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Sailors of the Cloud Ships

By David Fooks

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**SAILORS OF THE
CLOUD SHIPS**

**THE MEN AND SHIPS THAT CHANGED
THE WORLD**

DAVID FOOKS

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The Age of Discovery (1450-1550)

“One does not discover new lands without consenting to lose sight of the shore for a very long time” - Andre Gide

The Age of Discovery, also known as the Age of Exploration, was roughly a one-hundred-year period of European maritime history between the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. It still stands today as one of the most significant periods in the development of Western civilization. The known world was to be expanded far beyond what was believed to be its navigable boundary, with new lands and riches unimaginable to the Western European nations. European ships for the first time pushed beyond the safe navigation of coastal cruising along the coastlines. In doing so, they found new and unexplored continents, they charted the true size and shape of the world, and they made contact with new and unique civilizations, previously unknown to the “civilized” nations of the Western European seaboard.

This intense time of discovery was initiated and fueled by a pressing need for more wealth from trade to fund the continued existence and independence of the competitive European nations that bordered the Atlantic Ocean. The Atlantic Ocean was a great barrier to these seaboard nations; it was uncharted and untraveled. It was a huge ocean that some brave navigators had tried to explore, and from which almost no one returned. Those few who did come back alive arrived on broken ships, with dead and dying crews, and stories of sea monsters, raging storms, and seas that destroyed their ships.

When the barrier presented by the Atlantic Ocean was slowly breached, it led to the discovery of new trade routes, territories, heretofore unknown civilizations, and riches of unimaginable value. The nautical explorers of the Age of Discovery,

supported and encouraged by the wealthy monarchs and merchants of their time, discovered the real size of the world, and with their increasing knowledge played the major role in developing the world as we know it today, for good or bad.

Prior to the Age of Discovery, little was known about the shape or size of the world, and travel was either limited to overland, or short coastal trips taken without losing sight of land. Little to nothing was known of the world outside of the local trade routes. Beyond local trade, there was no need to travel, and no motivation to travel.

Travel was extremely dangerous at this time, both overland and certainly by boat. On land were brigands, warlords, and politically unstable lands that had to be crossed. At sea were monsters, raging seas, and pirates. The Barbary pirates raided the European seaboard as far north as Ireland, and the Vikings raided as far south as Spain.

At this time, there were only two sources who claimed complete knowledge of the known world, and unfortunately, neither of them would prove to be good sources.

The Roman, Ptolemy, lived 1,300 years prior to the Age of Discovery. Ptolemy was a philosopher and a scientist, who wrote works on mathematics, astronomy, geography, and music theory. Ptolemy's knowledge as an astronomer, and the information he gathered from the geographical descriptions sent back to Rome from its armies conquering the known world, were used to formulate the book he became famous for, *Geography*, or *Guide to Drawing the Earth*.

Geography was a book explaining how to draw maps using known geographical coordinates for parts of the Roman world, and then how to extrapolate from them to ascertain the shape and size of the entire world. The first part of *Geography* is a discussion of the data and of the methods used. Ptolemy correctly notes the supremacy of astronomical data over land measurements or travelers' reports, though he

possessed observed astronomical data from very few locations. The second part of the book is a list of more than 8,000 localities he collected from Roman records and other sources; the biggest such database ever assembled at that time. Ptolemy assigned these locations coordinates so that they can be placed into a grid that spanned the known world. In the third part of the *Geography*, Ptolemy gives instructions on how to create maps. Ptolemy did use his knowledge of astronomy and geology to postulate that the earth was round, and he was well aware that he had knowledge of only about a quarter of the globe.

Ptolemy's world map was accepted as correct for centuries afterward, including during most of the Age of Discovery. The original map had dangerous errors not only in the distance calculations, but in the basic size and shape of the world, as well. Ptolemy thought the earth was shaped like a pear, and he made assumptions of the existence of unknown continents, based upon the balance of the earth needed for its rotational spin to be correct. For this reason, he included continents vaguely representing the Americas, although they would not be discovered until a thousand years later.

Marco Polo, claiming he had travelled the entire world by land routes, was generally accepted as the most knowledgeable expert on the geography of the world.

Marco Polo was born to a wealthy Venetian merchant family. From a young age he was taken on trading ventures; they went overland, across the Middle East, and eventually to parts of the Far Eastern lands, known then as the Orient. Marco Polo travelled all of what was the known world to European traders, and far beyond, on a trip that lasted for 24 years. He stayed in the Far East for 17 years, in service to the Kubla Kahn.

Marco Polo returned to Venice in 1295 with a fortune in gemstones. He came home in the middle of a war. Marco Polo paid for an armed fighting galley and joined the war. Taken captive in battle, he spent three years in a Genoese prison.

During this time, he dictated a detailed account of his travels to a fellow inmate, who recorded them, including fanciful stories of his own, as well as including speculations and anecdotal stories by Polo as factual.

Though Marco Polo was not the first European to reach the Far East, he was the first to leave a detailed chronicle of his travels. His account of the Orient provided Europeans with the first look at the Far East, including China, India and Japan, as well as many other previously unknown smaller lands. His book quickly spread across Europe, and became known as *The Travels of Marco Polo*.

The book introduced the Western World to the previously unknown geography and customs of these Eastern Lands. It provided descriptions of previously unknown items of porcelain, gunpowder, paper money, and Asia's exotic plants and animals. Although full of fanciful places and creatures, little was known of the Eastern world at the time, and the book inspired Western traders to try to reach these distant lands.

When wars and political upheaval made overland trade with the Orient impossible for Western Europe, *The Travels of Marco Polo* would inspire people like Henry the Navigator, Christopher Columbus, and other coastal navigators. His descriptive locations would be plotted on Ptolemy's map, and become the accepted map of the time of the world, both known and unknown. Fanciful and fictitious locations were plotted on the map as well, and the first vivid description of the dragons and sea monsters that lived beyond the horizon became the nightmares of the wretched sailors who were forced to man the first ships of exploration leaving Western Europe.

But stepping back a moment in time, before long distance sea trade was established, Western traders had to travel by overland routes to reach the riches of the Orient. To accomplish this, they had to cross the dangerous Mongol empire, which demanded payment for the crossings. This piece negotiated; the

trade route was eventually established. Although trade between the East and the West started out as sporadic, it soon grew to be consistent and regular trade, with caravans crossing from the Western nations to the Orient. Taxing this trade provided substantial income for the cash-strapped monarchs of Europe, who came to rely on this wealth to fund their never-ending conflicts with each other over territory and natural resources.

