although John Wright Stanly offered Biddle command of one of his letter of marques, Biddle declined.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 113-114.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 114.

His wife wanted him to return to Philadelphia and quit the privateering business. As he stated, "Mrs. Biddle was very much averse to it." He also noted, "I was afterwards sorry I had not gone, for they made short voyage, sold their cargoes well, and returned home to a great market."⁴⁷

Whereas the actions of John Wright Stanly, Richard Ellis, and Charles Biddle demonstrated that professionalism normally equaled success, there were professional privateer owners who failed. John Gray Blount, entered the business in the summer of 1781 (See Figure 17). A native of the small village of Washington, Blount was only twenty-five years old, but he had already established himself as a successful merchant. He entered the privateering business at an opportune time, since in August 1781 Stanly and Ellis were forced out of North Carolina by the British. Blount, therefore, filled the privateering void left after New Bern was occupied.⁴⁸

Blount used a variety of vessels in his operations. His first privateer was the galley *Tyger*. Traditionally built as coastal defense vessels, galleys were commonly used as privateers. Governor Abner Nash wrote to George Washington in 1780 that the British suffered severe losses because of "open Row Boats. These Boats, with forty or fifty-men on Board, take almost every thing that comes in their way. Two who went in company returned here this week, after a leave of about 20 days, in which time they took and sent in 12 valuable prizes besides burning I think 4."⁴⁹ Thomas Blount, John's brother and business partner, wrote John in September 1781 that he would "procure a Commission

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 120. Despite his wife's wishes, Biddle later took command of a Pennsylvania privateer, the *Active*, in 1782, and continued to operate privateers from Philadelphia.

⁴⁸ See Alice Barnwell Keith, ed., *The John Gray Blount Papers* (Raleigh: Dept. of Archives and History, 2 volumes, 1952).

⁴⁹ Governor Nash to General Washington, December 14, 1780, Clark, *State Records*, XV 176-177.

for the *Tyger* Galley.”⁵⁰ The Blounts initially intended to use it to attack British shipping involved in the Yorktown campaign. As Thomas explained to his brother, “The British have upwards of 200 Sail of Vessels, said to be very valuable, now in York river a fine Harvest for the *Tyger*.”⁵¹ Nevertheless, that plan failed because the *Tyger* capsized with the loss of two men while chasing a prize off the Georgia coast on October 20, 1781. A South Carolina privateer commanded by Captain John Howell rescued the crew and their commander Matthew Macomber.⁵²

Aside from the *Tyger*, the Blounts also outfitted the *Greyhound* and the *Wolfe*, both twenty-gun brigs, during 1781-1782. Although nothing is known concerning their complements, the brigs both saw action in the Mediterranean Sea. The thirty-six gun British privateer *Baluga* captured the *Greyhound*, commanded by Samuel Butler, after a three hour fight off the coast of Corsica in December 1781. Evidently released or pardoned, Butler took command of the Blounts’ other brig, *Wolfe*, in May 1782. The thirty-gun frigate HMS *Heartless* captured the *Wolfe* in the Mediterranean in 1782.⁵³

Though unsuccessful, John Gray Blount handled his operation professionally. He outfitted large, well-armed vessels and relied on captains he deemed trustworthy. Blount relied on his brother as a business partner, a choice not unlike that of John Wright Stanly. Yet, all of his vessels were captured or destroyed, and there is little evidence that they

⁵⁰ Thomas Blount to John Gray Blount, September 4, 1781 in Keith, ed., *The John Gray Blount Papers*, I, 19.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 19-20.

⁵² Charles C. Jones, *The History of Georgia* (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin & Co., 2 volumes, 1883), I, 499-501.

⁵³ Richard Dillon Pension, 1832, National Archives, Washington, D.C; Robert Avery Pension, 1832, National Archives, Washington, D.C.

