

THE COMMERCE OF BOSTON ON THE EVE OF THE REVOLUTION

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THE importance of maritime commerce in the history of Boston and of New England can hardly be overestimated. Until the industrial revolution of the 19th century, Boston lived and thrived by making good use of her access to the sea. The attempt of Parliament, in 1774, to exclude Boston altogether from the element that made her great, was a punishment comparable to the destruction of Carthage. Had Boston, indeed, been given the choice, she would doubtless have preferred the deliberate destruction of her buildings, to the prohibition to use salt water, that was actually inflicted upon her, and from which the army of Washington delivered her.

Although most historians recognize the importance of Boston's pre-revolutionary commerce, no one has attempted a systematic description of that commerce. It so happens that we have the statistics and materials for such a description. The Massachusetts Historical Society possesses several tables of statistics for the commerce of all the English continental colonies in the years 1768-73, compiled by the Royal Commissioners of the Customs, whose headquarters were at Boston.¹ Professor Edward Channing is the only historian who so far has made use of these statistics;² and space prevented him from making the detailed analysis for a single port, which we propose to do here. In addition,

¹Most if not all of them were compiled by Thomas Irving, one of the customs officials.

²"United States," III, 85-90, 108-17, 128, 154.

Professor Channing obtained from the Public Record Office, London, some valuable Treasury Board statistics of colonial trade, which he has kindly placed at my disposal.

The original books of record of the royal customs officials, from which these statistical tables were compiled, disappeared from view at the time of the Revolution. Last year, however, I discovered two of them in the basement of the Plymouth custom house. The one was a list of entries at Boston from all other ports in the Province of Massachusetts Bay, and from Nova Scotia, for the year 1773; and the other contains a list of clearances from Boston to Great Britain during the first six months of 1773. In addition, I have compiled a list of entries and clearances from the *Massachusetts Gazette and Boston News Letter* for 1773.

These records do not enable us to reconstruct Boston's commerce for any one year. The statistics of non-continental imports and exports are for the years 1771 and 1772; the above record books are for 1773. But the three years have this in common: they were years of normal commerce unaffected by riots, boycotts, or embargoes.

The earlier non-importation agreement had broken down in 1770, when Parliament repealed the Townshend duties on British manufactures;¹ and the next disturbance was the Boston tea-party of December, 1773. During these three peaceful years the Commissioners of the Customs were quietly enforcing the Acts of Trade, and collecting the customs duties with such efficiency as to enable them to make smuggling unprofitable, pay the salaries of the Royal officials in Massachusetts-Bay, and to leave a substantial balance for His Majesty's treasury. The influence of all this on bringing about the Revolution, has already been pointed out by Professor Channing.

¹See above, and A. M. Schlesinger, "Colonial Merchants and Am. Revolution," chap. V; C. M. Andrews, in "Pub. Col. Soc. Mass., XIX," 246, ff.

I. TOTAL MOVEMENT OF VESSELS.

The following extracts from a table of annual average clearances, give us a broad view of the total movement of sea-borne commerce. No date is attached to the table (which covers every continental port); but it is found among the other papers of the Customs Commissioners, and undoubtedly represents the period of their incumbency, 1768-73, if not the latter part of it.

AN ACCOUNT OF THE NUMBER OF VESSELS ON AN AVERAGE ENTERED INWARDS AND CLEARED OUTWARDS ANNUALLY AT THE SEVERAL PORTS IN AMERICA

Ports	Extra-Continental				Continental ¹			
	Topsail vessels ²		Sloops and schooners		Topsail vessels		Sloops and schooners	
	in	out	in	out	in	out	in	out
New Hampshire	76	107	90	102	11	12	113	114
Falmouth ³	32	39	41	67	4	3	45	41
Salem and Marblehead	54	51	125	144	3	9	119	125
Boston	146	129	136	90	27	46	530	542
New York	150	146	161	160	25	36	294	301
Philadelphia	303	310	70	97	33	37	253	257
Charleston	165	182	105	113	34	23	155	140

I must remind the reader that Boston's commerce, as that of all the British continental colonies, was under certain restraints imposed by the Acts of Trade and Navigation. Hence all commerce outside these legal channels was illicit, and does not appear in the statistics that form the basis of this study. But it seems to be the consensus of opinion, both of contemporaries and historians, that by 1771 the combined efforts of the Royal Customs service, the Royal Navy and revenue cutters, had pretty well stamped out smuggling at Boston, although much of it continued at ports south of Cape Cod.⁴

¹It will be understood that the term continental, as used in these tables and in this article, refers to the continent of North America.

²i. e., ships, barques, brigs, brigantines, and snows.

³Portland, Maine.

⁴See the statistics of duties collected at the end of this article.

To summarize the legal restraints under which Boston's commerce labored during the years 1771-73¹

1. All vessels trading in or with the colonies must be built in Great Britain, Ireland, Channel Islands, or British colonies, and owned by British subjects.

