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SHIPBUILDING IN PORTSMOUTH FROM 1740 to 1800

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As full and as varied as the history of old Portsmouth is, still it is probably as a ship-building center that she exerted her greatest influence on the nation's career. If one should refer to each of America's most critical periods of conflict, he would find that the shipyards of Portsmouth have been greatly relied upon to supply the navy with vessels of sturdy quality, and that men of unquestionable talent have been drawn from her ranks. Nor has it been alone in the navy that this port has done her part, for she has created ships and plans for some of the most famous of American merchant craft. At one time or another, Portsmouth-built ships have pried into every important seaport on the globe, and have brought wealth, prosperity and fame to her owners wherever and whoever they may ~~be~~ have been.

It is the purpose of this paper to collect together some of the outstanding features of Portsmouth's maritime history from the middle of the eighteenth century to its close, and to try to bring to light the causes which have exerted their influence in bringing this New England seaport to her much revered position in the building of ships.

First, let us familiarize ourselves with a brief picture of Portsmouth's early history, for only by so doing can ~~one~~ we fully appreciate the depth and character of her later achievements.

The first settlers of New Hampshire were a few adventurers and merchants. They were not men who could be distinguished for their literary or religious characters, and they did not come to New England shores as Pilgrims. However, they were like them, for they were a bold and hardy few, forsaking their English homes in quest of better fortunes in a new world. They opened a path across the ocean and selected the wildest solitudes of nature as the scene for their experiment. The energy they displayed, their courage, perseverance and fortitude made them the terror of the Indians, the builders of a nation, and fitted them for the struggles of freedom against oppression. Just who were these men who took up their settlements at the mouth of the Piscataqua River? Though historians are certain that European vessels had sailed up and down the New Hampshire coast nearly thirty years before the first recorded date of settlement, nothing remains even in tradition, to show that they ever entered the mouth of the Piscataqua, or landed and explored the banks and shores of the sea. Unquestionably they were seeking furs and fish, according to Barstow's "History of New Hampshire," but it was not until 1623 that a fishery at the mouth of the river was established. [1]

In Martin Pring we have the first records of the exploration of the Piscataqua. This was in June of 1603,

[1] Barstow, George - History of New Hampshire - (Concord, 1842), pg. 21-22.

when he sailed up the river in his fifty-ton ship, the "Speedwell," with a crew of thirty men and officers. Failing to locate their cargo of sassafras, they returned down the river, probably effecting landings at the point where the river widens out and the banks, green and covered with strawberry vines, attracted the weary mariners. Eleven years later a much more enterprising character, Captain John Smith, sailed along these same shores, making records of the character of the land, and more important still, making a chart which he was to present to His Majesty Charles I upon the return to England. In 1622 Captain John Mason and Sir Ferdinando Gorges obtained from the Council of Plymouth in England, a grant of lands lying between the Merrimac and the Kennebec Rivers and extending back to the Canadian lakes. This tract they called Laconia, and in the interest of its development several merchants from London and other trading places joined together in a partnership under the name of "The Company of Laconia." This company was resolved to establish a plantation at the river site almost immediately, and to carry on the fishery there. As a result, David Thompson and Edward Hilton, who had been fishmongers in London, "established themselves on the west side of the Piscataqua River near the mouth of the Westerly branch, which they called Little-Harbor".[2] At this point, salt works were erected and salt was manufactured to a great advantage, since it was so necessary in the preserving

[2] Adams, Nathaniel, Annals of Portsmouth, (Exeter, 1825), pg. 10.

of fish.

Other industries began at this time and were carried on and developed on down through the years, adding to the causes for Portsmouth's development. Trading with the natives for furs took an early start with some of the settlers, others attended the cultivation of the earth and raised those articles which were essentially necessary for their support, and which they could not otherwise obtain.

In the fall of 1634 we are able to discern some of the first indications of the value of the timber lands about Portsmouth, for at this time Dixy Bull and a band of fifteen others began a series of piracies along the coast. Now what did these early Piscataqua Settlements do but unite and fit out four pinnaces and shallops manned by forty men, and with the aid of a brig from Boston, set out to punish the pirates, but only succeeded in driving them away.

For the sake of clarity, let it be mentioned here that even though Mason and Gorges had agreed upon the separation of their plantations in 1630 into Maine and New Hampshire, the boundary being the Piscataqua River, ships built at Badgers Island, Little Harbor, Seavey's Island or Strawberry Bank will all be generally spoken of as Portsmouth ships. For this city gave the Piscataqua basin its prominence, its support, capital and terminals for foreign and coastwise trade.

The separation of the two plantations or grants was confirmed in new patents in England, and Mason's we will

see was subject to the subordinate rights and properties acquired by his associates in the Laconia Company. For the security of their interests, a group of these associates obtained a grant of the township of Dover, while the remaining members including Mason himself, procured not long afterward, the Charter for Portsmouth. Walter Neal was appointed its superintendent and an agency was organized with several stewards having supervision of the departments of trade, fishery, salt - making, building and agriculture. Prior to the forming of these new plantations, the chief seat of business and population had been at Little Harbor, but now came a shifting and Strawberry Bank or Portsmouth assumed the leadership.

There the water is of sufficient depth for the largest ships and the natural advantages afford situations for all purposes of building and docking them. The surrounding harbor is so capable of defense that a part of it was to be made a very safe and commodious navy yard. But here we must stop in our political history of early Portsmouth and turn to a period which portrays this port near the peak of its distinguished civic positions.

I have tried to give briefly in a few paragraphs a background showing when and how Portsmouth came to be, and that ships and men of the sea formed the nucleus from which grew the maritime industry of shipbuilding in this New England port.

Along about the year 1740, a new era in the history of Portsmouth began. The primeval forests and the undeveloped

banks of the Piscataqua had given way to a small township between 1623 and 1740. It had been persistent in its struggle with the frontier, its wars with the Indians, and difficulties with Massachusetts, and with its own duly appointed Lieutenant Governors. Steadily this little township had won its way through these hardships and had gained in strength and solidarity. By 1740 Portsmouth was still poor, but she had at last stepped out on a sound political and economic basis and made ready to reap the benefits of its earlier well-fought-for battle for existence, progress and independent action. Furthermore, she was determined to assume a prominent position in Colonial and revolutionary history, as well as in the early civic life of the United States. This period of apparent lack of money and prosperity was not to last much longer. In 1752 John Langdon received a letter from Montreal stating that a shipment of goods had been received but "that prosperous times and plentiful money are still scarce here though our hopes are high for the future." [3] This letter though blurred with age, further acknowledged the new turn of events in Portsmouth. The acquisition of wealth arose chiefly from imports by sea, which in turn were bought with the proceeds of the considerable export trade in lumber, ~~ca~~ masts and fish. The wharves bustled with energetic stevedores loading and unloading the deep water craft and the coastwise vessels, and the merchants of the town showed the signs of a lucrative trade.

[3] John Langdon Papers, 1752, (On file at New Hampshire Historical Society, Concord, New Hampshire)

We can go no further with this rise in Portsmouth's enterprise without a consideration of the natural contributions to her development. Those who have stood on the wharves at the Piscataqua and looked out over the river and harbor, viewing the islands in the distance and rubbing elbows with a sturdy stock of Americans can understand the propelling elements of her growth. Those who have not had this opportunity have but to weigh these following advantages, some of which are noted in the journal of a Frenchman who visited Portsmouth during this early period. He said of Portsmouth: "There is every appearance of its becoming to New England what the other Portsmouth is to Old; that is to say, that this place will become the depot of the Continental Marine. The access to the harbor is easy, the anchorage is immense, and there are seven fathoms of water as far up as two miles above the town"....[4] In the winter time when other rivers and their mouths are frozen, the Piscataqua continues its flow, this being due to the rapidity of the current and the affect of the tide. In some ways this has been a disadvantage, for ships could only enter as the tide was coming in or was at the peak. Nevertheless, this feature kept the port open the year around.