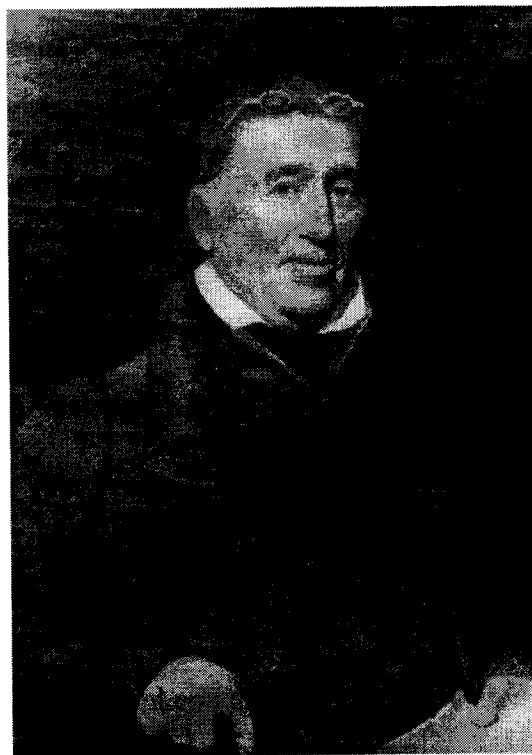


Figure 20. John Gray Blount (c. 1812)⁵⁴

succeeded in capturing a single prize. One wonders why he continued to rely on Samuel Butler even after the capture of the *Greyhound*. Moreover, Blount sent vessels only along the North American coast and Mediterranean Sea. Surprisingly, he neglected the Caribbean, a busy theater of operations that attracted the attention of John Wright Stanly and other North Carolina privateer owners.

Professionalism extended to the commanders and crews of private men-of-war. The most successful North Carolina privateersmen were those who had a strong seafaring background. For example, Sylvanus Pendleton, a Rhode Islander with nearly fifteen years of experience at sea, commanded North Carolina's most successful privateer, the

⁵⁴ Portrait by unknown painter, in *The John Gray Blount Papers*, I, iv.

Bellona. Benjamin Appleton, commander of the *Lydia*, had twenty-five years at sea. Professional privateersmen not only had seafaring experience, but in their years as merchant seamen likely gained familiarity with business. They knew not only the skills necessary to handle a vessel at sea, but also the importance of getting a prize cargo to port quickly. After all, if the cargo did not reach the market, the sailors did not make any money. Some of the more professional North Carolina privateersmen did quite well. Appleton, for example, made enough money as commander of the *Lydia* to start his own privateering business. As a partner of John Wright Stanly, he outfitted the *Smithfield* in 1781.⁵⁵ Another Stanly captain, Stephen Tinker, became quite wealthy, and after the war commanded the New Bern militia. Tinker's artillery battery saluted George Washington during his visit to the town in 1790.⁵⁶

Not all privateer owners were professional merchants. The "amateurs" oversaw operations that failed because of a complete lack of professional skills and business backgrounds. These men were typically doctors and politicians. Their lack of business experience resulted in poor professional decisions. For example, amateurs did not understand the importance of diversifying their interests. They invested their money in one vessel, and did not spread out their chances. In addition, amateurs' lack of experience resulted in them making poor decisions concerning management and personnel. Finally, these men did not have a merchant's understanding of how to dispose of prize cargoes effectively.

⁵⁵ Condemnation Proceedings of the *Anne*, HCA 32/270; Condemnation Proceedings of the *Smithfield*, HCA 32/452-15.

⁵⁶ Alonzo Dill, "Eighteenth Century New Bern, A History of the Town and Craven County, 1700-1800: Part VIII, New Bern at Century's End," *North Carolina Historical Review*, XXIII, (1946) 523.

Privateering was a speculative business, and investors faced difficult decisions concerning risk and reward. Investing in a group was preferable to owning 100 percent of one vessel. Although such a division of ownership reduced risk, it also lessened the profits an individual investor received from a successful prize action. Entrepreneurs rarely succeeded in privateering if their investment was limited to a single vessel. Investing the same capital in several privateers was a better strategy, since it increased the chances of capturing prizes. Amateurs, however, did understand the importance of diversification. For example, John Green, Alexander Blanchard, Edward Tinker, and David Barron put all their money into the unsuccessful privateer *Johnston*, which was unsuccessful.⁵⁷ Similarly, Doctor Isaac Guion and Doctor James Pasteur were sole owners of unsuccessful vessels. A British fleet captured Guion's *Salley & Betsey* in 1780 near St. Martin's along with an unidentified vessel that Guion owned. Pasteur's *Betsey* was captured in 1780 and his vessel the *Rising States* surrendered to a British frigate in 1782.⁵⁸ In each case, these men blundered because they were sole owners of only one or two vessels. By not diversifying, they ensured that the loss a single vessel could end their entire privateering career.

Successful privateering ventures required well-manned and heavily armed vessels. Most amateurs, however, apparently ignored this prerequisite. For example, William Borritz, Alexander Black, and Archibald Bell outfitted their brig *Hero* with only two carriage guns and eighteen men. Borritz, a merchant, should have known better, but

⁵⁷ Journal of the North Carolina Council of Safety, September 26, 1776, Saunders, *Colonial Records*, X, 876-877.

⁵⁸ Michael Gorman to Governor Nash, September 5, 1780, Clark, *State Records*, XV, 70-71; Thomas Ogden to Governor Richard Caswell, February 23, 1780, *ibid.*, XV, 342-343; Condemnation Proceedings of the *Rising States*, HCA32/438-2.