2. IMPORTS. All goods of European or oriental origin must be imported from Great Britain, except Mediterranean salt, Madeira or Azores wines, and Irish horses, victuals, linen and servants, which may be imported directly from the country of origin.

3. EXPORTS.

a. *Enumerated* colonial products may be exported only to Great Britain, British colonies, and West Africa. The enumerated products likely to affect Boston's trade were tobacco, cotton, indigo, dyewoods, molasses, sugar, rice,² coffee, pimento, furs, hides and skins, naval stores, masts and spars, pot and pearl ash, whale fins, iron.

b. *Non-enumerated* (all other) colonial products may be exported only to Great Britain, British colonies, Ireland, Europe south of Cape Finisterre, West Africa, and the West Indies.

c. Wool yarns, woolens, hats and felts may not be exported at all, even coastwise.

I omit the regulations as to duties, bonds, cockets, etc.

Stated in another way, parliamentary legislation forbade the colonists direct trade with the orient, or with Northern Europe outside Great Britain; and permitted only a limited trade with Southern Europe and Ireland. But practically free trade was permitted with the west coast of Africa and the West Indies, British and foreign, subject only to certain customs duties and regulations; and there were no restraints on the coasting trade between the colonies

¹The clearest statement of these that I have seen is in "Instructions by the Commissioners of His Majesty's Customs in America to [John Mascarene Esq.] who is appointed [Comptroller] of the Customs at the Port of [Salem & Marblehead] in America." (1769, pp. 40. (Words in brackets inserted in Ms.). Copy in Mass. Historical Society.

²Rice and sugar may be exported to Europe south of Cape Finisterre.

from Labrador to Florida, other than a few export duties, and that mentioned in (c) above.

The English colonists were forbidden to trade with Spanish or Portugese America by the laws of those countries.

2. THE DIRECT TRADE BETWEEN BOSTON AND GREAT BRITAIN

A. Vessels and Exports

We have an itemized list of imports and exports for 1771¹ at all the continental ports; a similar list of imports for 1772²; and for Boston alone, a list of clearances, with interesting particulars as to the vessels and cargoes, for the first six months of 1773.³ Additional data as to records and inward ladings, at a somewhat abnormal period, may be obtained from the pamphlets printed in Boston by John Mein in 1769 and 1770.⁴

From these sources, and from the entries and clearances in the *Massachusetts Gazette and Boston News Letter* for 1773, we gather that Boston had forty clearances to, and sixty-six entries from British ports for that year.⁵ London was the favorite terminal or

¹"An account of the imports & exports to be from the several ports in America from January 1771 to January 1772" Ms. in Massachusetts Historical Society. This contains no imports from Great Britain.

²"Imports from Gt. Britain & Ireland from 5th Jany. 1772 to 5th January 1773." Ms. in M. H. S.

³"A List of all Ships & Vessels that have cleared outward from the port of Boston to Great Britain and Ireland" in one of the Ms. books at the Plymouth Custom house.

⁴"A State of the Importations from Great Britain into the port of Boston." Jan. 1769 to Aug. 17th 1769 (Boston 1769); and "A State of Imporations from Great Britain into the Port of Boston. From the beginning of January 1770." (Boston, 1770).

⁵Distributed as follows:

	Entries from	Clearances to
London	32	25
Greenock	7	8
Falmouth	10	0
Liverpool	7	1
Newcastle	3	1
Bristol	3	0
Jersey	2	1
Hull	0	2
Sunderland	1	0
Poole	1	1
Southampton	0	1
	—	—
	66	40

starting point, with Greenock (the port of Glasgow) second, and Liverpool, fourth. The discrepancy between entries and clearances is explained by the fact that many vessels made the voyage from England to Boston as the last leg of a triangular voyage.¹

The "constant traders" or packets that plied regularly between Boston and British ports were as familiar to Bostonians of that day as Long Wharf or the Town House, and their masters as well known as Sam Adams or James Bowdoin. These vessels were very small, even for that period; none over 180 tons, and mostly under, which would make them about sixty to eighty feet long on deck.² Most of them carry a crew of ten officers and men. Here is the ship *Thomas*, Captain John Callahan, built at Boston in 1764 and owned by the Greenes and Daniel Hubbard; next year the same captain will have Governor Hutchinson as passenger. Here is the ship *Lydia*, 120 tons, John Hancock's well known packet. Her former master James Scott has been promoted to the larger *Hayley* (150 tons, built at Boston in 1771); earnest of a later promotion, by his owner's wife!³ Here is the ship *Boston Packet* 120 tons, Nathaniel B. Lyde, master, built at Pownalborough in 1772 to replace an earlier vessel of the same name, and belonging to William Dennie, a Boston merchant. Here is the ship *Industry*, 100 tons, Captain Parsivell, built at Barnstable in 1773 for Samuel Allyne Otis, brother of the eminent patriot. Mr. Otis, we are told elsewhere,⁴ was accustomed to pick up most of his outward cargoes at Plymouth:—

¹The ten entries from Falmouth, for instance, are probably vessels bringing Mediterranean products, which merely stopped at the nearest British port to comply with the law. See below.