The shore line about the area of Portsmouth has had an eventful history and many complexities. As the great ice sheet withdrew toward its northern bounds, the coast line rose, tilting an inland sea out of the estuaries in Rochester

[4] Law, Captain T. H., Portsmouth Book, 1916 ("Journal of a Frenchman"), pg. 43

and Epping and causing shoals and island to coalesce as the shore line advanced to its present position. These are the islands we find in the harbor to-day, as well as those seen up and down the coast, and the Piscataqua River forms the only noteworthy valley that discharges directly into the ocean.[5] It is made up of three streams that converge above Portsmouth, the Salmon Falls, the Cocheco and the Bellamy. Others empty into it at the Great Bay, the Oyster, Lamprey and Exeter. These rivers have been the highways to the hinterland, an important element in transporting the "mast trees" from the interior to the bay.

Though this ice sheet left a valuable harbor, it had a distressing affect upon the area of land which was tillable. Only a fan-shaped plain near the coast offered ease of cultivation on a rich residual soil. The soil ~~be~~was ~~ing~~ formed by the outwash of the rivers toward the sea, ~~and the fact that the sea~~ it having at one time flowed over the land leaving a silty soil. During this period in Portsmouth history the land provided the grains for the colony, but a marketable production was impossible. Much of the remainder of the area is rocky, hilly and covered by trees of many descriptions. Naturally enough these trees soon found their use, each one having a definite duty to perform on the wharves or ways of Portsmouth. The elm, both the white and red variety, is tough and stringy and was frequently used for the bottoms of chairs and bed-cords, and thus a potential

[5] Goldthwaite, James W., Geology of New Hampshire, (Concord, 1925), pg. 69.

export commodity. The sassafras is common in the moist lowlands and was in demand in both England and the Colonies at this time for medicinal purposes. The Locust was important as a fuel, but more so in its use as trunnels[6] for ships. A plentiful supply of birch was also found, and this fine tree was used in making bedsteads, chairs and tables, thus making a valuable cargo on many a lumber ship to Europe. Probably one of the most important trees was the oak, for which the area around Portsmouth boasts of four species. First, the black oak used for tanning, an industry still flourishing in Portsmouth, and also used as the main beam in the keels of ships. Secondly, there was the red oak abounding in the moist swampy soils and making excellent staves for molasses kegs and for dry calks. Another species of this red oak, the swamp oak, possessed great elasticity and was frequently substituted for whalebone. The yellow oak, which grows on ridges and hills, was the source of some of the best ship-timber and pipe staves in New England. Lastly, the scrub oak, but of no importance as far as the maritime interests of Portsmouth are concerned. The walnut tree held little value, except as a probable future export. According to Dr. Manasseh Cutler, the bark of this tree afforded a new property for making medicines. One variety, however, was used in making gun-stocks, and canes, thus an article of export. The Chestnut took its place along side of the oak as important timber for staves and

[6] A trunnel is an early nautical word meaning "tree-nail." When used in fastening parts of the ship together they swell upon contact with water and form a firm joint.

dry calks. One of the large trees along the shore was the Button-Wood which was used by the shipbuilders for windlasses, wheels and blocks. The pine also takes its place in the first rank of important trees and "more of this species have been produced in New Hampshire, and in the eastern counties of Massachusetts than in all America besides." [7] The white pine is the most outstanding species and is one with which we are most concerned, since it is the famous "mast tree." The timber of New Hampshire has been reviewed because it has ~~been such~~ made an indispensable contribution toward Portsmouth's shipbuilding industry, and few people are really aware of the variety and uses of each species. Semple declares in her book,"American History & Its Geographic Conditio that were it not for the fineness and abundance of New Hampshire's trees along the Piscataqua, her shipbuilding industry would have been but a dream by the opening of the nineteenth century.

Nature has given Portsmouth an energetic climate, one which geographers such as Huntington would class as a balanced optimim; nature has placed it near the centers of growing industry and population, and at a point within easy reach of the main trade routes. Its harbor gave ideal protection; the islands soon became ship yards, for they, like the mainland, were covered with a thick growth of timber.

We have discussed the land, its raw materials, and physical advantages; we know that England in her mercantilist

[7] Belknap, Jeremy, The History of New Hampshire, (Boston, 1792), Vol. iii, pp. 102 ff.

theories looked to the colonies for raw materials which she did not possess, and an outlet for her own finished goods; we have seen that fishermen made up her earliest inhabitants, thus setting the foundation for a maritime province; and records show that in 1749 the population of New Hampshire had doubled [8] and that in the main this population boasted of hardy Anglo-Saxon workmen whose shipbuilding capabilities were unexcelled. [9]

From this point we may peer into the industries which were at the fore in the middle of the eighteenth century, and which in Portsmouth made it possible for shipbuilding to thrive. The fisheries of course should be considered first, for they have been shown to be at the foundation of this port. The soil of New Hampshire furnished the trees and now the sea furnishes the province with another staple, that being the great abundance of cod. Its uses were varied: it furnished food for the people, fertilizer for the farms and an essential article of trade especially to the island colonies. Small-scale fisheries had been planted from the earliest times along the shores of the bay, at Little Harbor, Badgers Island, and The Isles of Shoals, and all of the small juttings of land had at one time or another been used as drying stands. At Odiornes' Point records show that an annual rental of two shillings sixpence was paid for

8 Barstow, George, History of New Hampshire (Concord, 1842), p. 186

9 May, Ralph, Early Portsmouth History (Boston, 1926), Chapter XI.

that privilege, and that alongside of the drying stands the fishermen fitted out their small vessels for the local catch.[10] Up and down the New England coast and on the banks of Newfoundland ranged more fisheries. Cod was plentiful, but in order to create a profitable business, the fishermen needed crafts much larger than those used for local fishing; thus came the building of schooners and shallops, the latter being propelled by both oars and sails. To this industry, more than anything else, do I attribute the independent character of the New Englanders of this period. Certainly it took an unusual amount of courage for a captain sailing his own vessel, built by himself with the aid of friends, to journey to Virginia with a cargo of fish to exchange for tobacco, or other goods. With only an apprentice to help him trim his sails, he braved the storms, fogs and treacherous coast for over four hundred miles. The honorable Sampson Sheafe had been such a man; born in 1681, educated at Harvard College and graduated in 1702, he turned his attention to the fishery. At this business he was most successful, and by 1760 he was building his ships to enter into the West Indies trade.[11]

Belknap declares that fishing ships were being built in all towns contiguous to the Piscataqua and its branches. Around Portsmouth they were generally set up on the banks of the river, but sometimes vessels of a hundred

10 Gooding, Alfred, The Portsmouth Book (Boston, 1916), pp. 44 ff.

11 Adams, Annals, p. 234.

tons and upwards were built two or three miles from the water. Here their keels were laid, using the black oak when possible and joining to this the ribs, possibly made from yellow oak, a tough and durable timber. It was a slow process from the laying of the keel to the stepping of the masts, but one can be assured that it was a fine specimen of workmanship when it was completed. To bring these vessels to the water was another problem. Often they waited until winter, and then drew them over the snow by teams of oxen, the number used depending on the size of the ship. Belknap quotes one instance of a vessel needing two hundred oxen to move it from its place of construction to the edge of a frozen river. Here it was placed on the ice, and in the spring floated down to the wharves. Ships, both fishing and coastwise, have been built inland to a distance of seven or eight miles; then taken to pieces and the sections removed to the sea in ordinary team loads and then refitted. [12]