Black and Bell were both lawyers and small-time politicians. Not surprisingly, a British frigate captured the *Hero* in September 1782 as it left Beaufort on its maiden voyage. Similarly, the *Yorick*, owned by Wilmington physicians John Dorcus and John Moet carried only four carriage guns and twenty men when captured by the British in 1781. These vessels could not have defended themselves against most British predators, nor did they have the manpower necessary to operate their own vessel as well as man potential prizes.⁵⁹

Other privateering novices made poor personnel decisions. In the summer of 1778, when the *Bellona* brought the British privateer *Harlecan* into New Bern, the prize's crew was incarcerated. Charles Biddle shortly thereafter approached the prisoners and convinced thirty-seven of them to join him onboard the *Eclipse*. John Owens, an "honest Welshman" and small time merchant from the town, approached Biddle as he was marching the men to his wharf. Owens requested that one of the men, named Henderson, be allowed to go in his privateer despite Biddle's warning that Henderson had been a petty officer onboard the *Harlecan*, and "understood navigation, appeared to be a fellow fit for anything, and probably would take the vessel from him."⁶⁰

Owens ignored Biddle's advice and shipped Henderson onboard his only privateer, a small sloop commanded by Captain Gurling. They had sailed only six leagues from land before Henderson appeared on the quarter deck with seven of the crew and demanded the ship. Henderson and his mutineers set Gurling adrift in the ship's boat

⁵⁹ Condemnation Proceedings of the *Hero*, HCA 32/354-7; Condemnation Proceedings of the *Yorick*, HCA 42/162.

⁶⁰ Biddle, *Autobiography*, 121.

and set sail for New York. Owens later took a flag of truce and went to New York intending to retrieve his sloop, but the British authorities refused to consider the matter.⁶¹ Owens refused to take the advice of a more professional privateer owner, and he paid for the rejection with his vessel.

Amateurs also did not understand how to dispose of prize cargoes effectively. They simply did not know how to profit from their seizures. Doctor William Savage and merchant Joseph Westmore operated a large-scale business in Edenton until a British raiding party destroyed their wharf in 1781. Unlike John Wright Stanly and Richard Ellis, they angered the local populace by demanding exorbitant rates on imported goods. In 1780, Savage and Westmore attempted to sell a cargo of rum for three times what Stanly offered it for in New Bern. Later that year they had to destroy a shipment of fruit from the West Indies because it went bad before they could find a buyer.⁶² Savage and Westmore also angered Whig leaders when they refused to offer the Continental Army any supplies on credit or donation as did Stanly and Ellis. In early 1778, Ellis, acting as Continental agent, seized several hogsheads of rum and stands of arms from Savage's warehouses. Because of their inexperience, Savage and Westmore never achieved success comparable to professionals, and eventually both fled the state amidst heavy debts.⁶³

In addition to amateur owners, there were also amateur captains and sailors. These were the "gentlemen" who, despite having little or no experience in business or in

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 121-122.

⁶² Joseph Westmore Journal, Manuscripts Division, Duke University Library, Durham, North Carolina.

⁶³ *Ibid.*; Charles C. Crittenden, *The Commerce of North Carolina, 1763-1789*. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1936), 124-128, 143-145.

shiphandling, saw privateering as more of an adventure than a business. Amateur captains and sailors appear to have mostly been native North Carolinians. Because of their inexperience, they were not as successful as the professional northerners who sailed for John Wright Stanly and Richard Ellis. For example, "six young Gentlemen of the first families, and best expectations in this part of the County, who went Volunteers to try their Fortune," were lost in a November 1778 storm onboard the *General Gates*.⁶⁴

Charles Biddle noted another "adventurer" named John Shute onboard an unidentified privateer. A former Continental army officer, Shute "went to sea, expecting through the interest of his friends to do better than he could do by staying in the army." He acted so cowardly, however, that the other sailors had to restrain him in irons.⁶⁵ Individuals such as these were simply not cut out for a privateer's life.

Privateering was a difficult way to make a living, and professionals enjoyed significant advantages over amateurs. The amateur owners lacked the business skills necessary to operate a successful privateering operation. Their dearth of commercial knowledge and experience resulted in poor decision and failure. Most professionals, like John Wright Stanly, Richard Ellis, and Charles Biddle, reaped substantial profits, though John Gray Blount's experience indicates that even the professionals sustained losses. For the most part, however, merchants succeeded, while doctors, politicians, and "adventurers" floundered. The merchants prospered because they understood the need for sound management, trustworthy partners, investment diversification, properly outfitted vessels, and effective marketing of prize goods. Similarly, veteran sea captains

⁶⁴ Robert Smith to Governor Caswell, December 10, 1778, in Clark, *State Records*, XIII, 325.

⁶⁵ Biddle, *Autobiography*, 159.

and experienced sailors were much more likely to participate in successful prize actions than amateur adventurers or other landmen seeking fame and riches on the high seas. Professional mariners knew how to handle vessels and fight at sea. In the privateering business, professionalism increased the probability of success.