²The dimensions of a 110-ton brigantine in 1768 are 52 feet keel, 20 feet beam, 9½ feet hold, and 4 feet between decks (Collections Mass. Hist. Soc. LXIX, 219) Lloyds register for 1776 contains several New England-built vessels over 300 tons. Vessels as large as 400 tons had been built in Boston in the 17th century (Morison, "Maritime History," 14), and one of 700 tons was built at New London in 1725 (Caulkins, "New London," 242). Some of the British East Indiamen of that period were over a thousand ton burthen.

³Captain Scott married John Hancock's widow Dorothy (Quincy).

James Thacher, "History of Plymouth" (1832) 340.

cod liver oil from the local fishermen, lumber and potash from the wooded back-country of the Old Colony. Most interesting of all is the ship *Dartmouth*, 180 tons, Captain James Hall; built at Dartmouth (New Bedford) in 1772; owned in part by three Rotches of that place, in part by Samuel Enderby and Isaac Buxton of London. The *Dartmouth* clears for London on January 4, 1773, and again on June 26;¹ on her return from this voyage a famous tea-party will be held on her decks.

The ship *John*, 140 tons, which like the *Dartmouth* makes one round voyage and begins a second within six months, belongs to James Duguid of Boston, John Duguid of Glasgow and three other Scots of Greenock. She was built at Falmouth (Portland, Maine) in 1772. The three other vessels in this list which cleared for Greenock, are also New England built and Scots owned². Nor are all the English packets owned and built on this side. The ship *London*, 140 tons, Robert Calef, master, was built on the Thames in 1770, and is owned by Nathaniel Wheatley of Boston and two Londoners; and the brig *Liverpool Packet*, 110 tons, built at Sheepscot in 1770, is owned by Liverpool parties. One vessel, the ship *Mary Ann*, 110 tons, built at Amesbury in 1762, is owned by its master, Ebenezer Symmes.

This list of clearances affords little detail as to cargoes; enough, however, to see that Boston's exports to Great Britain were few and cheap compared with her imports thence. The greater part of them are products of the forest; Glasgow, however, takes flaxseed and Indian meal; and to London goes six tons of pig iron marked *Hope*, manufactured by Nicholas Brown & Co., at Providence, Rhode Island.

The detailed list of exports from all continental

¹Apparently it took about six months for one of these packets ships to make a voyage. The *John* clears for Greenock on January 4 and June 19.

²Brig *Chance*, 70 tons and brig *Christy*, 110 tons, both built at Newbury, and brig *Mínerva*, 100 tons, built at Boston in 1766.

colonial ports to Great Britain, in 1771, gives us more information, and a better perspective.

Taking the forest products first; Boston exports 409 tons¹ pearl ash, and twice as much potash; this exceeds the figures for New York and Philadelphia². Under naval stores there are about 10,000 barrels of common tar, 800 of turpentine, and 80 masts, yard and bowsprits³.

For lumber, Boston is the third port of export to Great Britain of oak plank and barrel staves after New York and Philadelphia, second for pine plank, after Piscataqua (Portsmouth, N. H.). Boston is completely overshadowed in the timber trade by Falmouth (Portland, Maine), which sends 1200 tons of oak and 3250 tons of pine to Great Britain; and in the export of oars and handspikes both by Falmouth and Piscataqua⁴. Boston and Falmouth together export some 17,000 treenails, Falmouth sending the larger part.

Statistics for exports of furs and skins to Great Britain are given in these tables only for the port of Quebec. But we find moose and deer skins are mentioned among the cargoes of the vessels clearing from Boston for Great Britain in 1773; and Thomas Handasyd Peck conducted a flourishing fur export trade in Boston at this period.⁵

One export trade to Great Britain in which Boston was supreme before the Revolution, was that in whaling

¹The statistics of imports and exports, in this article, are given in round numbers only, and I do not guarantee their accuracy. Students who desire perfect exactness may examine the original totals at the Massachusetts Historical Society, or have photostat copies made for a reasonable sum. Professor Channing has tabulated the 1771 exports from Philadelphia, and from all continental ports, in his "United States," III, 116-117.

²No figures are given for Falmouth, Piscataqua, or the Carolinas, all of which must have had a large export trade in pot and pearl ash at this time.

³Portland, Maine exported 1,285 masts, 281 yards, and 288 bowsprits; New York 400 of all three. None from anywhere else save 94 masts from Brunswick, N. C. There is also a separate column for spars under lumber. Boston here has 557, Falmouth 27, Piscataqua 114, and extra New England ports none.