Though Portsmouth and the region surrounding the Piscataqua was rich in timber, and her situation for shipbuilding the most ideal, it must be remembered also that the quality of workmanship greatly depended upon the nature and promptitude of the salaries of the carpenters. Records show us that in 1746 the British government let contracts to Portsmouth shipbuilders who asked nine to ten pounds per ton for their work. As has been pointed out before, this was the time during which the fortunes of this port were turning

[12] Belknap, History of New Hampshire, Vol. iii, p. 209.

for the better, much being due to the combined efforts of Governor Wentworth and Sir William Pepperrell. [13] In 1790 the best fishing-schooners and whale boats were being built for the sum of twelve dollars per ton for the carpenters' work, and approximately one-third of that amount for iron and rigging work. During the year 1791 thirty-three ships of over one hundred tons were built at the Port of Piscataqua, and fifty more of the smaller tonnage, thus providing almost continual work for the entire population of the city. It is little wonder that fortunes were made, and the years from 1750 to 1795 referred to as the "Golden Years" at Portsmouth.

Several leagues off the Isles-of-Shoals a cod of superior quality is caught during the months of December, January, and February, at which time the small Portsmouth-built vessels enter vigorously into the catch. The species of fish that is caught is very distinctly marked, the backs being an unusual grey color and the bellies white. From this singular variety of fish is prepared the "dumb" or "dun" fish for which the Isles-of-Shoals became quite celebrated. The fish, incidentally, were considered unfit for use until the month of August, by which time they had undergone a fermentation and a change of color, which doubled the price of the fish. From this fishery began a new market in far-away Bilbao, and we read from the "Annals of Portsmouth" that early in the season of each year a brig or a ship was

[13] The Portsmouth Times, March 16, 1912 (New Hampshire Historical Society's Portsmouth Scrapbook)

loaded with these fish, now preserved, and sent off to Spain. [14]

The small thirty to fifty-ton vessels then had their places of importance in the list of Portsmouth built ships. During the middle of the eighteenth century we may term them the "feeder lines" for the larger craft of the merchant marine engaged in the transoceanic trade. Before the French war the concentration of fishing craft about Portsmouth was quite large. The shores of islands and the mainland were covered with fish flakes being dried before shipment, and besides preserving the fleshy part of the cod, the fishermen extracted oil as a by-product from the remains. This was sealed in casks in answer to the growing demand of the French and Spanish leather curriers. Seven or eight vessels loaded with such a cargo left each year from Piscataqua for the coasts of Europe. The short ineffectual war of 1745 to 1748 had little affect on this commerce but the French and Indian War ten years later caused it much suffering. However, it is interesting to note that immediately after the treaty of peace, trade and shipbuilding again increased and the cargoes furnished by the "feeder lines" from the fisheries created the greater part of the remittances of Europe just before the outbreak of the Revolution. [15]

Naturally the Revolution was a serious blow to this fishing industry and the building of fishing craft, but as

14 Adams, Annals, page 260.
15 Belknap, History of New Hampshire, Vol. iii, p. 215

will be shown later, Portsmouth kept to the front and increased her reputation from the record of her ships built for the navy. After the war, the problem of the port was competition, and much of it was to be with Europe. I believe the spirit and understanding of these Portsmouth industrialists can be understood best from the following quotation: "It is, however, in the power of the Americans to make more advantage of the cod fishery than any of the European nations. We can fit out vessels at less expense, and by reason of the westerly winds, which prevail on our coasts, in February and March, they can go to the banks earlier in the season than the Europeans, and take the best fish. We can dry it in cleaner air than the foggy shores of Newfoundland and Nova Scotia. We can supply every necessary from among ourselves; vessels, spars, sails, cordage, anchors, lines, hooks and provisions. Salt can be imported from abroad cheaper than it can be made at home; if it be not too loaded with duties. Men can always be had to go on shares, which is by far the most profitable method, both to the employer and to the fishermen. The fishing banks are an inexhaustible source of wealth; and the fishing business is a most excellent nursery for seamen. It therefore deserves every encouragement and indulgence from an enlightened national legislature." [16]

One can rest assured that the above spirit manifested itself in a new energy in and about Portsmouth. At a short

[16] Ibid., vol. iii, p. 216.

distance from the port Thomas Odiorne, Esquire began the manufacture of sail cloth for Piscotaqua's leading industry. The legislature of the State granted a small bounty to encourage his enterprise, and to induce others to follow in his footsteps. Shipbuilders began ships with the prospect of a buyer upon its completion and the New Hampshire Gazette frequently printed ads such as the following:

TO BE SOLD

A New Schooner, About seventy tons, now on the stocks, and will be launched by the middle of July; also a quantity of lumber. Inquire of
(A Fishing Schooner) Isaac Williams[17]

In March, 1786, James Drisco put up for sale the thirty-seven ton schooner "Dispatch." She was three years old, built for fishing and was in fine condition. Ships of this sort were built to be used both as fishing vessels or cargo carriers in the coastwise and southern trade, and the fact that frequent sales of vessels a year or two old occurred indicates, in this instance, the thriving business activity of the port. Very often such merchants as Drisco would build a ship, then make a few profitable trips to defray the cost of building it, and then sell the vessel at a handsome profit. One may feel sure that business was fairly good during these early years following the war by giving attention to the Statement of the Fishery at

17 The New Hampshire Gazette, June 17, 1785 (Portsmouth, Edited by Daniel Fowle)

Piscataqua for the year ending 1791 which declares "the success of the fishery in this season has been uncommonly good." 18 Combining this statement with the appearance of ads for the sale of both new and used vessels, and the fact that these ads seldom appear in more than three issues should convince one that one form of the shipbuilding industry still flourished. We should not be deceived by generalities, however, for in the shipbuilding and merchant trade there were hardships mixed with prosperity. John Parker, Esquire, after a fair education in the local grammar school, and a wide experience in trade, ship work and navigation in his later years, embarked on a partnership in trade with William Rhodes in 1771. Through the successive losses of their ships at sea came bankruptcy and a break-up of the concern. By the good graces of Governor Wentworth, however, they were able to find another footing, but the top of the ladder for them was a long way off.

Cries of the lack of money as a result of the Revolution appeared in many papers, but the Portsmouth merchants found they could build a ship in exchange for cargoes of goods after the vessel had been completed. Such a condition was indeed not often encountered, but it merely serves as an example. Our shipbuilders of this period were mainly of the merchant class and generally had sufficient capital to finance the vessels they had ordered built. Just as fishing was a contributing factor toward the development

18 Belknap, History of New Hampshire, vol. iii, p. 227

of shipbuilding in Portsmouth, so also may the various forms of commerce be shown to materially affect this industry. In the first place it is difficult to draw a line between fishing and commerce for preserved fish and fish oil certainly became one of the most stable of export commodities. Portsmouth was a small city, her population was confined to about thirteen hundred homes and buildings and her inhabitants were nearly all connected with the sea. The most prosperous merchants such as Benning Wentworth, John Langdon, Pierce Long, Samuel Cutts, William and Joseph Whipple, John Wentworth, John Sherburne, Captain James Hackett and Nathaniel Meserve built and owned their own vessels. Their shipbuilding was carried on extensively on the several branches of the river (Piscataqua) for themselves as well as for many of the smaller merchants of the town who paid the builders chiefly in goods. Some of the larger merchant traders built their own ships and sent off ten or twelve and in one instance thirteen ships in a single year[22-23] (1775). In addition to their trading and shipbuilding business, they were all prominent in politics both state and national, and consequently with their economic and political influence, the prosperity of Portsmouth was carried ahead for many years as though on the crest of a wave.