CHAPTER FIVE

CONCLUSIONS

Privateers did not single-handedly win the American Revolution. They did, however, offer a fledgling nation the most affordable form of maritime warfare. Private men-of-war captured as well as destroyed British commerce, and interrupted the logistical capabilities of the British war effort. Although not as numerous as other states' predators, North Carolina privateers played a small, yet vital role in winning American independence.

Although privateering was a method of warfare, it was also a business. Most successful privateer owners, therefore, were also merchants. In 1775, the merchant population of North Carolina was growing, and a new commercial class was developing. When war broke out, merchants divided into those loyal to the king and those who supported American independence. As the more influential loyalist merchants fled the country, independence-minded businessmen commanded the state's commerce. Patriots such as John Wright Stanly and Richard Ellis possessed political and commercial connections, capital investment, and the business skills necessary to manage privateering operations.

Regardless of their political loyalties, North Carolina merchants held a high social status in the colony in the turbulent years preceding the Revolutionary War. They gained political positions among the colonial elite. North Carolina merchants played a major role in the British Atlantic commercial system. At the beginning of the Revolutionary

War, merchants who leaned toward American independence had the political and financial support necessary to enter the privateering business.

With the coming of war, North Carolina's leaders faced a daunting task. How could they defend their state's seaboard? This problem, however, was not simply North Carolina's; each state faced this dilemma. The Continental Congress reacted by building a small, but completely ineffective national navy. Nearly every state followed suit, building small local navies that proved, for the most part, equally ineffective. North Carolina's state navy, consisting of three brigs and two galleys, was a completely useless drain on funds. Ultimately, the nation turned to private men-of-war to carry the fight to the British.

After Congress legalized privateering in March 1776, North Carolinians invested in, commanded, and served onboard at least eighty-four private men-of-war. In addition, captains and sailors from New England and the Middle Colonies flocked to the state's privateers when the British occupied Boston, New York, and Philadelphia. North Carolina admiralty courts condemned prizes and their cargoes, and Continental agents procured much needed supplies from vessels captured by privateers. During the war, North Carolina predators sailed the Atlantic, Caribbean, and the Mediterranean. They captured not only British merchants, but also enemy privateers, suggesting that their motivations were not always profit driven.

Although privateering has traditionally received scathing criticism for its focus on profitability, North Carolina's experience shows that patriotism fueled the business as well. North Carolina privateers actively engaged and took British and Loyalist predators

as prizes. Taking such risks indicates that they were more than willing to actually take on enemy warships as well as British merchantmen. In addition, only 5 percent of the North Carolina privateersmen known to have been captured chose life in the Royal Navy over harsh prison conditions. Even in the face of possible death, North Carolina privateersmen stood loyal to their cause.

North Carolina privateers also provided the state and the nation with much needed supplies for both subsistence and war. On two separate occasions, the winter of 1777-1778 and the aftermath of Camden in 1780, supplies from North Carolina privateers helped keep the Continental Army in the field. Although privateer owners sold war material instead of donating it, they did not charge excessive prices. In addition, private warships and letters of marque delivered commodities and provisions unattainable through normal trade including rum, molasses, and sugar as well as other consumer goods. Providing such materials raised civilian and military morale and directly aided the outcome of the war.

Successful privateer owners benefited from their experience as professional businessmen. They understood proper management and trustworthy partners, investment capital and diversification, and the necessity of properly outfitted vessels. While most merchants succeeded in their privateering efforts, amateurs such as doctors and politicians did not. Several North Carolina "gentlemen" entered the privateering business searching for a quick dollar and adventure. Without business skills or connections, most of these individuals failed. Most amateurs only discovered debt, bankruptcy, or death.

North Carolina privateers played a much larger role in the American Revolution than they have been credited with. These predators operated in their best interests as well as their country's, and severely hampered the British war effort. Motivated by patriotism and profitability, this "abandoned sett of wretches" helped gain American independence from the British Empire.