Beginning in the middle of the fifteenth century, a combination of circumstances forced Western countries to seriously consider seeking sea routes to the East. The vast empire of the Mongols was breaking up, and Western merchants could no longer be assured of safe conduct along the land routes to the East. The Ottoman Turks and the Venetians controlled access to the Mediterranean and the ancient sea routes to the East, but forbade the European nations from using them. For a European trader to be caught in the Mediterranean would mean death or slavery for everyone on the ship. The nations on the Atlantic shores of Europe were being cut off from the trade and riches of the east, and were forced to try to discover unknown sea routes as an alternative.

At this time, most of the land and sea beyond the horizon of Europe was unknown. The Mediterranean, and specifically the Straits of Gibraltar, was the most southerly travel any Europeans had done by sea. The Barbary Coast on the Mediterranean Sea was all that was known of Africa. A Western seaboard coast of Africa, although assumed to exist, had never been reached by sea, let alone explored.

The stakes were enormous. The kingdoms of Europe were in fierce competition for any advantage in trade with the East. This trade equated to cash, and without that, many of the great European nations—England, France, Spain, and Portugal—were not strong enough to defend themselves from each other, let alone against a concerted attack from the Moors, the Eastern Nation/State of Venice, or the Huns. In the not-too-distant past,

France had been successfully invaded by Attila the Hun. If Attila had desired, he could have conquered the entire nation, and consequently subjugate all the European nations. Why he stopped his successful invasion of Europe before entering Paris is unknown to this day; the Huns did not keep written records of their military conquests.

The Nation/State of Venice, exceedingly strong, was expanding at a rapid rate. It had control of the Mediterranean, and had the ships and men to invade Spain, and could conceivably go around the Strait of Gibraltar to attack the remaining Western European nations by sea. England was very weak, having been ravaged by the Scandinavian Vikings by sea for centuries, and continually fighting the wild Scots and Irish to their north who had easy access by land for raids throughout Northern England.

The fact was, the only real defense these nations had from their aggressive neighbors was that they were on the brink of collapse, and their neighbors really saw no benefit in taking them over. The western European nations all needed cash desperately to survive, and saw trade with the Far East as the only source to fill their sorely depleted coffers. But the land routes were closing, the Mediterranean was closed, and they had neither the ships, nor the money to build ships, to explore for new routes to the East.

Though several early navigators have made the history books for their contributions to The Age of Discovery, they followed in the wake of hundreds, if not thousands more who died, unknown, in their failed attempts. Every one of the navigators who lost their lives at sea had a ship, often carrying a crew of sixty or more sailors, who died as well. If there was a record of the sailors who died during the Age of Discovery, it would be staggering.

This book will deal only with European navigators, and the sailors who crewed their ships. Rather than a comprehensive

history of the nautical exploration that took place during the Age of Discovery, we will focus on the few that were, in this writer's opinion, critical to the discoveries, mapping, and exploitation of the entire world as we now know it today.

A Portuguese Prince known as Henry the Navigator initiated the first explorations of the Age of Discovery. He was a scholar, and his curiosity about the world made him more knowledgeable than most. Henry deduced that a sea route down the unknown coast of Western Africa would possibly lead to a passage to the Orient. Henry was aware of the trade in ivory and gold coming from the south of Africa to the Moors of Barbary. He had hopes of finding a way to divert that trade by an as of yet unknown sea route, giving Portugal a European monopoly to the riches of unknown Africa and the Orient.

Prince Henry funded expedition after expedition to explore the coast of Africa, most of them to never return. He remained undaunted, sending ship after ship, with crew after crew, on voyages truly into the unknown, slowly mapping the results when ships returned. Henry lost an unknown number of ships and seamen in his quests. Prince Henry died in 1460 after a life's work that had established the colonization of the west African coast down to Sierra Leone. But Henry's vision would live on. More Portuguese continued down the western coast of Africa, establishing trading posts as they went.

Another Portuguese navigator, Bartolomeu Dias, found a route around Africa. In 1487 he rounded the Cape of Storms in such bad weather that he did not even see it, but he satisfied himself that the coast was now trending northeastward. On the return voyage, he sighted the Cape and set a pillar upon it to mark its discovery. The seaway to the East was now open, but five years were to elapse before it was successfully travelled again. It was a dangerous voyage.

In 1497 a Portuguese captain, Vasco da Gama, sailed in command of a fleet under instructions by the king of Portugal

to reach India. After rounding the Cape of Storms (which he renamed the Cape of Good Hope) and along the unknown coast of East Africa, Da Gama reached India. He was the first to discover the sea route from Europe to Asia, and as such it was a momentous event for the Age of Discovery.

Portuguese trading depots were built along the African coast, as well as at the strategic entrances to the Red Sea and the Persian Gulf, and along the shores of the Indian peninsula. The Portuguese established a base in Malaysia, commanding the straits into the China Sea. Discoveries kept coming, and in 1557 the trading port of Macau was founded at the mouth of the Canton River. Europe, through Portugal, had finally arrived in the East by going around Africa. The Portuguese controlled all of the coastal posts around Africa, charging any other nationality exorbitant fees for usage and supplies. But they soon found themselves overextended, and were forced to pull back. This allowed the other European countries to establish their own posts, and eventually it was the Spanish, Dutch, English, and French who benefited the most by the Portuguese explorations of the southern route to the East.

Without a doubt, the most influential nautical explorer of the Age of Discovery was Christopher Columbus. Saying that, he was wrong in almost every one of his calculations and assumptions about the world. In 1492, Columbus got the backing of the Spanish monarchs, and set sail from Spain with three ships, on a journey that would take him across the Atlantic and into the unknown. In fact, in his day, anything beyond the horizon was unknown. After a journey of 61 days, Columbus and his crew arrived in the Bahamas, which he thought was the back side of India, and he consequently named the land the West Indies. His discovery was ultimately to be called the New World. He was the first European to establish contact with the indigenous peoples of Central America. Columbus and his

voyages led to the European exploration and colonization of the New World.

At the end of The Age of Discovery, the greatest of the Portuguese explorers lead an exploration that would change the world yet again. Ferdinand Magellan was a Portuguese navigator hired by the Spanish monarchs. They were losing faith in Columbus of ever finding the riches of the Orient. Magellan was sent on a voyage to find a westward route to the Orient. In 1519, Magellan set sail with five ships. He sailed through the storms of Cape Horn, considered the roughest waters on the planet, and he was the first European navigator to reach the Pacific Ocean. In 1521 Magellan was killed by natives in the Philippines, but his crew continued sailing westward and arrived in India. In their last remaining ship, they sailed around the Cape of Storms, up the coast of Western Africa, and back to Seville. There were 16 sailors left from the original five ships, and they are credited with being the first sailors to circumnavigate the world. But this is not accurate. The first man to circumnavigate the world was a Filipino slave. More on this later in a later chapter.