⁴Piscataqua exports over 115,000 feet of oars; Falmouth over 194,000, and Boston, 19,500.

⁵Juliah Sturgis, "From Letters and Papers of Russell Sturgis" (Oxford, privately printed,) Chapter II.

products. Of whale fins, 30,500 pounds, about three-quarters of the total from all the colonies, left Boston. Of oil, 2150 tons, about half the total; most of the other half being from Newfoundland. Of spermaceti candles, 4200 pounds, the sole entry in that column. There was no royal custom house at Nantucket; hence all the products of that island metropolis had to be exported from some continental port, and Boston evidently handled the lion's share.

Boston's exports of dried fish to Great Britain are inconsiderable—a mere two thousand “kentle,” (as they still call that ancient measure at Gloucester), compared with over 11,000 quintal from Newfoundland; which emphasizes New England's assertion that without the West India trade, her fisheries were undone.

Some 5900 bushels of flaxseed leave Boston for Great Britain; a little over one-third of the total to England and Scotland. But New York exported 105,500 bushels and Philadelphia 42,000 bushels of flaxseed to Ireland. Apparently neither Boston nor Salem had any direct commerce with Ireland at this period. The table of the North American-Irish trade¹ for 1771 omits Massachusetts. In the shipping news in the *Massachusetts Gazette* for 1773 there are no clearances from Boston to Ireland, and but one entry thence, and that vessel merely touched at Cork on the way from London.

A curious item in the list of exports from Boston to Great Britain is 900 pounds of hops, the only entry in that column. In the coastwise figures for 1769, 8350 pounds of hops leave Boston for other parts of the continent. Evidently hops were more extensively cultivated in Massachusetts at this period than has generally been known.

From these statistics, it is evident that Boston had no transit trade between the West Indies and Great

¹An account of the Imports & Exports” (Ms. cited above), p. 10.

Britain, although an act of 1766¹ remitted Colonial customs duties on foreign West Indian sugar, indigo and coffee, if re-exported to Great Britain within twelve months. The Boston merchants in 1769 complain that formerly they had enjoyed a considerable trade in re-exporting British West India sugar to England; but that under the same act, all sugar imported into England from the continental colonies is deemed foreign, and pays duties accordingly.²

B. Imports

Of imports from Great Britain and Ireland we have a carefully itemized list³, for all colonial ports, for the year 1772, divided into goods of British and those of foreign origin, which could be legally imported into the colonies only through Great Britain.

From these tables it appears that Boston, in 1772, was the continental emporium for foreign drugs; a position that it held well into the 19th century. In a long list, including such favorites of the 18th century pharmacopoeia as scammony, gamboge, dragon's blood, quicksilver, jalap, aloes, cassia and senna, Boston leads all other ports, and in several instances is the only place in America importing the article in question.

Boston is the principal importing point for sailcloth and cordage. Here are entered 241 tons of cordage (Newfoundland with 238 tons is second); and over 100,000 yards of sailcloth; New York with 75,000 yards is second.⁴ These are British products. Boston also imports 92 pieces and 1526 ells of foreign (undoubtedly

¹ 6 George III, c. ss. 52, 15, 16.

² "Observations on several Acts of Parliament," Boston, 1769, p. 7.

³ "Imports from Gt. Britain & Ireland from 5th Jany. 1772 to 5th January 1773," Ms., M. H. S. The imports from Ireland are separate from those from Great Britain, and the goods of British origin separate from those of foreign origin.

⁴ Salem imports 38,736 yards of sailcloth. The imports of cordage and sail-cloth at Piscataqua (Portsmouth, N. H.) 29 tons and 6,795 yards, are surprisingly small for as important a center of shipbuilding; suggesting that Boston was the distributing center for such goods.

Russian) sailcloth, and is the only port in that column. It is also the only place importing British ship chandlery.

Textiles naturally loom large in the import statistics. Boston is a poor second for printed cottons (5500 yards), to the James River (72,000 yards); and its imports of printed calicoes and foreign cottons and calicoes are practically nil, although all the other colonies, including Quebec, figure largely in these columns. Nor is Boston particularly prominent in the silk or the linen trade. But in the English woollens trade it is among the leaders, being the first for imports of baizes, shalloons, serges, kersies, and well up in the list for numerous other varieties of woolen cloth¹. Boston is also first in woolen hosiery, 4411 dozen pairs. Philadelphia's low figures for woolen hose, 565 dozen, indicate that the Germantown stocking industry was underselling, locally, the imported goods.

In hardware and cutlery, no figures are given for Boston, and very few for other ports. Undoubtedly there is some error here, for surely more than 13 baskets of British cutlery,—the total noted—were imported into the colonies for one year. Boston, to be sure, has a flourishing local handicraft of cutlers and braziers. It is the only place in the list importing block tin, but second to the Upper James River in brass.