APPENDIX A:
NORTH CAROLINA PRIVATEER AND LETTER OF MARQUE VESSELS

Name	Type	Size	Owner	Captain	Crew	Guns
<i>Anne</i>	sloop	40	Stanly, Green, & Co.	T. Alderson	6	
<i>Bellona</i>	brig		Ellis	S. Pendleton		16
<i>Betsey</i>	sloop		T. Ogden and J. Pasteur	Ishol Tinker		
<i>Buckskin</i>						
<i>Carolina</i>	brig		Stanly			
<i>Caswell</i>				Thomas Williamson		
<i>Caswell</i>	schooner		Stanly	Samuel Palmer		
<i>Cogdell</i>	brig	180	Stanly, Green, & Co.	Stephen Tinker		45
<i>Committ</i>	sloop			Thomas Pemberton		
<i>Cornelia 1778</i>	brig		Charles Biddle, Spyers Singleton	Capt. Cook		
<i>Cornelia 1779</i>	brig		Charles Biddle, Spyers Singleton	Charles Biddle		
<i>Defiance</i>				Nicholas Mallet		
<i>Dolphin</i>	schooner		Ellis???			
<i>Don Quixote</i>	schooner		Stanly and Stephen Tinker	Stephen Tinker		
<i>Eclipse 1778</i>	sloop		Charles Biddle and W. Hodge	Capt. Simpson		
<i>Eclipse 1779</i>	sloop		Charles Biddle and W. Hodge	Charles Biddle	70	14
<i>Fair American</i>	brig	170	Ellis	John Smith	58	16
<i>Fanny</i>	brig	120	Savage and Westmore & Roulhac	T. Alderson	25	10 (4)
<i>Favourite American</i>	brig		Ellis	Jeremiah Morgan	41	
<i>Francis</i>	sloop			Thomas Baker		
<i>Flying Fish</i>	schooner		J. Richards	J. Richards		
<i>Fortune</i>	galley		Leonard Depaux	Marshall Boitar		
<i>General Gates</i>	brig		Roulhac, Rainbeau & Co. (France)	Capt. Cunningham		
<i>General Gregory</i>	brig			C. Schlemmhorn		14
<i>General Nash</i>	brig	120	Stanly, Green, & Co.	Wright Stanly		20
<i>Goodwill</i>	brigantine		Stanly, Green, & Co.	Stephen Tinker	40	10
<i>Governor Burke</i>	brig		W. Savage & Mr. O'Mally	P. Rainguenoire	40	12
<i>Governor Moore</i>	schooner	70	Stanly, Carson, and George Emblem	David Thompson	20	7
<i>Green</i>	brig		Stanly, Green, & Co.			
<i>Greyhound</i>	brig		Blount Brothers	Samuel Butler		
<i>Hannah</i>	ship		Stanly, Green, & Co.			
<i>Harlequin</i>	sloop		Ellis		25	6
<i>Harmony Hall</i>	brig	200	Stanly	Simon Alderson		
<i>Hazard</i>	brig		Ellis			
<i>Heart of Oak</i>	sloop	70	Ellis	G. Dennison		
<i>Hero</i>	brig	80	Wm. Borritz, Alex. Black, Arch. Bell	William Skillings	18	2 (3)
<i>Hiram</i>			Blount Brothers	Samuel Butler		

Numbers in () are the swivels the vessel had

Name	Type	Size	Owner	Captain	Crew	Guns
<i>Jack o' Lantern</i>	schooner			John Rigging		
<i>Jenny</i>	brigantine	80	Westmore & O'Connor	Stephen Carpenter	25	8
<i>John</i>	schooner		Stanly and William Allibone	Stephen Tinker	4	12
<i>Johnston</i>	schooner		Green, A. Blanchard, E. Tinker, D. Barron	Edward Tinker	12	4
<i>Joseph</i>				Emperor Moseley		
<i>King Fisher</i>	sloop			James Ducaine		
<i>La Baronne Dauzers</i>	brig		Roulhac, Rainbeau & Co. (France)			
<i>L'Amite</i>	brig	180	Ellis and Benjamin Franklin	Joseph Shute	53	16 (10)
<i>Le Basque</i>	brig	120	Savage and Westmore	Dominique Dascomb		
<i>Little Batchelor</i>	sloop			Miller Johnston		
<i>Lord Chatham</i>	brig		Ellis	John Cheshire		
<i>Lydia</i>	sloop		Stanly	Benjamin Appleton	50	12
<i>Nancy</i>	sloop		Stanly	Sameul Palmer		
<i>New Bern</i>	brig			Cochran Amis		
<i>Peggy</i>	brig		Stanly	John Davis	40	14
<i>Polly</i>	sloop		A. Knox, Wm. Brown, J. Chase, and D. Cartwright	John Chase	24	8
<i>Rainbeau</i>	brig	100	Savage and Westmore & Roulhac	Martin Ferns	25	10 (4)
<i>Rebel</i>				John Gales		
<i>Redmond</i>	brigantine	100	Stanly, Green, & Co.	W. Moffat		
<i>Resolution</i>	brigantine		Stanly	Joseph Meredith		
<i>Revenge</i>	unknown					
<i>Rising States</i>	brigantine	90	J. Webb, Blow, Baker, and J. Pasteur	Samuel Mansfield		25
<i>Sally</i>	sloop		Stanly and Matthew Carson			
<i>Sally & Betsey</i>	schooner		Dr. Isaac Guion and Abner Nash	Thomas Singleton		
<i>Sam</i>	schooner		John Wright Stanly	John Davis		
<i>Savage</i>			Henry Montfort			
<i>Smithfield</i>	schooner	40	B. Appleton	M. Macomber		
<i>Speedwell</i>	schooner	75	William Campbell and John G. Blount	George Dennison		
<i>Success</i>	sloop		Stanly			
<i>Tartar</i>	galley		Vessel put out by Edenton	William Proby	29	2
<i>Totten</i>	brigantine		Stanly and Steward Totten			
<i>Triumph</i>	brigantine		Stanly, Green, Titus and Thomas Ogden	Benjamin Northum		
<i>Tyger</i>	galley		Blount Brothers	M. Macomber		
Unknown	schooner		Charles Biddle	Joseph Biddle		
Unknown	schooner		Dr. Isaac Guion	Capt. Church		
Unknown	sloop		John Owens	Capt. Gurling		
Unknown	sloop		Vessel put out by Edenton	Capt. Cross		
Unknown	galley		Vessel put out by Edenton	Capt. Simons		
Unknown	galley		Mentioned by Abner Nash			
Unknown	galley		Mentioned by Abner Nash			
<i>William</i>	brigantine		Stanly	J.W. Stanly		
<i>William</i>	brig		Stanly	Wright Stanly		