Most of the Explorers during the Age of Discovery, Columbus included, were either directly sponsored, or else influenced by the Portuguese nobleman, Henry the Navigator. He was the first serious chartist of the known world, and maintained accurate and updated charts based upon the logs and findings of every Portuguese captain who returned. These charts were kept under his personal lock and key, and captains going to sea got copies of only that region they were travelling to. He was adamant in his desire to make Portugal the world leader in exploration and trade, and wanted no other nation to get these charts, allowing them to interfere with Portugal's monopolies in colonization and trade. Eventually these charts were obtained by other nations, and became the maps that allowed navigators to follow the routes established by the Portuguese. The historically successful navigators of Europe set

out on specific journeys of discovery, and more often than not did not find what they were looking for.

While unsuccessful in their specific destination, several of them nonetheless discovered unknown lands, many with previously unknown civilizations, and untapped wealth for the taking. The monarchs who sponsored these trips were not looking for knowledge and discovery. They financed these journeys out of avarice and greed, and their explorers knew exactly why they were there. Their voyages opened up new trade routes, territories, and found new civilizations for exploitation by the Western world.

Most important for their respective nations, their navigators brought back the promise of fabulous wealth. Their voyages marked the beginning of European exploration and colonization of the New World, and they would be responsible for the establishment of Europe as a dominant global power.

What was it that gave these early navigators the faith that they would be successful in their quests? Most were not successful, and never came home. But there were always more men who were ready to try. We now know that they weren't just inspired adventurers. They went for the promise of riches. They went because of the financial support of monarchs, and used the accumulated knowledge from previous voyages before them, gained at such a huge price of men and ships. Many had charts previous explorers used, particularly the Portuguese. These were the charts and maps drawn for Henry the Navigator, which had gradually been shared among the competing European nations after his death.

Some idea of the knowledge that these early explorers actually had may be gained by a study of their contemporary maps still in existence. Although Ptolemy had drawn the only known map of the world at the time, it was greatly in error. However, there were in existence numerous independent charts from that era showing rough contours of most of the land

masses, including those continents and some islands yet to be discovered, including some major rivers. Although these charts were far from accurate, they did indicate that previous voyagers had explored these lands sometime in the distant past, and had drawn at least rudimentary maps and charts of the places they had been.

It is not known when the idea originated of sailing westward in order to reach the Orient to the east. Many sailors before Columbus had set forth searching for islands in the West; and it was a commonplace idea among scholars that the earth was round. Scholars were confident that the East could be reached by sailing west; but to believe this to be a practicable voyage was an entirely different matter. Despite the disappointments of Columbus, it was clear to others that there was much to be investigated, and probably much to be gained, by more explorations westward. In all of the European seaboard nations, groups of wealthy merchants schemed in hopes of joining in the search for these riches.

In the latter part of the fifteenth century, John Cabot, a Portuguese navigator, set sail for England in search of the fabled Northwest Passage to the Orient. His landfall on the other side of the ocean was probably on the northern peninsula of what is now known as Newfoundland. From there, Cabot explored southward, seeking a westward passage. Little more is known of John Cabot's first voyage, and almost nothing of his second, since he did not return. But his voyages in the high northern latitudes represented a navigational feat into the unknown almost as great as that of Columbus. The coasts between the landfalls of Columbus and of John Cabot were charted in the first quarter of the sixteenth century by Italian, French, Spanish, and Portuguese sailors.

Amerigo Vespucci, an Italian merchant sailing with a Spanish navigator, explored the northern coast of South America. His lively and greatly embellished descriptions of

these lands became popular, and on his map of 1507, he gave the name America to the southern continent, naming it after himself. The name stuck.

Late in the game, Francis Drake, an Englishman, was to play numerous important roles in the Age of Discovery. Drake was the first Englishman to circumnavigate the world, and he played a major role in the defeat of the Spanish Armada in 1588. He orchestrated numerous highly successful raids on Spanish towns in the New World, which got him labeled as a pirate by Spain. Drake's voyages and explorations helped to establish England as a major naval power. He laid claim to lands and established settlements in the New World, and he helped lay the foundations for the formidable British Empire, yet to come.

It was becoming obvious that a previously unknown body of land, now called the New World, had not only been found, but also that it was of significant size. However, for a long time there was little inclination to explore this New World, preferring to find a way to get past it to reap profits from the wealth of Asia.

Let's bring this chapter to a close with another quick look at the first circumvention of the world by the voyage of Magellan. With his voyage lasting from 1519 to 1521, two long-cherished illusions were dispelled. First, the hope that there was an easy way through the barrier of the New World, and, second, that, once that barrier was passed, the Orient would be near at hand. Eliminating these assumptions literally changed how the world was perceived. It is fitting to consider this first circumnavigation as marking the close of the Age of Discovery. Magellan and his men had demonstrated that Columbus had discovered a New World, not the route to the Orient. They also proved that Columbus's "Indies"—the West Indies—were separated from the East Indies by a vast ocean.

Although we will never know for sure, the few explorers who made history with their discoveries is estimated to be less than one percent of those mariners sent out on voyages of

exploration. Most never returned. Others returned, obviously not having tried very hard, and having discovered nothing new. And then others came back with wrecked ships and short crews sick with scurvy, carrying stories of storms, doldrums, and sea monsters.

Most of the captains and officers of these ships were professional seamen. Of the sailors who went with them, the crews were to a large degree made up of convicts, promised freedom if they survived. Most of these men were not sailors, and knew nothing about the ocean except what they could see from shore. They knew nothing about where they were going, except for the stories they had heard—greatly exaggerated stories originated by survivors of previous voyages. Stories that caused nightmares, and made seasoned sailors refuse to go.

These convict-sailors made up most of the crews of the voyages of exploration. They were the brave ones; albeit they had little choice in the matter. Knowing nothing good awaited them on land, they were willing to strike out into the complete unknown, for the slight chance of freedom. Fearful of the things out of sight just over the horizon, they were willing to take that chance. We will never know why except to be fairly sure that they had no better choices left in life.

Piracy and the English Colonies

“Piracy would not exist if not for the complicity of merchants” -
Unknown

While piracy has traditionally been associated with the Spanish Main, it was pervasive along the coast of North America. Pirates needed to be able to raid ships of commerce, and they needed places to sell what they stole. All pirates needed certain ports where they knew they would be welcomed, where they would be relatively safe, and where they could sell their stolen merchandise. The traders dealing with pirates had to be wealthy, and had to be powerful enough to be able to hide their dealings with pirates, as trading with pirates was a crime punishable by hanging.

By 1680, Port Royal, Jamaica, was the richest city in the New World, with stately brick homes, and a population of three thousand, one third of it slaves. It's reputation of the “wickedest city in the world,” was well earned, as it was the primary safe pirate port in the Caribbean. It was in close proximity to commercial sailing routes through the Spanish Main, making it easy for pirates to ply their trade. Port Royal existed solely to do business with the Caribbean pirates. There could be twenty-five or more pirate ships in Port Royal Harbor at any given time, and they would be quick to help defend Jamaica from Spanish raiders.