Most of the American customs districts report considerable imports of British tanned leather; 3829 lb. for Boston, and over 63,000 for Newfoundland, where it was doubtless in great demand for fishermen's clothing. Boston imports 3384 fishing lines, but no fishing hooks, which were at that time made locally.

Although Boston was a considerable export point

¹There are some very curious statistics in the woolen schedule. Patuxent (Maryland) for instance, imports 94,000 pieces of frize as compared with Boston's 22,000 and New York's 18,000. Quebec imports 39,750 yards of flannels, as compared with Patuxent's 24,000, New York's 14,000, and Boston's 3,000 yards.

for flaxseed, it imports more linseed oil, 1880 gallons, than any other place save New York.

The passing of Puritanism may be tested by the fact that Boston imported 6536 packs of playing cards in 1772, more than any other districts save New York and Maryland. Boston's 2500 gross tobacco pipes occupy the same relative position. We also note that Boston is first in those necessities for 18th century officials, ostrich plumes and gold lace; but has not much use for silver lace, which finds a greater sale in New York. Philadelphia takes little of either kind. We must also yield to New York for British snuff and looking glasses.

During the first half of the nineteenth century, Boston was the principal North American emporium for East India goods, Smyrna figs, and citrous fruits. It is interesting to note that in 1772 Boston was already the chief colonial importing point for these commodities. Over two million oranges and lemons were landed in Boston that year, from Great Britain, as compared with barely 350,000 at the rest of the continental seaports. Figs to the amount of 162 chests make up over three-quarters the total American importation; and in India goods Boston leads with almost 7500 pieces, compared with 5200 at New York and 4300 at Philadelphia. About half the pieces were Nankeens or China cottons, then in great demand for gentlemen's small-clothes. Boston is also the chief importer of olives and raisins.

Although Professor Channing has already brought it out¹, many persons will still be surprised to hear that Boston was the principal emporium, in 1773, for regularly imported, duty-paid tea! Out of a total of 783,165 pounds paying the threepenny duty in the continental colonies between December 1, 1770, and January 5, 1774, Boston was responsible for 492,886 pounds. Another proof of the efficiency of the Com-

¹Table summarized in his "United States," III, 128.

missioners of the Customs, and of the timeliness of the famous tea-party in December 1773.

Pre-revolutionary Boston obtained its most popular beverage, rum, largely from its own distilleries; but the "quality" drank wine imported either from the Western Islands direct, or from Spain and Portugal through England. In 1772, Boston is the only place on the continent¹ importing port wine, and to the comfortable total of 37,000 gallons. Of British strong beer, 83 tons are imported at Boston, a good second to New York.

In this list of imports from Great Britain for 1772, no mention is made of Spanish wine. However, in another record, we find the Marblehead-Boston packets in 1773 carrying Spanish or Malaga wine that John Hooper of Marblehead imported in the *Betsey* and the *Lynn* from Falmouth, England.

Wines imported from Great Britain (except French wines) paid ten shillings duty per ton of 252 gallons, whilst Madeira and Fayal wine imported directly was taxed seven pounds sterling per ton. Although the English duty on foreign wine would have made up part of the difference, there was enough discrimination to encourage the indirect route, which gave British merchants the profits of transshipment.

3. THE MEDITERRANEAN, AZORES AND MADEIRA TRADE

This brings us to the direct trade of Boston with the Mediterranean and "Wine Islands." Before 1760, when the colonists were permitted to carry West India produce to this part of the globe, and return direct with fruit and wine, the Mediterranean trade had been one of the chief props of Boston's prosperity. But now, as we have seen, exports to that region were limited strictly to non-enumerated goods; and imports, to salt and insular wine. Consequently, Boston's

¹Except for 787 gallons at St. Augustine. Possibly the 11,500 gallons "foreign wine" imported at New York from England is port.

direct trade with the Mediterranean had shrunk to very puny proportions. Little but fish, lumber and rum could be exported thither; and even Island wine, the sole direct return allowed save salt, was subject to so heavy a duty—£7 per ton of 252 gallons—that it could not compete with wine imported *via* England, paying but ten shillings per ton.¹

The *Massachusetts Gazette and Boston News-Letter* for 1773 notes but five clearances to this region,² and thirteen entries from Lisbon, St. Ubes, Cadiz, Teneriffe, Fayal and Madeira.

In the table of "Exports to the Southern Parts of Europe and the Wine Islands" for 1771,³ Boston exports 4350 lb. sperm candles out of a total of 7650 lb. for the whole continent; but only two tons of oil. Boston sends but 11,500 quintals dried codfish, as compared with 119,000 from Salem and Marblehead, and 384,500 from Newfoundland. The two Bay ports send each about 13,500 gallons of rum. Salem and Marblehead send 268,000 feet of pine boards and planks; Boston, 45,000 feet; and New York, 47,000 feet.