Numbers in () are the swivels the vessel had

Name	Type	Size	Owner	Captain	Crew	Guns
<i>Willing Maid</i>			Henry Montfort			
<i>Wolfe</i>	brig		Blount Brothers	Samuel Butler		20
<i>Yorick</i>	brigantine	60	John Dorcus and John Moet	Stephen Hopkins	20	4

Numbers in () are the swivels the vessel had

APPENDIX B: NORTH CAROLINA PRIVATEERS

- _____, Corromantee, *Peggy*
 _____, Dartijoller, *Favourite American*
 _____, Duke, *Peggy*
 _____, Jackbean, *Favourite American*
 _____, Limerick, *Peggy*
 _____, Peter, *Peggy*
 _____, William, *Peggy*
 Alderson, Simon Sr., *Harmony Hall, Revenge*
 Alderson, Simon Jr., *General Nash*
 Alderson, Thomas, *Fanny, Anne*
 Amis, Cochran, *New Bern*
 Andrews, Timothy, *Fair American*
 Angus, John, *Carolina*
 Appleton, Benjamin, *Lydia*
 Austin, Daniel, *Lydia*
 Avery, John, *Wolfe*
 Avery, Robert, *Wolfe*
 Baker, Thomas, *Francis, Widow's Son*
 Banks, William, *Fair American*
 Bates, John, *Fair American*
 Bayliss, Isham, *Hero*
 Beall, Charles, *Favourite American*
 Bell, Charles, *Peggy*
 Bembridge, Miles, *Salley*
 Benil (Bowell) (Buell), Benjamin, *General Nash*
 Benton, Abijah, *Salley*
 Biddle, Charles, *Cornelia, Eclipse*
 Biddle, Joseph, *unknown*
 Blair, William, *Fair American*
 Blake, John, *Favourite American*
 Blanchard, Frederick, *Success*
 Blevins, Jesse, *Peggy*
 Blind, George, *Peggy*
 Blythe, Vivian, *Fair American*
 Boitar (Bolos, Boytar), Marshall, *Fortune*
 Bolton, Aaron, *Fair American*
 Booth, Robert, *Lydia*
 Brickells, Thomas, *Fair American*
 Brittain, John, *Fair American*
 Brothers, James, *Fair American*
 Brothers, John, *Fair American*
 Burgess, George, *Fair American*
 Burgess, John, *Favourite American*
 Burnes, Henry, *Peggy*
 Burrell, John, *Hero*
 Butcher, William, *Peggy*
 Butler, Jacob, *Tartar*
 Butler, Samuel, *Greyhound, Hiram, Wolfe*
 Calvin, John, *Wolfe*
 Canady, James, *Fair American*
 Canady, Richard, *Salley*
 Carpenter, Stephen, *Jenny*
 Carpenter, Thomas, *Fair American*
 Chace, Abraham, *Peggy*
 Chase, John, *Polly*
 Church, _____, *unknown*
 Cheshire, John, *Lord Chatham*
 Clark, Abraham, *Tartar*
 Colerus, Christopher, *Fair American*
 Collins, Thomas, *Smithfield*
 Combs, Robert, *Fair American*
 Conner, John, *Salley*
 Cook, _____, *Cornelia*
 Conyers, William, *Favourite American*
 Cooper, John, *Fair American*
 Cope, John, *Favourite American*
 Cortner, James, *Peggy*
 Cotton, John, *Fair American*
 Cotton, Thomas, *Fair American*
 Crandal, Lyman, *Fair American*
 Crohing, John, *Smithfield*
 Cunningham, John, *General Gates*
 Cunyngham, Isaac, *General Nash*
 Daniel, Stephen, *unknown*
 Dascomb, Dominique, *Le Basque*
 Davis, William, *Peggy*
 Davenport, Daniel, *Hero*
 Davenport, Jean, *Hero*
 Davis, John, *unknown, Peggy*
 Davis, John, *Betsey*
 Davis, Samuel, *Hero*
 Deane, Orlando, *Peggy*
 Dennis, George, *Smithfield*
 Dennison, George, *Heart of Oak*
 Dickinson, Joseph, *Favourite American*
 Dillon, Richard, *Greyhound*
 Doane (Doze, Dozier), Reuben, *Johnston*
 Dorrell, Thomas, *Peggy*
 Dowdy, William, *Fair American*
 Drew, Shadrach, *Lydia*
 Ducaine, James, *King Fisher*
 Erskine, Collin, *Fair American*
 Farrow, Jacob, *Lydia*
 Ferns, Martin, *Rainbeau*