Traders from the continent of Europe also realized the advantages nature afforded Portsmouth as a shipbuilding

22 Adams, Annals, page 258.
23 Ibid., pp. 258-260.

center and the capabilities of her shipwrights. In the years between 1750 and 1765 these traders came [20]"hither to build ships which they found could be done much cheaper and better than at home" and upon completion of the vessel, a cargo would be made up and taken back to Europe which, when sold, brought them much profit.

Naturally, the extent of trade acted somewhat as a barometer for ship construction, so let us acquaint ourselves a bit with its procedure. The general run of the recorded tonnages of the merchant built vessels was from two to three hundred tons, and for the most part these ships were engaged in the voyages to the British Sugar Islands with a lading of lumber, fish, oil and livestock. Here the cargo was sold, and the produce of the islands, which was gained in exchange, was sent back to the colonies in smaller vessels. The larger ships, on the other hand, took a lading of sugars for England where they were sold," and with the freight a remittance (often unprofitable) was made to the merchants of England for goods imported on credit the preceding year." [20] These vessels then loaded with British goods would return to New England furnishing their owners with articles much in demand by the colonists.

The disposition of cargoes in Portsmouth was nearly always announced by an ad in the New Hampshire Gazette or the Portsmouth Times; just as frequently too, were pamphlets and bills delivered to the various homes announcing the

[20] Belknap, History of New Hampshire, Vol. iii, p. 204

arrival of the brig "Friendship" direct from London with a great variety of merchandise. A typical ad appears in the New Hampshire Gazette for December 24, 1761:

PIERCE LONG

Hereby Informs His Customers and others that he has just imported from London a large assortment of Broad Clothes, Kerseys, Serges, and Half Thicks, with trimmings for ditto; Scallopt and plain gold and silver lace for waistcoats and hats; Cinnamon, Nutmeg, Cloves, and Mace; the best Bohea Tea by the dozen or smaller Quantity; Women's English shoes and Clogs; pewter dishes, plates, basins, Porringers and hard metal spoons, ---; Besides which he has a full assortment of all other kinds of goods which he will sell on the lowest terms for cash.

He likewise sells the best of West India Rum at 4-15S single gallon, and so in proportion for smaller amounts: Molasses 55S by the gallon; Sugar 11S by the pound; cotton wool 36S; Coffee 17S; Rice 5S¢ allspice 28S, and tobacco 8S by the pound.

. . . .

From Portsmouth other vessels loaded with timber and spars proceeded directly for the British Ports, where

their cargoes were sold, thence returning to their home port with exchanged goods.

Portsmouth was also active in the coast trade where her vessels exchanged West India commodities for corn, rice, flour, pork and naval stores; a part of which were re-exported to Nova Scotia and Newfoundland, thus producing bills on England for remittance. Thus we see the common routine of trade between the mother country, her colonies, and Portsmouth in the years from 1740 to the time of the Revolution.

As for foreign trade in comparison with the national, it was not so heavy. However, several vessels a year departed for the French and Dutch West Indies with cargoes of lumber, fish, oil and provisions which were exchanged for molasses to be distilled in New Hampshire. One vessel a year set out for the Azores or the Canaries with pipe staves, fish and other provisions, and returned with a cargo of wine. If a balance occurred in the transaction, it was paid off in cash rather than by creating bills of exchange. Frequently a ship which had been to London or Liverpool would return to Portsmouth by way of Lisbon or Cadiz where they would purchase salt and fruit for home consumption,[21] and this appears to be the extent of Portsmouth's foreign trade up to the time of the Revolution. However, after 1775 trade increased with the French and Dutch ports, due to British restrictions, but I hardly

[21] Ibid., vol. iii, p. 205.

believe with as much profit as of before.

In the few years succeeding the Revolution the partial imposts and impolitic restrictions of our own government prevented foreign vessels from loading in American ports. Reciprocal action was taken by Foreign powers and obviously a slump in trade was followed by a slump in ship construction in the merchant marine. This assumption may be based somewhat on the following quotations: "The war (meaning the Revolution) put an end to all commercial intercourse with Great Britain and its dependencies, with whom the trade of this town had been most exclusively carried on, --- nothing is more convincing than fact and experiment. During the late war the trade in lumber was suspended and the people were obliged to engage in husbandry."[24] This statement does not necessarily mean the complete abandonment of trade and commerce, but only in an industry which was so closely associated with shipbuilding. Many of those who left lumbering had devoted their time to the cultivation of corn, a product which had heretofore been an import but which between 1776 and 1781 became a leading export. In 1772 Portsmouth was importing 4006 bushels of corn, while in 1780 she was exporting 6711 bushels.[25]

From the Customs House Reports in Portsmouth, the following list of vessels entered and cleared on May 21,

24 Belknap, History of New Hampshire, vol. iii, pp. 200-212.

25 Ibid., vol, iii, p. 213.

1773, and it will give some conception of the volume of business carried on by the merchants of this port:[26]

Ship		Inwards	Captain		From
Schooner	Defiance	-	Roderick Morrison	-	Guadaloup
"	Nancy	-	John Bernard	-	Tobago
"	Squirrel	-	Thomas Harmon	-	Montferrot
"	William	-	Joseph Toppan	-	Guadaloup
"	Brittania	-	Joseph Stanwoort	-	Philadelphia
"	Martha	-	Amos Toppan	-	Philadelphia
"	Nonpariel	-	Robert Follete	-	Newfoundland
Sloop	Clatessa	-	Noah Miller	-	New London
"	Endeavour	-	James Hovey	-	North Carolina
"	Free Love	-	John Conulin	-	New York
"	Russel	-	Nickolas Martin	-	Maryland

26 The New Hampshire Gazette, May 21, 1773
(Baker Library Files)

Outward

Ship	Captain	To
Brig Widow's Son	- ---------	- West Indies
" Resolution	- Samuel Hatch	- " "
" Sally	- Ben. Gunnison	- " "
Ship Venus	- Nat. Marshal	- " "
Sloop Beneater	- William Welcott	- " "
" Friendship	- Abraham Parsons	- " "
" Friendship	- Eleazar Looding	- Maryland
" Russel	- Nicholas Martin	- "
" Sally	- Stephen Summers	- New Haven
Schooner Lydin	- John Harmon	- Newfoundland
" Corner-Copie	- John Blunt	- "
Brig William and Nancy	- William White	- "
Schooner Greyhound	- Abraham Trestethem	- Maryland
Sloop Clarissa	- Noah Miller	- New London

Choosing the months at random over an eleven-year period, as is shown in the succeeding statistics, the Piscataqua merchants evidently increased their volume of business, which in turn meant the construction of more merchant ships up to the eve of the Revolution. We are not, however, able to find the individual record of each ship operated by the Portsmouth trader in order to ascertain which wharf or who its builder was.[27]

27 Baker Library afforded the only available documents for long periods of study.

Number of Merchant Ships	Date
15	September 7, 1756
18	January 14, 1761
13	October 3, 1765
14	August 11, 1768
28	May 21, 1773
18	February 3, 1774
24	July 21, 1774 [28]

Nevertheless, to substantiate these reports there are letters and documents which show the trend and activity of the shipbuilding industry during these years, and if we add a few paragraphs concerning the eminent builders to these reports, it should be convincing evidence of this industry's status.