The import statistics are even more significant of the havoc wrought in this commerce by the recent Acts of Trade. Some 22,000 bushels of salt (compared with 150,000 at Newfoundland), and a bare 93 tons of "Wine Islands" wine (New York took 210 and Charleston, 121 tons), make up the entire account. The two million oranges and lemons, and the large amounts of raisins, figs, drugs, and olives, which Boston would normally have imported direct, come through England. From England, too, comes Malaga wine, and 37,000 gallons (about 148 tons) of port wine,

¹These restraints form one of the principal complaints of the Boston merchants in their "Observations on Several Acts of Parliament," 1769. Their effect on the fisheries is particularly noted and evidently with justice, comparing the figures of Boston's exports with those of Newfoundland, below.

²Several others clear for Newfoundland, and proceed thence to the Mediterranean with fish.

³In "An Account of the Imports & Exports to and from the several ports in America," Jan. 5, 1771 to Jan. 5, 1772.

which the colonists are not allowed to import directly from Portugal.

Here we have concrete evidence that Parliamentary regulations were changing the drinking habits of the New England gentry. Port wine, a beverage little known in the colonies before 1760, is being imported to a fifty percent excess over Maderia. No wonder Sam Adams thought it high time to force the issue. Colonial liberty was in danger of being stupefied by port wine, as well as drenched in tea!

4. THE AFRICAN TRADE

Boston had eight clearances to Africa in 1773, and no arrivals thence; a clear indication that those vessels were engaged in the slave trade. The statistics for 1769 and for 1771 mention no imports at Boston from Africa in those years; in fact there were no imports from Africa in any of the colonies north of Mason and Dixon's line in 1771; and in 1769 only 10 tons of camwood at Newfoundland, 6 negroes at Rhode Island, and 93 elephants' tusks at New York.¹ The statistics of exports to Africa in 1771 give Boston a place subordinate to Rhode Island, and mention no exports from any other New England port. Boston's wherewithal to purchase slaves includes 550 pounds spermaceti candles (Rhode Island, 3430 pounds) 58,700 gallons rum (Rhode Island, 153,000 gals., New York, Philadelphia and Charleston, together 22,000 gals.); 2400 pounds tobacco (Rhode Island 1500 pounds, New York and Charleston each 8,000, and Philadelphia 2300 pounds); and 7500 feet of lumber (Rhode Island 15,000; Philadelphia 13,000, Charleston 10,000 feet).

¹Thomas Irving's "Account of the Goods & Produce imported into the several ports on the continent of North America . . . 1769 . . ." (ms. M. H. S.) 5,155 negroes were imported into the Southern Colonies, according to this schedule, and only 2,761 in 1771. 4 negroes were "exported coastways" from Rhode Island in 1769, but none from other Northern Colonies.

5. THE WEST INDIA TRADE¹

As of old, Boston's most extensive and valuable branch of commerce, was that with the British and foreign West Indies. In character it was the same as in the beginning—exports of dried fish, lumber and country produce, in return for tropical products, particularly molasses, most of which was distilled locally into rum. It employed more vessels than any other branch of Boston commerce, and, was the cornerstone to Boston's prosperity. Parliament, of late years, had removed many of the obstructions from the natural course of trade in this direction. Commerce with the non-British West Indies was no longer prohibited, because experience had shown that it could not be prohibited; and the bulk of Boston's West-India trade was with the French and the Dutch islands.

Foreign sugar, coffee and indigo were taxed more heavily than British, on entry to the continental colonies, and foreign rum was prohibited; but all molasses, British and foreign, was subject to the light duty of a penny a gallon; and there were no duties whatever on cotton, which was used extensively at this time in domestic manufactures, or on cocoa, which several local establishments manufactured into chocolate.

The West India trade probably employed more tonnage than all the rest of Boston's inter-continental commerce. According to the *Massachusetts Gazette and Boston Weekly News-Letter* for 1773², there were in that year 128 clearances from Boston to the West Indies, and 26 to the continental colonies of Surinam (Dutch Guiana), Demerara and Essequibo (British Guiana). The entries from the West Indies numbered just 203; and those from the Guianas 20. This discrepancy between entries and clearances is due to

¹Cf. Herbert C. Bell, "West Indian Trade before the Revolution," *American Historical Review*, XXII, 272.

²Tabulated by the author, accuracy not guaranteed!

the common practice of clearing for some continental port, such as New London or Cape Fear River or Charleston, in order to pick up outward freight or produce. Judging from a table of 1766, the average burthen of Boston's West India fleet was about 65 tons,¹ about half the vessels being square-rigged, and the rest, schooners and sloops.