There was another market developing for pirate goods where the payment for pirated goods was much higher, pirates were welcomed, and places to work on their ships were plentiful, with the wood and other resources needed right at hand. The new English colonies in North America. The first pirate to trade on the American coast was at Jamestown, in 1619. According to John Rolfe, secretary of the colony, the ship “had nothing aboard but twenty and odd negroes.” Rolfe noted that

Jamestown traded food and supplies needed by the pirates for the slaves.

The first known American pirate was a fur trader called Dixie Bull, in 1630. Bull would trade with the natives for beaver pelts, primarily in New England. French traders stole his boat filled with trade goods and pelts, leaving Bull and his men destitute. Angry and frustrated, Bull took to piracy, first seizing two small English ships, then attacking an English trading post, getting away with a small fortune. Realizing they were now pariahs in the colonies, Bull and his men tried to sue for peace with all of the colonial governors, but were refused by them all. Bull and his men disappeared, never to be heard of again. That was easy to do in early colonial America.

The English Navigation Acts were a series of laws to promote English merchants to grow their fleets so their ships would be available to the Crown at times of war, and allowing the merchants to make much more profit from the colonies. The Acts required that all goods traded in the colonies had to be bought from England, and sent to the colonies on English ships. The English government had steep custom and import duties required on all goods sent from England to the colonies. Even products like tea, bought from China, had to be shipped to England first, where it was bought, resold, and then shipped to the colonies at grossly inflated prices.

By law, no colony ships, nor any ship from another nation could bring in goods from elsewhere into the colonies. Consequently, the goods and merchandise the colonists could not make themselves were only available only at grossly inflated prices. When England went to war, shipments of everything to the colonies were delayed or cancelled. The colonists were starved for their basic needs. The one thing the colonists had in their favor was that there were no English ships in the colonies to enforce the Navigation Acts.

It wasn't long before pirates were welcomed by the colonists, from whom they could buy the products they wanted at steeply discounted prices, and without the onerous trade restrictions, as well as the import and customs taxes. In addition, pirates brought much needed metal currencies to buy things from the colonial merchants. When England was at war it had a shortage of silver to mint coinage with, so the colonies could get no cash currency. This made the silver being brought up to the colonies all the more valuable. Soon the colonies started bidding against each other for silver when pirate ships came north.

Pirates brought enough stolen Spanish silver into Boston that the colony was able to mint their own coinage with it, the first mint in North America. Albeit illegal. Boston silversmiths had an abundance of silver to work with, where formerly it was unattainable from trade with England. Pirates brought goods to sell in colonies up and down the coast: indigo, cloth, sugar, tobacco, and slaves, all sold at steep discounts and without England's taxes.

In the colonies, piracy and slave trading went hand in hand. As England had a monopoly on the slave trade, any ship trespassing upon that monopoly was considered a pirate, and treated as one. Unfortunately for England, they were not able to furnish slaves nearly fast enough to fill the need. New England merchants and shipbuilders would outfit slave ships to go directly to the African coast and buy from slave traders, bypassing the British trade forts. At the same time, pirates knew they would have a ready market for slaves in the colonies. The demand was never met for slaves in America, until after slavery was ended.

Between the years of 1649-1680, English colonies from South Carolina to Massachusetts actively solicited, protected, and traded with pirates. Colonial governors were almost always welcoming to pirates, not only for their trade and silver, but for their protection from Spanish or French marauders. Bribes and

kickbacks were encouraged to the point of becoming so blatant that several governors were forced to step down, but by this time they were very wealthy men.

William Penn, comfortable in England, was warned he would lose his colony if he didn't do something about the pirates trading in Philadelphia. Denying it, but fearful he may lose his lands, he got on a ship and sailed to Philadelphia. Alarmed by the blatant use of Philadelphia by pirates, Penn fired the governor and stayed there himself, to rid the city of pirates.

The governor of New York, Benjamin Fletcher, was openly in partnership with a pirate named Thomas Tew. The situation was similar in most of the colonies, and in almost every harbor large enough to trade with the pirates. The pirate ships, unlike an average merchant ship, were always filled with the most expensive of merchandise, and large amounts of bullion and cash to dispose of. This required very well-heeled merchants who could afford to trade with the pirates. Even if a Governor forbid pirates, the local merchants would force or bribe him to change his mind, or else trade clandestinely behind his back.

In 1676 an English official, Edward Randolph, was sent to the colonies to inquire into colony trade practices, the payment of taxes, etc. He was shocked to learn how involved colonists were involved in piracy. "I observed they fitted out a great many ships of 60-70 tons, very well manned who they called privateers, and sent them to the West Indies or India without commission where they committed all acts of violence and brought home great amounts of silver, bullion and coins, as well as church plate, fine robes, and other riches." The piracy trade practiced by the colonies alarmed England, but there was little they could do to stop it at that time.

The colonies most invested in this pirate trade were Massachusetts, Rhode Island, Pennsylvania, New York, New Jersey, and the Carolinas. In a very real sense, piracy could not have flourished during this time without those colonies.

Colonists provided supplies, medical needs, entertainment, a home port, and a source of enterprising sailors for the pirate ships. They provided a safe harbor, as well as boatyards to work on their boats. The average wage for a top-rated sailor was about £12 per year. A sailor on a successful pirate ship could bring home £800 or more in one cruise. Many pirates from the colonies would go out for just one or two trips, then come back and settle in their hometowns as very wealthy men. The wealth these men brought home bought them positions of power in the colonies.

The New England colonies had first-class boatyards, and produced ships for whoever could afford them. While pirates didn't buy their ships, many American merchants bought them to be used as traders or slave runners, as well as blockade runners when British ships showed up. The most profitable trade was in slaves, and eventually American colonists in New England became a major force in the colonial slave trade.

All of the colonies issued letters of marque to local captains wanting to try their hand at attacking enemies of the colony. Most of these captains went directly to Africa to buy slaves, or else went to the Indian Ocean to raid the Muslim treasure and commerce ships. These trips brought fabulous profits for the owners, captains, and crew. The trade to the American colonies would soon be taken over almost exclusively by American ships despite the British Navigation Acts. The American ships traveled the world, trading in every country but Great Britain.

While the pirates didn't need American ships, what they did need were the supplies called naval stores, all the natural products needed to maintain a ship: the straight timbers for masts and spars, manila ropes, turpentine, tar, rosin, and pitch. Three quarters of the world's naval stores came from a British American colony, North Carolina. The Cape Fear River, to the north past the colonial port town currently named Wilmington, became a huge swamp known as the Piney Woods. This

swampland included much of northeastern North Carolina. Slave labor produced the naval stores from this swamp, and it was shipped out of Wilmington, as well as out of Edenton, North Carolina, a colonial port that at one time did almost as much trade as Boston.