Probably one of the most outstanding men of the few years preceding the Revolution was John Langdon. He was born in 1740 into one of New England's most prosperous merchant families. Langdon, after a mercantile education in the counting room of Daniel Rindge, entered upon a seafaring life which he followed until the first year of the war.[29] His ability and enterprise made him a most successful man and in recognition of his achievements, Congress appointed him agent for building ships of war in 1778. He was also the agent for supplying the materials for the "America" 74,

28 The New Hampshire Gazette Files, Issues from Sept., 1756 to July 21, 1774.
29 The Langdon Papers, New Hampshire Historical Society Files, Concord, New Hampshire.

our first "line of battle" frigate, and which will be described later on in this paper.

Another member of this merchant family was Woodbury Langdon, an older brother of John Langdon. This illustrious merchant has left letters and papers which give us his personal reaction to the ~~roar~~ war in relation to trade and shipbuilding. The following is an example.

Portsmouth, Dec. 17, 1774

"Messrs. Eastman and Webster

Gents

After you went from hence I had both our contracts copied over properly ready for each of us to sign, and intended to have come over to Salisbury next week to have them signed provided you wrote me that you accepted of my proposal which you have now done by Mr. Hackett, and I looked up on it that everything was clear and settled, but quite unexpectedly the day after you went from hence some hundreds if not thousands of men went to the Fort as it is said and have taken from thence all the Arms and Powder, fearing that the King's Troops might come and deprive the Province of their Arms, Ammunition, etc., as has been reported is intended. What will be the event of this no man can tell. It is a matter of very considerable importance, and if it should be possible that the ministry should bring this town into the same situation as Boston, as it

is plain they are embracing all opportunities to injure us, you are sensible that no man here could do anything with ships. Therefore considering the very critical situation of matters here at present, I cannot think of contracting for any more ships for the present until I see a better prospect. Whenever I see the way clear to build another ship I shall certainly call upon you before I agree elsewhere, but at present the prospect is very bad and I fear I shall build no ships next season except those two which I agreed with Mr. Hackett for some time past. As soon as I see a better prospect I shall wait upon you and

An y^r Ho. Servt.

Wy: Langdon. [30]

Other letters of interest acquaint us with Major Hackett, Captain Ladd, Robert Parker and John Flagg:

At a meeting of the Proprietors of the "General Sullivan," a merchant ship converted to a privateer, the captaincy of the vessel was entrusted to Thomas Dalling. It had been voted that Captain Ladd, a shipbuilder in Exeter, be elected to rebuild the "General Sullivan" but since Major Hackett's reputation seemed better and his prices lower, the contract was changed and Ladd was paid for what he had done and accordingly, Messrs. Hackett, Hill and Paul were to take the vessel, lengthen her for two more guns, calk, iron and fix her for a ship as agreed by Captain Dalling. The proprietors agreed to pay Hackett

30 The New England Historical & Genealogical Record,

"fifteen hundred pounds, lawful money in cash and give them one barrel of New England rum, proprietors to find iron-work, pitch, turpentine, and oakum." 31

Colonel James Hackett (also spoken of as Major) was of Exeter but seems to have resided most of the time in Portsmouth. He was a noted shipbuilder and a man of great enterprise and energy. His services were greatly used during the Revolutionary War in fitting out armed vessels for the navy.

Another man mentioned in the above extract from the meeting of the Proprietors of the "General Sullivan" was Colonel Eliphalet Ladd, who was born in Exeter in 1744 but moved early to Portsmouth and became a noted merchant and shipbuilder.

John Flagg had come to Portsmouth in 1770 and married Sarah Odiorne, the daughter of one of Portsmouth's socially eminent families. Flagghad spent most of his youth around the ships of his home port and as soon as he was able he was given a voyage on a merchant schooner. More voyages and experiences followed, and by the time he was twenty-four years old he was master of his own ship. He, as many of his contemporaries, had thought much of having a ship-building company of his own, but this dream did not materialize until nearly the close of the eighteenth century when Flagg with his brother, gave up making voyages and took to building ships. The "Jason" was their first ship and was

31 Ibid., Vol. 23, pp. 50-59.

soon engaged in a profitable trade with Lisbon.

In another record we find that Captain Robert Parker was commander of the schooner "McClary" and the ship (frigate-built) "Portsmouth", both of which were built at, and sailed from Portsmouth as privateers during the Revolution. Both of these vessels were well-built and apparently very successful in captures, proving the ~~medal~~ mettle of the Piscataqua builders. [32]

Again we come across a reminiscent paragraph in Brewster's "Rambles About Portsmouth" in which he says: "We may imagine, a few years before the Revolution, a ship of perhaps 250 tons -- a large vessel for those times -- fitted out by Captain Cutts at a wharf near by, with a freight for the West Indies, to proceed thence to Spain or the Mediterranean for a return cargo." [33]

The following is an original account of the interest displayed in launching a vessel typical of the years between 1740 and 1765. "Launching a ship in these early times was an event of great importance, and always attended by all persons of both sexes living in the vicinity, who expected an ample supply of good cheer. We read in the Life of Sir William Pepperrell that on the occasion of his launching a vessel on the Saco, he allowed and sent down to his agent a barrel of wine and a barrel of rum for the festivities of the occasion and that the vessel was launched with her sails bent, it being dangerous tarrying on account of

32 Ibid., Vol. 23, pp. 50-59
33 Brewster, Charles W., Rambles About Portsmouth, (Portsmouth, 1869), Vol. II, pp. 148-149.

hostile Indians, and expensive to keep the men upon pay." [34]

Notice of the construction of the "Friendship," which was a Portsmouth built vessel according to the New England Register, is seen on the Clearance lists of the Customs House in Portsmouth in successive months for a number of years, yet data on her building and the logs of her voyages are not to be found in our local records. This exemplifies the extreme lack of material on most of the merchant built vessels of Portsmouth. The reports and notices that have been given are the result of a page by page search through letters, documents and early papers, and they acknowledge only the fact that this industry was paramount in the industrial activities of the inhabitants of this port. Accordingly we must make this the prime motive of the essay, that is, that shipbuilding was Portsmouth's heritage and through it she achieved her high position in Colonial history. Earlier in the paper we have ~~shown~~ seen the natural and circumstantial advantages upon which Portsmouth began her eager advance; to complete this picture there are two important branches of ship construction which must be considered. The first is our acquaintance with the "Mast Fleets," and secondly, naval shipbuilding.

Let us consider for a moment the direct relation of the great pines of New Hampshire to the most singular

[34] May, Ralph, Early Portsmouth History (Boston, 1926), p. 215. (Taken from, "Vessels of War Built at Portsmouth by Captain George Henry Preble)."

of industries, the "mast fleet." In the sixteenth century Spain was the mistress of the world, the queen of the seas and the terror of all the nations of Europe. England, however, was gradually growing stronger. Her government saw the great need of colonies in an imperialistic way; her merchants had their eyes upon new markets. The realization slowly dawned upon the English monarchs that to surpass Spain meant the development of a vigorous mercantile system, and a part of this system included the building of ships, and many of them, and to fill them with her sailors and adventurers and send them all over the world. England achieved her position, she conquered the Spanish, outstripped the French and the Dutch, and finally put herself at the head of the world. In this race for position the lumber and masts from the Piscataqua had a profound influence.