Further analyzing these shipping statistics we find that of the 128 clearances, 90 leave for the West Indies in general, and the rest for some island in particular. By tracing the names of vessels, or rather of masters², we find that a few trade constantly with some particular island, such as Jamaica, Grenada, or New Providence;³ but the greater number made first for Barbados or one of the Windward islands, and traded down the wind until their outward loadings were disposed of, and the homeward cargo complete.⁴ The entries, which mention only the last port touched at, assign the greater number to French possessions. From Mole St. Nicholas in Hayti, recently opened to the British flag, come 52 sail. From Guadeloupe, Martinique, St. Lucia and St. Martin's, 64. From Dutch and Danish St. Eustatia, St. Croix, and St. Thomas, 22. From Jamaica, 11; from Barbados, 9; and from eleven different small British islands, 38.

Although the West India trade was the most important branch of Boston's commerce, Boston's exports were inferior to those from several other North American ports.

Portsmouth, New Hampshire, sends more bricks; Portsmouth, Philadelphia and Rhode Island more

¹"An account of the Number of Vessels and Tonnage entered and cleared inward and outward at Philadelphia, Boston and New York for the year 1766". Ms. in Mass. Hist. Society.

²The shipping records in the colonial press usually give the names of masters rather than of vessels, thus: "Cleared outward, Smith, Jones, Perkins & Robinson for the West Indies."

³Nassau, Bahamas.

⁴This is the course described in the Boston merchants' "State of the Trade," 1763 (*Publications of the Colonial Society of Massachusetts*, XIX, 381) Cf. Herbert C. Bell, in *American Historical Review*, XXII, 276 and note 87.

furniture; Southern New England and the Middle States more grain and provisions. The port of Salem and Marblehead sends 1800 pairs of shoes, and Boston, 1400; 88,000 quintals of dry fish, and Boston, 57,500; 15,500 hogshead shooks, and Boston, 12,500. Connecticut, and particularly the port of New London, is the principal exporting center for livestock and onions. New London sends 1450 live cattle, 3150 horses, 4180 hogs and sheep, a thousand dozen of poultry, and over a hundred thousand ropes of onions to the West Indies in 1771. Indeed there is not a single item of any importance on the whole list, in which Boston is first. It is evident, as the shipping figures of 1773 suggested, that Boston vessels had to pick up a good part of their outward ladings in ports south of Cape Cod.

Turning to the statistics of imports from the Antilles we find that Boston has lost its ancient pre-eminence as the "mart town of the West Indies" which Edward Randolph had called it a century before. It is still first, however, in molasses, despite the loud complaints that the penny duty would ruin that trade¹. Boston imports over a million gallons of foreign, and 23,000 gallons of British, West India molasses, compared with half a million gallons at Rhode Island, a little less at New York and Philadelphia, and 638,000 gallons at Salem and Marblehead. Boston is the first in salt imports, but she is second to Philadelphia as importer of pimento, second to Salem and Marblehead in cocoa, third to Salem and Marblehead and Philadelphia in cotton. In the important items of sugar and rum, Boston stands very low.

As far as may be learned from these statistics, Boston re-exported only very slight amounts of West India produce to Great Britain and the Mediterranean the only parts of the world to which she was permitted to re-export them, under the Acts of Trade. It would seem that part of her exports to the Islands must have

¹"Observations on the Several Acts of Parliament," 1769, p. 5.

been exchanged for specie, or for bills on London; otherwise her heavy adverse balance in the direct trade with Great Britain could not have been righted.

6. THE COASTING TRADE

The old Boston entry-book for 1773, now at the Plymouth custom house, gives the entries from the Province of Massachusetts Bay, from certain points northward, and from fishing voyages. The following table, compiled from this book, indicates the extent and variety of the local coasting trade at this time.

NUMBER OF VESSELS ENTERING AT BOSTON, 1773, FROM OTHER PLACES IN THE PROVINCE OF MASSACHUSETTS-BAY, AND FROM CERTAIN POINTS NORTH

Labrador	1	Hingham ¹	2
Magdalen Is.	3	Cohasset, Scituate ¹	4
Canso	31	North River	17
Other points in Nova Scotia	15	Kingston	14
St. John River	2	Duxbury	24
	—	Plymouth	23
	52	South Shore	84
Eastern Maine	75	Cape Cod	52
Penobscot	60	Dartmouth	7
Penobscot to Kennebec	190	Nantucket	24
Kennebec	98		—
Casco Bay	45	Total Coasting	956
Falmouth	54	Returned from whaling	56
Western Maine	57	Returned from fishing	45
	—	Returned from sea-cow- ing	6
Maine, total	579		—
Newburyport	48		107
Gloucester	54		
Ipswich and Manchester	6		
Salem and Beverly	47		
Marblehead	55		
	—		
North Shore	210		

From the shipping news in the *Massachusetts Gazette* for 1773, I have compiled the following table

¹Entries from these nearby points to Boston were recorded only exceptionally.

of entries from, and clearances to, the following places and colonies not covered by the above table.