Edenton sits at the mouth of the Roanoke River, protected by the Inner Banks in the Albemarle Sound. All of the produce and goods from Virginia's Shenandoah Valley went down the river to be shipped out from Edenton. Edenton was so wealthy, many of our nation's founding fathers and Supreme Court judges came from there. When Boston had its Boston Tea Party, to protest British taxes, it was coordinated with Edenton, who held their own protest in the same manner. While Edenton was a great harbor for early wooden sailing ships, it was too shallow for the heavier ships of the nineteenth century. Today it is a quiet little town, full of beautiful mansions and churches with very beautiful headstones of many of our nations early statemen.

Wilmington was the primary port for slaves going to the Piney Woods and Virginia. By 1785 Wilmington had twice as many slaves in the city as freemen. To this day, the road slaves traveled from the dock to Raleigh and other points inland still exists. It is called Misery Road, and has a reputation of being haunted by the souls of slaves who died and were left alongside the Road.

Thomas Cromwell, a resident of Plymouth Harbor, left the colonies on a ship as a common sailor. In 1646, Cromwell returned several years later to Plymouth Harbor, a pirate captain with three ships loaded with stolen goods. The ships were welcomed, and eighty pirates came ashore and terrorized the community with their drunkenness and lechery. The puritans of the community were scandalized, but quickly came to appreciate the pirates and overlook their behavior when their goods were sold at bargain prices, and the wealthy pirates started spending their fortunes within the community. Eventually the

town decided it was “Divine Providence” that brought the pirates to their community. Pirates were always welcomed into Plymouth Harbor after this first visit.

In 1683, the same Thomas Cromwell took a ship loaded with treasure to sell in Newport, Rhode Island. An English customs inspector present at the time there tried to seize the ship and its contents, but was stymied by the residents. Thomas produced a questionable letter of marque from the governor of Jamaica, and the colonial governor allowed him to sell his goods, sell his ship, and even settle in Newport. Cromwell married the daughter of a judge who would eventually become the colony’s governor.

In 1684 a pirate ship arrived at Boston harbor, and was well received by the town’s fathers and merchants. An English customs inspector announced he was seizing the ship and its contents, and asked the sheriff to arrest the sailors. The inspector was so severely threatened by both the sheriff and a mob that had gathered that he dropped the matter.

By the end of that year, pirates had carried £80,000 currency a year into Boston, and an English official called Boston “The common receptacle for pirates of all nations.” At least half of the coins in the American colonies were Spanish pieces of eight, brought into the colonies by pirates. At a time when a laborer would make about £10 per year, and a woman one half of that, each pirate sailor may make £800 or more, some of them returning after just a few months. In 1688 a colonial official reported that many pirates were settling in New London and New York, buying houses and land, and living as wealthy men.

In 1690, the American English colonies had about 190,000 colonists and 17,000 slaves. The largest port in the colonies, Boston, only had 7,000 residents, but due to pirate trading, it had enough money and muscle to become the significant social and military force of the colonies. The colonies felt they had enough clout to passively ignore the British Navigation Acts, but

England saw it differently. They set their sights on replacing officials and sending over small British cruisers to enforce the Navigation Acts.

The colonies responded by starting their own small navies. Merchants and traders invested in more blockade runners. The age of the freelance pirate in the colonies was coming to an end. Blackbeard's death brought the end to the blatant piracy on the Atlantic coast. For years he operated with impunity up and down the eastern coast of North America, without being tracked down. He was hiding in the inland sounds of North Carolina, and trading with local merchants. Governor Eden of North Carolina gave both Blackbeard and Sted Bonnet a King's Pardon upon a promise to change their ways. Bonnet soon went back to piracy, but Blackbeard chose to settle in the town of Bath, North Carolina. He married the sixteen-year-old daughter of a local wealthy plantation owner, the ceremony officiated by Governor Eden, and attended by Tobias Knight, the king's royal secretary for North Carolina. Blackbeard quickly started dealing in pirate goods, buying, then selling to local, with merchants, who sold these goods at increased profits. As the Inner Banks of North Carolina rivaled Boston as a trading center at the time, this worked out well for everyone involved.

A prominent North Carolinian accused Governor Eden of trading in pirate goods from Blackbeard, but it was never proven. However, Knight was caught with pirate goods and letters from Blackbeard incriminating him of trading in pirate goods. He was recalled, returning to England in chains, and Blackbeard had to leave. It eventually was proven that the king's emissary to North Carolina was in collusion with Blackbeard, acting as a fence, buying and selling Blackbeard's stolen goods. Blackbeard's demise was bringing the Age of Piracy to a close. The colonial navies were eliminating local pirates, and England was sending over ships to stop the piracy in the Caribbean. It slowed, but never entirely ended.

Women At Sea

“There are many advantages in Sea-voyaging, but security is not one of them” - Saadi, 1258 AD

Women are bad luck on ships. How long has that been an established belief? Like many other beliefs during the Age of Sail, superstitions were one thing, reality another. Ships were full of women. On occasion, superstition and reality would collide. In 1379, Sir John Arundel was admiral to a fleet of British ships sailing to Brittany, France. He had about sixty women on his ships, prostitutes as well as nuns who were kidnapped by the crewmen. Finding themselves in a violent and unforgiving storm, the captain fell back on his old superstitions, and had all sixty women thrown overboard. It didn't work. Twenty-five ships were smashed on the shores of Ireland, drowning the men, including the admiral himself.

Women on ships weren't always only there for companionship. There is ample evidence to confirm that women disguised themselves and worked as crewmen, or worked as surgeons, nurses, or cooks on board many a ship. There is a reason women fail to show up in ships logs; women were forbidden to be aboard most ships, especially aboard naval ships. Therefore, their presence was undocumented. Many women on board ships were prostitutes, but would also do ship's work during the day. It was a hard life, but better than anything they would have on land.

When in port, women were allowed to come aboard and stay for the duration of the ship's time in port. Captains knew if he let his men have shore leave, most of them would never return. Therefore, women and rum were allowed belowdecks. There are records showing four hundred or more prostitutes rowed out to visiting naval ships. Often some of these women didn't leave, and plied their trade belowdecks when the ships

were underway. Again, as horrible these conditions may have been, they were better than the choices she may have had on land.

Unofficially, many captains turned a blind eye to wives of officers travelling with their husbands. Warrant officers and junior officers often had their wives with them when underway. These women were off the muster, so the husbands had to share their allotment of food and sleeping arrangements, usually narrow hammocks, with their wives. For the wives, this was far preferable than being left on shore, to fend as for herself as a “sailor’s widow.”