- Fife, John, *Tartar, Hero*
 Fish, William, *Fair American*
 Flanagan, James, *Peggy*
 Flanagan, Patrick *Favourite American*,
 Flury, Henry, *Tartar*
 Foust, James, *Favourite American*
 Fuller, Reuben, *Smithfield*
 Fullerton, Andrew, *John*
 Furgus, John, *Fair American*
 Fuze, William, *John*
 Gales, John, *Rebel*
 Garret, John, *Hero*
 Gaskins, Thomas, *Tartar*
 Gay, Henry, *Salley*
 Gillies, James, *Smithfield*
 Gordon, Levin, *Hero*
 George, Shane, *Hero*
 Grant, Thomas, *Peggy*
 Grant, William, *Fair American*
 Grayback, Thomas, *General Nash*
 Gregory, Moses, *Tartar*
 Groves, John, *Fair American*
 Gucy, John, *Tartar*
 Guillard, Claude, *Peggy*
 Gurling, _____, unknown, *Salley & Bestey*
 Gurthing, Eliza, *Fair American*
 Hannan, John, *Favourite American*
 Harding, John, *Fair American*
 Harris, John, *Eclipse*
 Heaker, William, *Tartar*
 Helsey, Benjamin, *Fair American*
 Herbert, Joseph, *Favourite American*
 Hicks, William, *Favourite American*
 Hoodly, James, *Smithfield*
 Hooper, Edward, *Peggy*
 Hopkins, Stephen, *Yorick*
 Houseley, Samuel, *Hero*
 Howard, Simon, *Lydia*
 Hunter, Phillip, *Fair American*
 Hunter, Solomon, *Fair American*
 Hutchings, Henry, *Favourite American*
 Ingram, William, *Fair American*
 Jackson, George, *Tartar*
 Jasper, Selden, *Nancy*
 Jenkins, Charles, *Fair American*
 Johnson, Jeremiah, *Tartar*
 Johnson, Randolph, *Fair American*
 Johnston, Miller, *Little Batchelor*
 Johnston, Nathan, *Hero*
 Jones, Ephraim, *Salley*
 Jones, Henry, *Fair American*
 Jones, John, *Fair American*
 Jones, Roger, *Smithfield*
 Kagg, Robert, *Favourite American*
 Kelly, Hugh, *Favourite American*
 Lambert, Dick, *Favourite American*
 Lattimore, William, *Revenge*
 Leecroft, John, *Favourite American*
 Leigh, John, *Fair American*
 Leonard, Daniel, *Tartar*
 Letnie, John, *Fair American*
 Lewis, Elijah, *Fair American*
 Lloydford, William, *Fair American*
 Lockhart, John, *Fair American*
 Lockhart, Thomas, *Fair American*
 Lunker, Peter, *Favourite American*
 Lunker, Van, *Favourite American*
 Luten, Henderson Sr., *Tartar*
 Luten, James, *Tartar*
 McGuire, Peter, *Fair American*
 McIntyre, Andrew, *L'Amite*
 McKinsey, David, *Tartar*
 Mackey, John, *Peggy*
 Macomber, Matthew, *Tyger, Smithfield*
 Mallet, Nicholas, *Defiance*
 Mann, Thomas, *Tartar*
 Mansfield, Samuel, *Rising States*
 Martin, Martis, *Peggy*
 Martin, William, *Fair American*
 Martion, William, *Betsey*
 Matthewman, Luke, *Fair American*
 Meredith, Joseph, *Resolution*
 Minot, Amis, *Favourite American*
 Moffat, William, *Redmond*
 Montague, Norman, *Peggy*
 Montague, William, *Peggy*
 Moore, John, *Fair American*
 Moore, Calvin, *Tartar*
 Moore, Thomas, *Favourite American*
 Morris, Frederick, *Tartar*
 Morrissett, Jonathan, *Fair American*
 Morton, Thomas, *Fair American*
 Moseley, Emperor, *Joseph*
 Mull, William, *General Nash*
 Nations, John, *Yorick*
 Neal, David, *General Nash*
 Nichols, George, *Fair American*
 Nichols, John, *Hero*
 Nixon, Frederick, *Wolfe*
 Nohell, Valentine, *Tartar*
 Northum, Benjamin, *Triumph*
 O'Donnelly, Daniel, *Hero*
 Oates, Thomas, *Tartar*
 Oliver, John, *Peggy*
 Orr, James, *Wolfe*
 Palmer, Reuben, *Fair American*