All through the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries ships were being built in Portsmouth especially for the mast trade. They were of about four hundred tons burden and were able to carry a cargo numbering from forty-five to sixty-five masts. In addition and showing the importance of the lumber, these ships had the privilege of wearing the King's Jack and were escorted by a special convoy from his majesty's fleet. Frequently when a ship was not available, or the one on the ways was not yet completed, these masts were made into huge rafts shaped and rigged like a vessel with additional supplies of lumber

fastened aboard it. One of these rafts made the passage to Europe in twenty-six days.

The mast fleets at one period early in colonial history were the curriers of the sea, for they were the surest and quickest means of communication between the two continents.

The British Government paid a premium of one pound per ton for masts, yards and bowsprits. The masts were not to exceed thirty-six inches at the butt, and the length was to be no longer than it was inches in diameter. A good mast brought from ninety-five to one hundred fifteen pounds to the owner of the grant from whence they were taken. Up until the time of the Revolution, the King dispatched special convoys, one being Commissioner Cartwright, to the Piscataqua in order to mark the most select trees for his government. An arrow was placed on all white pines twenty-four inches in diameter three feet from the ground, and it was especially stipulated in the Royal Grant that all pines fit for masting the Royal Navy were to be carefully preserved. If by chance they were cut for any other purpose, the grant was forfeited as punishment.

To fell these trees was quite a task, for a tree thirty to thirty-six inches in diameter and from two hundred to three hundred feet in length could very easily be broken if care was not taken. After being trimmed of its branches, many of which were used for spars, the trunk was moved to the banks of the rivers or to the shore by yokes

of oxen, often times forty being required to move a single tree. When a mast was to be drawn through the forest, a straight path was cut, leading to the bank of the river. Another mode of conveyance was to suspend one end of the mast from the axle connecting two wheels and letting the other end drag. According to Belknap, these wheels were often sixteen to eighteen feet in diameter in order to clear the rocks and stumps in the path. [35]

On May 17, 1775 documents show that ships still arrived for masts to sell in Europe or use in the Royal Fleet, but the people forbade their exportation and used them to build the ships for the Colonial Navy during the War for Independence. [36]

Shipbuilding as an outlet of civic industry and enterprise appeared in very vigorous form at the outbreak of the Revolution through the naval orders of the Continental Congress. However, the fifty-four gun "Faulkland" had been built in 1690; the thirty-two gun "Bedford" (galley) in 1696; and the next ship of importance launched on the Piscataqua was the forty-gun "America," built in 1749. Beginning with the "America," the following ships were built under authority of the navy. (The first "America" was for the Royal Navy).

35 Belknap, History of New Hampshire, vol. iii, Chapter XIII.

36 The Granite Monthly, Article, The Piscataqua Mast Fleet, by Oliver L. Frisbee, Vol. 49, pp. 19 ff.

NAME	GUNS	YEAR	DATA
1. America	-50-	1749	
2. Raleigh	-32-	1776	- Dimensions, 131.5; gun deck 110.7; keel, 34.5; breadth 11; depth [illegible]; 697 tons; 220 men. (as given in British Navy List after her capture)
3. Ranger	-18-	1776	- Captured at Charleston, S. C., by enemy fleet, 1780. Her armament was six pounders.
4. America	-74-	1782	
5. Crescent	-32-	1796	
6. Scammel	-14-	1798	- Revenue Schooner, 187 tons, cost $20,000. Sold in 1801 for $8,200.
7. Portsmouth	-24-	1798	- 593 tons. Cost $59,600. Sold at Baltimore, 1801, for $34,366. Crew 220.
8. Congress	-36-	1799	- 1268 tons, 344 men. Cost $197246. Broken up at Norfolk, Va., 1836. She brought to the United States the first Ambassador from the Barbary powers. [37]
9. Congress	-38-	1799	- A Frigate. [38]

The "America" 44, launched in 1749, was the third vessel of war built at Portsmouth, and to-day a model of her may be seen in the cabinet of the Portsmouth Athenaeum. It is a beautiful piece of work in mahogany, planked up as a ship would be, except that the planks of the upper deck and the forecastle and quarter decks are left off so that the beams, carlines, knees and gun mountings may be seen.

37 The New England Historical and Genealogical Register, 1868, Vol. 22, pp. 393-402. (Article - Vessels of War Built at Portsmouth, New Hampshire).

38 From the list of Naval Vessels built at Portsmouth compiled by Rear Admiral W. D. MacDougall, Commandant, U. S. Navy Yard, Portsmouth, New Hampshire, by Ralph May, (Boston, 1926), p. 297.

The ship model was a gift of Madame Elwyn, daughter of Governor Langdon.

The story of this ship is quite interesting. On March 13, 1746 Sir William Pepperrill sent a message to Governor Wentworth announcing that the Lord Commissioner of the Admiralty had directed the Honorable Peter Warren to build four ships of war in New England. Pepperrill was to agree with some shipwright on the erecting and building of one of these on the Piscataqua, and it was Pepperrill's desire that Wentworth select a board to estimate the value for such a ship of "44" guns. This board reported that for such a ship "nine pounds per ton would be a fair price for the government to give for the vessel completely fitted with 44 guns." 39

Accordingly, Sir William Pepperrill made a contract with Colonel Nathaniel Meserve for the construction of the ship. Very little is known concerning the procedure of the ship's carpenters, or any of the hardships they encountered; however, we do find in the Portsmouth Records that the ship was set up in the stocks "at the north part of the city on the main land." 40

The ship was launched in 1749 and according to Pepperrill's biographer, the vessel was acclaimed one of the best frigates in the British Navy. After her convoy set out for England, little trace can be found of this

39 Portsmouth Times, March 16, 1912. (Reprint of Letter from Sir Wm. Pepperrell to Governor Wentworth, March 13, 1746)

40 Ibid., March 16, 1912, (Reprint of Pepperrell's letters)

this Portsmouth ship. In the British Navy Lists for 1755 she was apparently classed as "an ordinary," which probably meant that she did not prove herself to be the most durable bit of construction as was customary from the Portsmouth Yards.

From the early vicissitudes of Colonial life emerged men of sterling quality and ability. One of these men was Nathaniel Meserve, whose mark of genius was most certainly recognized in the activities of the Granite State in these trying years. Young Meserve learned the trade of a carpenter or "joyner" while working with his father at Newington. Shortly after his marriage he moved to Portsmouth where he soon became identified with its life and the life of the colony in a public, political, educational and military capacity. From his first activities as a carpenter, he set out on a career as a shipbuilder, and from 1740 until the time of his death, he was the owner and the operator of the largest shipyard in Portsmouth, if not in the colonies. His shipyard was located in the northern part of the city, and adjoining it he built a colonial home which is still standing at 53 Raynes Street. Meserve distinguished himself also in a military way, for he was selected to lead two hundred of his carpenters on an expedition against Louisburg, and the resulting success was attributed to the swiftness and ease with which these men constructed large sledges on which the cannon were carried through the marshes. Colonel Meserve died in 1758 from a raging small-pox plague.

The Raleigh was the first American man-of-war built in New Hampshire and a bronze tablet at Portsmouth to-day commemorates her memory.