During combat, any woman on board made herself useful. Doing the same jobs as the children on board, they would serve as power monkeys, scuttle butters, or assisting in the surgery, known among the crew as the “butcher shop.” Admiral Horatio Nelson of the British Navy allowed women aboard his ships. This is evidenced by the written record of a woman giving birth during the Battle of the Nile. During the Battle of Copenhagen, Nelson’s records again refer to the birth of a little girl, Mary Campbell. Admiral Edward Pellew wrote in his recounting of the bombardment of Algiers in 1816 “husbands and wives were manning the same guns.” Yet still, none of these women were on the musters or got any of the credit they deserved.

One woman who did get on the muster, and was officially discharged was an English woman named Hannah Snell. Struggling to survive on land, she took advantage of the great need for sailors, disguised herself as a man, and successfully joined the British Royal Navy. Hannah sailed on several different ships and took part in a number of battles. She earned the respect and admiration of her fellow sailors. She was discharged upon discovery of her sex when being treated for a wound incurred in battle.

Her story was widely reported in the press, and she became a symbol of women’s courage and determination. She was far

from the only woman who took advantage of the navy to earn a living by disguising themselves as men and getting berths as ship's boys or young crewmen. The Royal Navy was so desperate for crew, captains would have turned a blind eye to competent crewmembers whose sex may have been in question, so long as it did not create an issue below decks.

The most dangerous woman afloat was Anne Bonnet. She was a pirate working in the Caribbean during the eighteenth century. Anne was a skilled and fearless fighter, and quickly gained a reputation as one of the most dangerous pirates of her time. Bonnet was acknowledged as "War Chief" of her ship. Leading the boarding crew, leaping onto the deck of enemy ships with her naked bosoms flying about; she shocked her enemies, making them hesitate before killing a woman, giving her pirate crew that extra second or two they needed to successfully board. But she was not the only woman pirate aboard her ship. The other female pirate aboard ship was Mary Reid.

The Chinese pirate, Ching Shih, was without a doubt the most successful pirate in history, commanding a pirate fleet of over 1,800 ships and eighty thousand pirates, terrorizing ships and communities throughout the China Sea region. Originally working as a prostitute, Ching Shih was taken by a pirate captain to be his concubine aboard his ship. Details are few, but somehow, before long, the pirate captain was no more, and Ching Shih had taken command of his ship. She earned the respect of her crews, and grew her fleet to be the largest pirate fleet in history. After a very successful career, she retired from piracy and successfully integrated back on land. She opened and ran brothels, becoming fabulously wealthy from both careers.

Women were often found onboard ships, in one fashion or another. As a policy, captains forbade women, except for passengers, or as an officer's wife aboard a long-distance vessel. He was not so lenient with the crew below decks. The reasoning

to forbid women from bring with crew was based on experience. A woman aboard could be so disruptive to the crew that jealousy, fights, and even murder would be the result, although no fault of the lady in question.

In the nineteenth century, women began challenging these perceived traditional gender roles and started to take more active roles aboard ship. Women first started being taken aboard coastal fishing vessels, and eventually acknowledged for their skills on blue water ships. It became difficult for a captain to forbid proper women on his ship, when his own wife was sailing on it.

Fishing was where women would start to make their greatest advancements. Coastal fishing was becoming a much safer affair, with boats being built safer, and more advanced forms of navigation being used. Coastal fishing was usually a local affair, the fishing boats going out for no more than a week or two, salting their catch in their hold until full, then returning home as fast as possible to keep the catch from spoiling. Women in the community had always worked on the dock to unload the fish, gut them, prep them and preserve them. They patched the nets and lines, restocked the boats with provisions, and helped with repairs. Most women working on the docks were married to fishermen, or were the daughters of fishermen. They knew what was required as well as any man. When there was not enough crew available on a fishing boat, the captain wouldn't hesitate to take a woman he knew aboard to fill out the crew.

As international maritime commerce grew, fewer and fewer men were available for coastal fishing. Women started being taken as crew on a regular basis by necessity. And they held their own. New England fishermen would be quick to take a skilled woman as crew, rather than an unknown or questionable male.

The whaling industry of the nineteenth century sent ships around the globe, ships that would often be gone for years at a time. Captain's wives and even family were taken aboard, and

eventually, married officers were often allowed to bring their wives as well, so long as the peace of the ship was maintained. When whalers headed for the Bering Sea and the Arctic, it was not unusual for wives to be dropped off in Hawaii, where an entire community developed made almost entirely of sailor's wives.

Clipper ships traversing between the Orient and Europe or America, although coming back home fairly regularly, never stayed longer than it took to unload, and they were gone again. Captains on these vessels often brought their wives, and there is more than one instance where the wife brought the ship safely back to harbor, running a skeleton crew, with the captain and rest of the crew debilitated by sickness.

The story of Mary Brown Patten is worth telling. A newly wed captain's wife, nineteen years old and four months pregnant; her husband taught her to navigate. Mary became the best navigator on board, becoming proficient with the essential tools of sextant and chronometer. In a terrible trip attempting to go around the Horn in 1857, her husband had collapsed at the wheel. He had been forced to discharge his first mate for dereliction of duty, and he had taken over his duties, working night and day until collapsing, never to fully recover. The second mate took over the ship, but had marginal navigational skills, and lacked the trust of the crew. Mary Patton took over the position of captain, successfully navigated the ship around the Horn, served her watches, had the respect to command the crew, tended to her husband, and oversaw all of the ship's requirements. A fever broke out on the ship, and as more men took ill, Mary oversaw their medical needs, and still captained the ship, although with a greatly reduced crew. After a journey of 120 days, Mary ran the ship into San Francisco Bay, beating out three other clipper ships that took the same route and left about the same time her ship had left. The ships owners presented Mary with a check for \$5,000 for returning their ship

and cargo home safely. That was a virtual fortune at that time, and Mary Patton was one of the few seagoing women ever paid anywhere near their worth.

Why would a woman subject herself to the awful circumstances she faced on a ship? Simply put, it was a better than they would live on land as a single woman, married to an absent sailor. On land, sailor's wives did wash, cleaning, sewing, or prostituting themselves, and were forced to do whatever they could do to earn money to feed their children and keep a roof over their heads. Sailors pay was poor, at best, and often he would come home from a voyage of six months to a year, and have no money at all. For many wives, he was home just long enough to get her pregnant again, and was then gone, chattel crew to his ship. Unfortunately, in many instances, this woman was not his only wife, nor hers his only family. A historian specializing in nineteenth century sailors wrote "These were great hard men made of iron...but their wives were even stronger." Sometimes it was easier to pass yourself off as a man and suffer the fate of being the only woman on a ship full of men, rather than stay ashore. At least you had a bed, food, and regular pay.