- Palmer, Samuel, *Johnston*
 Palmer, Thomas, *Hero*
 Peer, John, *Fair American*
 Pemberton, Thomas, *Committ*
 Pendleton, Sylvanus, *Bellona*
 Perry, George, *Fair American*
 Phillips, Samuel, *Peggy*
 Piver, George, *Smithfield*
 Poppens, Jacob, *Favourite American*
 Porter, Edward, *Betsey*
 Powell, Charles, *Fair American*
 Poyes, Daniel, *Peggy*
 Proby, William, *Tartar*
 Raingenoire, Peter, *Governor Burke*
 Rains, William, *Favourite American*
 Reynolds, Thomas, *Peggy*
 Richards, J _____, *Flying Fish*
 Richards, John, *General Nash*
 Richardson, John, *Favourite American*
 Riddick, Henry, *Fair American*
 Rigging, John, *Jack o' Lantern*
 Riggs, Joseph, *Fair American*
 Rhodes, Henry, *Tartar*
 Rogers, Samuel, *Cornelia*
 Ruger, John, *Fair American*
 Rumberg, Alexander, *Favourite American*
 Rush, William, *Fair American*
 Russell, John, *Fair American*
 Russell, Michael, *Fair American*
 Russell, Thomas, *Fair American*
 Rutland, Sion, *Fair American*
 Saddlemire, William, *Favourite American*
 Sadler, William, *Favourite American*
 Savage, Peter, *Favourite American*
 Schlemmerhorn, Cornelius, *General Gregory*
 Senior, John, *Favourite American*
 Senior, William, *Favourite American*
 Sharpley, John, *Peggy*
 Shute, John, *unknown*
 Shute, Joseph, *L'Amite*
 Simpson, _____, *Eclipse*
 Singleton, Spyers, *Cornelia*
 Singleton, Thomas, *Salley & Betsey*
 Slater, Richard, *General Nash*
 Skillings, William, *Hero*
 Smith, _____, *unknown*
 Smith, James, *Favourite American*
 Smith, John, *Fair American*
 Smith, John, *Fair American*
 Smith, William, *Betsey*
 Sordenson, Peter, *Fair American*
 Spaniard, Emmanuel, *Tartar*
 Spaniard, Marino, *Tartar*
 Spikes, William, *Fair American*
 Squires, Charles, *Fair American*
 Stanly, John Wright, *William*
 Stanly, Wright, *Lydia*
 Steward, Samuel, *Peggy*
 Storey, John, *Peggy*
 Styron, George, *General Nash*
 Sumeral, _____, *Cornelia*
 Sweet, Job, *Fair American*
 Thomas, James, *Favourite American*
 Thomas, William, *Peggy*
 Thompson, David, *Governor Moore*
 Thompson, James, *Peggy*
 Tinker, Edward, *Johnston*
 Tinker, Ishol, *Betsey*
 Tinker, James, *Peggy*
 Tinker, Stephen, *Cogdell, John*
 Townsend, William, *Peggy*
 Treuboux, Andrew, *Favourite American*
 Troop, William, *Heart of Oak*
 Tucker, Proverb, *Favourite American*
 Tucker, Tom, *Favourite American*
 Turner, William, *General Nash*
 Twine, Samuel, *Tartar*
 Vandross, John, *Peggy*
 Ward, Enoch, *Cornelia*
 Welsh, John, *Fair American*
 Wendell, Isaac, *Peggy*
 White, Thomas, *Lydia*
 Whitepain, William, *Revenge*
 Whittemore, Jacob, *Fair American*
 Williams, George, *Hero*
 Williamson, Thomas, *Caswell*
 Willis, Jones, *Favourite American*
 Wirt, Jacob, *Favourite American*
 Wirt, Jasper, *Favourite American*
 Wressel, Nicholas, *Smithfield*
 Wynnes, Thomas, *Fair American*
 Wynnes, William, *Fair American*
 Yeomans, Reuben, *Hero*
 Young, John, *Smithfield*
 Young, Michael, *Tartar*

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