On Rindge's Wharf, Portsmouth,
May 21, 1776
Six Weeks Before
The Declaration of Independence
There was Launched
The Continental Frigate "Raleigh"
The First American Man-of-War
Built on the Piscataqua,
Keel Laid March 21, 1776
Act of Congress Dec. 13, 1775
(Erected by the Piscataqua Pioneers, 1926) [42]

On December 13, 1775 the Continental Congress ordered the construction of thirteen ships of war, one of which was to be built in Portsmouth. At the same time, Congress authorized the purchase of eight merchant ships which were to be converted into cruisers for patrolling the American coast. These acts signalized the beginning of the American Navy. The plans of the "Raleigh" designated her a 32-gun frigate, her armament to be 12-pounders, and her keel was laid on the stocks at what is now Rindge's Wharf. The Messrs. Hackett, Hill and Paul were the contracting builders and the supervision was under Captain Thomas Thompson, an able seaman and an excellent shipbuilder. Work was pushed along on the "Raleigh" as rapidly as possible so that by May 21st she was ready to be launched. However, so rapid had been her construction that it was impossible to secure her armaments, ammunition and sails before August. By the twelfth she was ready to sail and

42 The Granite Monthly, Vol. 60, pp. 558 (Article by Joseph Foster on "The Raleigh")

with a picked crew, Captain Thompson set out to meet the "Alfred" and thense to proceed to France for supplies which were waiting to be transported to America. The "Raleigh" and "Alfred" had several running battles en route, and the latter proved itself a burden for the heavier and faster "Raleigh", though their encounters were quite successful. In the second engagement the Raleigh sailed swiftly into a convoy of British ships sailing for the West Indies. Captain Thompson with several well-directed broadsides completely destroyed the "Druid" and then under full sail took out after the "Alfred." The return trip from France brought the loss of the "Alfred" through its capture by the British. Thompson was removed from his command for not trying to recapture the ship, but he said it was far wiser to deliver to the stores than to chance the loss of the "Raleigh" as well.

Captain Barry who was given command of the vessel, lost the ship in a stiff encounter with the English off Penobscot, Maine, where he ran it aground. At high tide the British refloated the vessel and it served them for some years as one of their best, and as the Admiralty Records report, "A very fine Rebel frigate." [43]

As the first aggressive act in the American Revolution, the assault upon and the capture of Fort William and Mary at Newcastle, which was earlier known as Great Island, near Portsmouth, was performed by a group

43 Ibid., vol. 60, pp. 558-566.

of patriots on New Hampshire soil and led by John Sullivan and JohnLangdon, so, it may be truthfully said that the American Navy began its career in the same region on the tenth of May, 1777 when the sloop of war, "Ranger," superintended by the same John Langdon, was launched in the Piscataqua River opposite Portsmouth.[44]

The Continental ship "Ranger" first called the "Hampshire," renamed by Act of Congress on June 14, 1777 when John Paul Jones was appointed to her command, was built by Captain Tobais Lear of Portsmouth at the Continental navy yard (formerly London's Island). The first pride of the Continental Navy was one hundred and sixteen feet over all. Her beam was twenty-eight feet; depth of hold thirteen and one-half feet, and her displacement measured three hundred and eight tons. In addition she was the first of our naval craft to be coppered. The "Ranger" had a light top gallant forecastle open aft and a short proof deck to be used for the Captain's cabin, and two small staterooms on the transoms. Her armament consisted of fourteen nine-pounders, and four six-pounders, all being carriage guns. The masts were more rakish than on any other ship of the day, and besides being considered a beauty by the sailors, she was the fastest ship afloat with a wind abaft the beam.[45]

44 The Granite Monthly, Vol. 59, pp. 58ff. (Article by Joseph Foster on "The Birth of the Navy")

45 Ibid., Vol. 59, p. 250.

Since, at the beginning of this paper it was mentioned that Portsmouth gave men to the sea as well as ships, I believe that at this point a further illustration should be given showing the attractions which encouraged such enlistment. Crews for ships were usually obtained in this city by the appearance of an advertisement in the local paper. In the Freeman's Journal of Saturday, July 26, 1777 appears the following announcement:

"Whereas the seamen of these states have for some time past been discouraged from entering into the navy by thinking they have hitherto been unfairly dealt with in respect to prize money, and the regular payment of wages: Therefore, to remove all cause of future complaint, I will be answerable to every person who may enter to serve under my command for the punctual and regular payment of wages. And I will also, with the consent and approbation of officers and men, appoint an agent for the prizes, whose duty it shall be to see the captors' part sold to the best advantage and to make punctual, just and regular payments to every person concerned. Every seaman in the navy is entitled to eight dollars per month wages with an advance of forty dollars at entry on board. Every marine or landsman is entitled to six dollars and two-thirds per month wages, with an advance of twenty dollars at entry on board. Every person who may lose a limb or be disabled by

by engagement will receive two hundred dollars smart money; if killed, his wife or family will receive it. Every person who may be disabled in engagement will receive half pay during life or allowance proportional to the injury sustained. The pay is extended to persons in captivity provided they return to the service as soon as possible. The captors share one-half of all merchant ships and all effects taken by sea or land without resistance; they share the whole of ships of war, and all privateers authorized by his Britannic Majesty to war against the states. --- Persons of ability will be promoted in proportion to their diligence and merit; --- and no equal encouragement can be given in privateers.

"The Continental ship of war "Ranger" at Portsmouth under my command is in readiness for sea. Such persons as think proper to enter are requested to apply on board, or receive at the ship's rendezvous where they will receive further information." [46]

(Signed) John Paul Jones

Portsmouth, July 26, 1777.

Crews for many a ship were secured in just this manner, built by Portsmouth carpenters and manned by Portsmouth seamen.

46 The Freeman's Journal (Portsmouth, 1777) Issue of Saturday, July 26, 1777. (Appears bound with New Hampshire Gazette of Same Date).

The "Ranger" under the Command of Captain Jones, sailed for France November 1, 1777, carrying dispatches of Burgoyne's surrender, and was the first ship flying the stars and stripes to receive a national salute from the French fleet. Jones commanded the ship until May, 1778, when he left her in France. He was replaced by Captain Thomas Simpson, by authority of the American Commissioner in France, and held his position until the vessel was captured at Charleston in May, 1780.

The year 1782 marked the launching of the "America" 74, the first "ship of the line" battleship our government ever built. This ship was first intended to be the flag ship of John Paul Jones, but due to the loss of the French ship, "Magnifique" on our coast, and the indebtedness of our government to France, the Continental Congress presented her to Louis XVI. There is some controversy as to whether the "America" was captured by the British in 1794 in an engagement with the French, but the Portsmouth Times for March 20, 1912 quotes from original records, declaring that the ship taken was a new ship just launched.

Congress ordered the construction of the "America" to begin on the ninth of November 1776.[47] Her keel was laid on Badger's Island, as it is now called, being named after an early shipbuilder, or Langdon's Island, as it was earlier called. About a year after the authorization of her building, Captain Landais and John Langdon, as

47 The New England Historical and Genealogical Register, (Boston, 1898), Vol. 22, p. 398

members of the Marine Committee, suggested the plans be changed, and the number of guns be reduced to fifty-six. Their plan, however, was not adopted and little is heard of the ship from this point until June 23, 1779 when Congress authorized Robert Morris "to take measures for speedily launching and equipping for the sea, the "America," then on the stocks, ..." Three days later John Paul Jones was advised that he was to be given command of her and to proceed to the port. The "America" was six years on the stocks, being launched on November 5, 1782. On the same day of her launching, John Paul Jones delivered her to Chevalier de Martigne, who had commanded the "Magnifique." The "America" was built under the general superintendence of John Langdon, and her master builder was Colonel James Hackett, who had never before seen a "ship of line" at the time he drew her plan, nor did he employ more than twenty carpenters at any one time while her construction was being carried on.[48]

John Paul Jones has left a very complete description of the "America," as well as a few interesting points on her construction in his journal. When Jones arrived in Portsmouth he found to his regret that the "America" was much less advanced towards completion than he had been informed. He even found that the materials for the last stages of construction had not been purchased, possibly through the fact that the resources of the country

48 Ibid., vol. 22, p. 398

were being turned to the support of the Continental Army. Jones, though grumbling a great deal, set out with much of his characteristic energy, and secured scanty funds and proceeded with his task, and as he remarks in his diary, "the most lingering and disagreeable service he was charged with during the period of the Revolution." [49]

The superintending and constructing of the "America", however, did not occupy entirely all of Jones' time, though he was faithful in his obligation. He had a very valuable library which he had collected in the course of his wanderings and now he found leisure to perúse a variety of studies in naval tactics and the construction and equipment of ships. These studies he put into actual operation in the final stages of the building of the "America."