When a captain's wife went to sea with her husband, she gave up everything she knew and loved. Embarking on long voyages that often lasted for years, these women left their homes, families, friends, and everything they held dear to accompany their husbands on these voyages. Life at sea was entirely alien, exceedingly uncomfortable, and the fearsome sailors were often objects of fear, until she got to understand their rough ways. The role of the captain's wife, once she was integrated into the ships company, was especially important.

She served as the head of the ship's community, overseeing the crew's behavior, being the closest thing to a nurturing mother that many of them had ever had. She could sometimes get far more accomplished out of the crew than her stern husband

could, with his unbending rules that he had learned from a lifetime on the unforgiving sea. She oversaw the captain's table, bringing proper manners and decorum to the officers, and acted as a mother to the young midshipmen. She became a leader and a mediator, handling disputes and resolving conflicts as they arose, being the only person on the ship who could argue with the captain. More often than not, she was successful. These were long voyages, too long for frayed matrimonial issues on a small ship.

The captain's wife often assumed the role of ship's surgeon by virtue of the fact that she could sew wounds back together better than anyone else on board. Many captain's wives became more competent than the average surgeons found aboard naval ships. In the case of Mary, it wasn't long before she was reading the dusty, untouched books on health and surgery located on her husband's shelves.

Although living in the best conditions on the ship, she was nonetheless subject to brutal and unhealthy conditions of long duration. Storms could make the decks unwalkable for days on end, and the leaking upper deck would have water dripping throughout her cabin, sometimes flooding it, and everything she owned, with cold salt water. The physical and emotional challenges of life at sea were endless. She adjusted to the cramped and often unsanitary conditions on board the ship, the bad food, the long hours, harsh weather, and lack of privacy. Raging disease throughout the ship was always a danger, and she did her best to combat the conditions that would lead to this occurring.

The captain's wife had to provide emotional support and insight to her husband, who was often under great stress and pressure as he navigated the ship, making decisions that would impact the ship and the lives of everyone on board. Hers may have often been the hardest position on the ship, and as such, a competent captain's wife was indispensable, and her ship was

recognized throughout the fleet as a good one to sail aboard, making the ever-present lack of crew a moot point on her ship.

Life at sea often had a profound negative impact on a woman. For many women, the long separations from their families and friends, and the isolation and loneliness of life at sea took a toll on their emotional and mental health. Many suffered nervous breakdowns, and were dropped off at the nearest port with anything approaching a hospital. They were left on their own, often for the rest of their lives, with nothing but their own broken devices to survive. Other women could never adapt to going back on land, and stayed at sea even if their husbands died, getting positions as a cook or launderer. These were undoubtedly strong women. Brave, determined, and resourceful: If they hadn't been, they would not have been long aboard a ship.

The wife of a common sailor left on land faced a notoriously hard life. Aside from rarely getting any financial support from her missing husband, her life was one of loneliness and uncertainty. Sooner or later, most sailor's wives became widows, often never even knowing what happened to their husbands, and feeling fortunate if they were told their husband's ship sank. Many husbands just stopped coming home, leaving a married woman with children to survive alone in a very hard and unforgiving time in history.

With their husbands away for months or even years at a time, these women had to manage their households and raise their children with only their own resources. This was no small feat, as many of these women had no resources or support. They had to face the day-to-day challenges of running a household, and earn enough money on her own to support her family. They faced huge social stigmas, and it was acceptable to refer to these women a "widow on shore." This term carried with it a lot of negative connotations. These women were often viewed as being abandoned or forsaken, and they faced discrimination and

ridicule from their communities. They could expect very little help, and that is usually what they received from the community.

More than a few sailors' wives eventually took on more than one husband, and hoped they never came home at the same time. Others fell into prostitution to make ends meet. For many, religion became an important source of comfort and support. They turned to their faith to help them through the difficult times, and they often found solace in larger religious communities. Despite all of the challenges, these women were strong, resilient, and resourceful in a very hard age, and they found ways to navigate the difficulties of living, and ways to support their families.

Despite these difficulties, some sailor's wives on land were able to find ways to provide support and comfort in their communities. Their role as single parents gave them the incentive and courage to reach out beyond their worry and uncertainty. They formed close bonds with other women who were in similar circumstances, and they often relied on these relationships to help each other navigate the challenges of their lives. A few women were able to find support from their families and friends, who offered practical help and emotional support as needed. Some of these women went on to start sailor's halls, sailor's unions, disabled sailor's homes, and sailor's wives support groups, long before the age of unionization. They took on Parliament, Congress, and the ship owners. Their efforts forced ship owners to start providing some provisions for sailor's welfare, as well as that of their families. Their efforts in the halls of Parliament forced the Royal Navy to provide some support, however pitiful, to deceased navy sailor's wives.

The nineteenth-century American whaling fleets allowed opportunity for more women to be with their husbands aboard long-term cruising ships. Whaling was a male occupation that separated men and boys from their families for years. The chase of the hunt and processing the whales filled relatively few hours

onboard ship for sailors. Routine chores and the incredible detailed scrimshaw carvings, the music, the storytelling; these were not enough to prevent loneliness and boredom. Good seamen who were family men would leave long-distance whaling to be on ships that would only be gone for months at a time, rather than years. Captains realized that to keep their prize crewmen, they had to make some allowances to have wives aboard. Their children would soon follow.

In 1822, Mary Hayden Russell, wife of Capt. Joseph Russell, and their young son, Charles, became the first family known to have joined a whaling voyage. Other families soon followed suit. A research scholar has identified several hundred seagoing whaling wives, many with children. They preferred the discomforts of life at sea to years of loneliness and separation from their husbands.

Although crewmen referred to a ship that carried a woman as a “hen frigate,” they were often glad to be aboard one. On the whaling bark *Powhatan*, Caroline Mayhew cared for eight hands that fell ill with smallpox and navigated the ship when her husband also became sick. Mrs. Nathaniel Jernagan was credited with helping the crew put out a shipboard fire. Other wives with keen eyesight were valued for spotting whales, and one can be sure many captain’s wives were appreciated for calming their husbands when lack of whales caused frustration and anger.

Other than calling out “There she blows,” a wife was not allowed to participate in the actual whaling activities. Most women washed clothes, cooked, sewed, educated their children, wrote diaries, or read. Many women used music to fill the long hours, which was greatly appreciated by the crew.

Whaling wives fought cockroaches and fleas, and suffered seasickness during violent storms. According to diaries, more than a few wives found the crew exceedingly unpleasant, while several others experienced the dangers of a mutiny aboard ship.

One wife killed a crewman with a pistol during an attempted mutiny.

Gamming, or visiting other boats, was a wonderful diversion for a wife, as well as the captain and crew. When whalers met at sea, the crews exchanged visits. The captain's wife was lowered from ship to whaleboat in a gamming chair and rowed to the other ship for a festive social occasion, visiting with the other captain's wife and any other women that may be aboard.

During the mid-nineteenth century, the wives of missionaries, merchants, and whalers formed a large community of American women in Hawaii. A captain's family might stop in Hawaii while his vessel went to the Arctic. Some families stayed on board and wintered with their husbands in the Arctic.

Aside from dealing with cramped and filthy conditions, poor diets, isolation, and sickness, many wives eventually found themselves with a child on the way. It was important to some pregnant wives to give birth on land, being around other women who could help them. Often stopovers in the Azores, on a Pacific Island, or in a South American port were made for their mothers to give birth to babies conceived on the high seas. Just as often, babies were born at sea.

In the nineteenth century, pregnancy was never mentioned outright. Even in their private diaries, whaling wives only hinted about their pregnancies. Some would miserably record an increase in daily seasickness. Only the very bold dared to delicately remark on the creation of pregnancy clothes. Martha Brown of the *Orient* was more forward by mentioning in her diary in 1848 that she is "fixing an old dress into a loose dress," with "loose" meaning "maternity."

Once the time of birth approached, women at sea faced two options: to be left on land—often while the crew continued on—or to give birth on board, which was far preferable, as the mother would be theoretically closer to women's medical care and whatever social support was available. Martha Brown was left in

Honolulu much to her personal dismay, when she realized her husband would be departing. He was gone for the next seven months, without ever seeing his child prior to leaving. From her diary we know she became involved with a supportive society of women, most of them in similar situations. During Martha's "confinement" after birth when she was restricted to bedrest, a fellow whaling wife nursed her. When Captain Brown returned, he wrote to his brother: "Oahu. I arrived here and to my joy found my wife enjoying excellent health with as pretty a little son as eyes need to look upon. A perfect image of his father of course - blue eyes and light hair, prominent forehead and filled with expression."

Giving birth on land did not always ensure the hygienic setting one would hope for. Abbie Dexter Hicks of Westport accompanied her husband Edward on the *Mermaid*, sailing out in 1873. Her diary entry on the Seychelle Islands was: "Baby born about 12. I caught two rats."

Some whaleships found reaching a port before birth tricky. In 1874, Thomas Wilson's wife Rhoda of the James Arnold of *New Bedford* was about to give birth, but when the ship arrived at the Bay of Islands of New Zealand, there was no doctor in town. A separate boat was sent to search up the Kawakawa River for fourteen miles; when a doctor was finally found and retrieved, the captain informed the doctor that it was a girl.

Still, many babies were born aboard whaleships, either by design or by accident, despite the hardly ideal conditions. Births, if recorded in the ship's logbook, were mentioned matter-of-factly. Charles Robbins of the *Thomas Pope* was recorded in April 1862: "Looking for whales...reduced sail to double reef topsails at 9pm. Mrs. Robbins gave birth of a daughter and doing nicely. Latter part fresh breezes and squally. At 11am took in the mainsail."

Captain Charles Nicholls was in for a surprise when he headed to New Zealand on the *Sea Gull* in 1853 with his wife.

Before the birth, fellow Captain Peter Smith had told him during a gam, “Tis easy,” and advised that the first mate be ready to take over holding the baby once it was born. When the time came, Captain Nicholls dutifully handed the baby to the first mate, only to return several minutes later shouting, “My God! Get the second mate, fast!” when he promptly handed out a second baby.

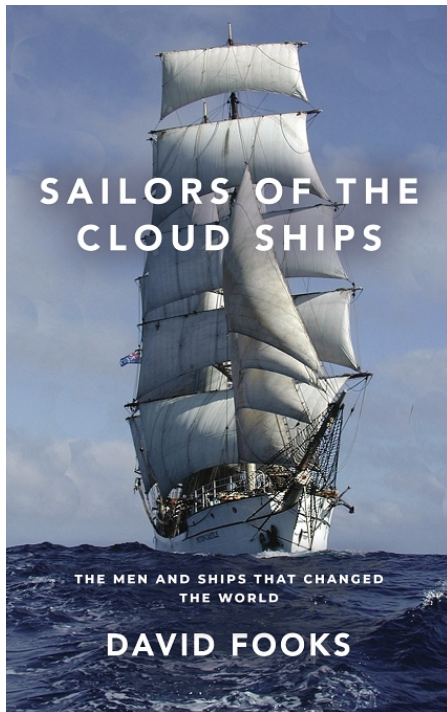
Captain Parker Hempstead Smith’s wife went into labor unexpectedly: “Last night we had an addition to our ship’s company,” Seaman John States recorded on February 18, 1846 on board the *Nantasket* of New London, “for at 9pm, Mrs. Smith was safely delivered of a fine boy whose weight is eight lbs. This is quite a rare thing at sea, but fortunately no accident happened. Had anything occurred, there would have been no remedy and we should have had to deplore the loss of a fine good-hearted woman.” He also added his good wishes for the baby: “Success to him – may he live to be a good whaleman – though that would make him a great rascal.”

We can’t finish this chapter without mention of the “Floating Brothel,” or as modern scholars call her, the “Love Boat.” In 1777, the British government chartered a ship, the *Lady Juliana*, to transport 222 young women from London prisons to the new Penal Colony of Sydney, Australia. All of these women were guilty of only minor offenses, but being poor, couldn’t afford to pay their fines. As soon as the ship got underway, the women were given freedom to come on deck. Within a few days, all thirty-five crewmen had taken “wives,” with some crewmen taking multiple wives.

The ship stopped at three ports of call, with long layovers: seven weeks at one, a month at the next. It was one of the longest trips on record for a transport ship. When at port, several of the women would let it be known in town what the cargo was, and before long, lines of men from town were waiting to “visit” the girls—for a fee, of course.

When the *Lady Juliana* finally arrived at Sydney, with all 222 women alive and healthy, most of them pregnant, they found a colony of unmotivated men, slowly starving to death. Although they had farming tools, they had not planted. They hadn't hunted. Nor had they built any sort of buildings. They were eating what was left of bad, weevil-infested rice. Both men and women were shocked to see each other, wondering how they would survive. The men, with 222 more mouths to feed; the women, wondering how were these lazy do-nothings were going to support them.

When the transport ship arrived the next year, they found a flourishing colony, one run mostly by the women. Many of these ladies flourished in business in the developing town, and several went on to be the richest business people in the country.



The explosive history of sailing ships, and the men, and women, who sailed them, witnessed the greatest changes that the world has ever experienced. The stories of the Age of Sail are far more interesting than what you learned in school.

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