The British at length became aware that it was the intention of the Colonists to complete this vessel, and accordingly they made plans to destroy her. Intelligence of these plans reached Jones through Washington and the Minister of Marines, and he at once organized a night guard composed of the mechanics who were engaged in her building. Large whale boats filled with men and pulling with muffled oars were occasionally seen, passing and repassing the "America", but Jones' guard was so effective that at length the enemy project was abandoned.

Though Captain Jones remarked that his task of building the "America" was disagreeable, we have reason

49 Mackenzie, Alexander, S., The Life of John Paul Jones, (New York, 1841), Vol. II, page 97.

to believe that some satisfaction and enjoyment was derived. The architect of the ship, Mr. Hackett, received a great deal of credit from Jones for the skill displayed in planning her model. However, the Captain introduced many alterations in the arrangements of her upper works and her ornamentation which appear to be very judicious, and in which he takes a great deal of pride. This evident pride can be seen in a quotation from the journal, and is as well, a fine description of a ship of the time. "The plan projected for the sculpture expressed dignity and simplicity. The head was a female figure crowned with laurels. The right arm was raised, with the forefinger pointing to heaven, as appealing to that high tribunal for the justice of the American cause. On the left arm was a buckler with a blue ground and thirteen silver stars. The legs and feet were covered here and there with wreaths of smoke, to represent the dangers and difficulties of war. On the stern, under the windows of the great cabin, appeared two large figures in bas-relief, representing tyranny and oppression, bound and biting the ground, with the cap of liberty on a pole above their heads. On the back part of the starboard quarter gallery was a large Neptune; and on the back part of the larboard quarter gallery a large Mars. The 'America' was fifty feet six inches in the extreme breadth, and measured a hundred and eighty-two feet six inches on the upper gun deck. Yet this ship, though the largest of seventy-guns, in the world, had, when the lower battery was sunk, the

air of a delicate frigate; and no person, at the distance of a mile, could have imagined she had a second battery. The workmanship was far superior to any before seen in naval architecture; and it would only have been necessary that the Abbe Raynal should have seen the 'America' to have induced him to give the world a very different idea of the continent of which that elegant ship bore the name."[50]

By the fifth of November the "America" was ready to be launched, and the difficulty of easing her from the stocks became quite a problem for Jones to solve. To the one side of the building slips lay a great ledge of rocks and which ran parallel to the keel and out into the river nearly two-thirds of the way across. The river at this point was not over two hundred yards wide and was bounded by rocks. Over the ledge of rocks the water continued to flow for nearly an hour after flood tide, and obviously the danger in launching the ship was in her being swept against this ledge as she slipped into the channel. The rocky character of the river bottom prevented the builders from fixing stockades in the river to conduct the ship clear of this menace, thus Jones was forced to use cables and anchors alone to effect this operation, which according to his description he seems to have done with a great deal of ingenuity.

"The flags of America and of France being displayed over the stern, in friendly union, and all being ready,

50 Ibid., vol. ii, pp. 103-105

Jones took his station on the highest part of the platform, leading from the ground to the bow of the ship. At the top of the tide the wedges were driven to lift her into her cradle, and the blocks upon which she was built being split from under the keel, she gradually put herself into motion. Stout cables had been secured to anchors on the shore, bitted and ranged on the deck and stoppered with ropes that would break at a given pressure, and check the ship completely at an estimated distance. Jones, from his conspicuous station, watched the motion of the ship, and, by concerted signals, marked the moment when the anchors at the bows were to be let go in succession. The ship ran swiftly along the reef, and was checked when clear of it, and dropped with the tide past it into the channel." [51] The task was most successful according to Captain Jones, and much admiration was expressed by the large assembly of spectators. The ship being safely moored was almost immediately delivered to the Chevalier, and Jones, very much disappointed in not securing the vessel for his command, set out for Philadelphia.

There are few descriptions of ships built at Portsmouth as complete as that of the "America."[74] Therefore it may be taken as a typical illustration of the construction of the larger vessels during this period.

Toward the last of the eighteenth century, the American Government found itself unable to pay the customary treaty dues to the Dey of Algiers, and our Navy

51 Ibid., vol. ii, p. 108.

was not strong enough to protest against the infamous demands of these pirates. As a tribute to the Dey, the "Crescent" 32 was built in 1798 and sent as a present to Algiers to compensate for the delay in fulfilling our treaty obligations. Though the details of her construction are lacking, we do find an account of the departure of the "Cresent" from Portsmouth on January 20, 1798.

"On Thursday morning, about sunrise, a gun was discharged from the "Crescent" frigate, as a signal for getting under way; and at ten A.M., she cleared the harbor, with a fine leading breeze. Our best wishes to Captain Newman and his officers and men. May they arrive in safety at the place of their destination, and present the Dey of Algiers one of the finest specimens of elegant naval architecture which was ever borne on the Piscataqua's waters." 52

From Brewster's "Rambles About Portsmouth," there appears the notice that in the time of the Revolution, Colonel Elephalet Ladd built a ship of twenty guns at Portsmouth called the "Hercules." It appears that the British in Halifax were well aware of this ship's being on the stocks of the Piscataqua and as a consequence inserted an advertisement in one of their papers to the following: "A ship of twenty guns, now on the stocks in the Piscataqua would be sold at auction in Halifax" on a

52 The New Hampshire Gazette, January 26, 1798

certain day. Two British frigates were put on watch at the entrance to the Harbor and when the gallant little "Hercules" started out on her first voyage she was captured and auctioned as the Halifax paper had advertised.[53]

In the same year the New Hampshire Gazette printed the announcement of the completion of the "Portsmouth" as follows: "On Thursday last a most beautiful copper-bottomed, twenty-gun ship called the 'Portsmouth' and built for the service of the United States, was launched from the Continental Navy Yard, Langdon's Island."[54] The pride expressed by the Gazette in this vessel proved that the art of building fine ships was Portsmouth's heritage, and the era of shipbuilding, the seeds of which had been sown long before, was now developing in earnest.

We have come now to the close of this particular account of the early development of shipbuilding in Portsmouth. The field is as yet a fruitful one for a more comprehensive study and will offer much enjoyment to one who is inclined to pour over the mass of material still unassembled. This thesis has attempted to bring to light important events and developments of this industry during the half century before 1800 in order that a more understanding approach may be had for a following era of prosperity in this city. Portsmouth entered the nineteenth century in happy fashion, her citizens had been reared in experience and success. There was wealth and cultivation

53 Brewster, Charles W., Rambles About Portsmouth, (Portsmouth, 1859), Vol. II, pp. 238-240.

54 The New Hampshire Gazette, October 16, 1798.

in the town, growing especially from a West Indian trade, and as business conditions improved after the war. Portsmouth enjoyed her share of the resulting benefits. The stage was set, and shipbuilding, which had always come naturally to Portsmouth and to Piscataqua men, attained a distinguished peak for which Portsmouth will long be remembered.

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