NUMBER OF COASTWISE ENTRIES, CLEARANCES AT BOSTON, 1773, FROM AND FOR COLONIES OUTSIDE MASSACHUSETTS-BAY

	E	C		E	C
Newfoundland and			Philadelphia	19	25
Island St. John ¹	33	45	Maryland	45	40
Quebec	7	10	Virginia	19	28
Halifax ²	17	8	North Carolina	61	55
Rhode Island	13	8	South Carolina	3	7
Connecticut	74	69	Georgia	4	3
New York	11	7			
				306	305

This last table is probably incomplete. The figures it gives for New York are suspiciously small. And both lists leave us in the dark as to the coastwise trade of Boston with Portsmouth, N. H., which must have been considerable. Furthermore, there is a discrepancy between these lists and the statistics of average annual clearances. That schedule gives Boston 547 annual continental (coastwise) entries, and 582 clearances. This cannot be meant to include the Massachusetts-Bay coasting trade, yet it considerably exceeds the figures, as given in the *Massachusetts Gazette*, for the non-Massachusetts coasting trade in 1773. Probably the newspaper reports of coastwise trade are incomplete. If this explanation is correct, Boston had not far from 1500 coastwise entries in 1773.

We have no statistics for the coastwise imports and exports at Boston, for any later year than 1769;³ an abnormal year, when all American commerce was affected by the non-importation agreements. But such as they are, the figures are worth a brief analysis. In 1769, Boston imported by water, coast-

¹Prince Edward Island.

²Halifax entries not included in previous table.

³"An Account of the Goods & Produce Imported into & exported from the several ports on the Continent of North America. . . . Coastways between the 5th of January 1769 & the 5th of January 1770." Ms., Mass. Hist. Soc.

wise, a very large quantity of breadstuffs and provisions:—almost 350,000 bushels of Indian corn, 38,000 bushels of oats, 58,000 bushels of wheat, 4600 bushels of pease and beans, four thousand tons of bread and flour, and a thousand tons of beef and pork.

The greater part of these remained in Boston for home consumption. Most of it probably came from the middle colonies, the great grain producing section at this period; and the meat from Connecticut. For other foodstuffs, Boston's excess of coastwise imports over coastwise exports are as follows: onions, 60,000 ropes (from Connecticut, doubtless, which exports coastwise 431,000 ropes); butter, 40,000 pounds; cheese, 31,000 pounds. In potatoes, the exchange is very small:—a thousand bushels imported and fifteen hundred exported. Of course a considerable part of these food imports originate in the farms of central and western Massachusetts, which found it cheaper to send their produce down the Connecticut River, and around Cape Cod, than to haul it overland to Boston.

An interesting item in the coastwise exports is shoes, of which Boston exported coastwise over 11,000 pair in 1769. Most of these went to New York and Philadelphia, which import coastwise almost that exact quantity. The South imports only a few hundred pair.

The leading Boston coastwise export of local manufacture, however, is rum. Over 585,000 gallons of the New England variety left Boston, in 1769, for American consumption; and only 50,000 gallons came in from other parts of the continent. 22,000 gallons of West India rum were exported, and none imported coastwise.

About 5000 barrels of tar and 1600 barrels of pitch doubtless represent the bulk of Boston's coastwise imports from North Carolina.

The other main items of coastwise export, in 1769, are West India products. The following figures are the excess of coastwise exports over imports: cocoa, 1,600 pounds; coffee, 30,000 pounds; loaf sugar, 28,500 pounds; molasses, 192,000 gallons.

We may conclude by analyzing the entries from the Northern provinces and from Massachusetts-Bay which are recorded in the entry-book of 1773. Here are found sufficient details to enable us to visualize the coastwise traffic of the pre-revolutionary period. Almost all of it is done in sloops of 30 to 50 tons burthen; the high-pooed sloops that we see in the old engravings, with loose-footed mainsails, square topsails, and high-steved bowsprits. A few brigantines of 70 to 80 tons are found in the list. The schooners, which are fairly numerous, vary from 15 to 50 tons burthen, and for the most part are smaller than the sloops. These lesser schooners are undoubtedly the pole-masted, double-ended pinkies or Chebacco boats which were very largely used in the fisheries, both before and after the Revolution.¹ About half the vessels appear several times at Boston in the course of the year, showing that they were regular packets.

From Labrador comes the little 15-ton schooner *Seaflower* with codfish and feathers. The vessels from Canso, N.S., are evidently returning from fishing. They bring mainly cod and sea-cow oil. Nova Scotia sends to Boston various sorts of peltry, pickled mackerel, codfish, firewood, and grindstones. The trade with Newfoundland is not noted in the entry-book; we know, however, from other sources that it consisted mainly in supplying the fishermen and settlers there with West India goods, and bringing back fish².

There are 579 entries from Maine, from almost every place between Passamaquoddy and Old York. The principal export of the coastline east of Portland is firewood, with various forms of lumber, such as boards, laths, shingles, staves, and shooks, in second place. Machias sends her *Little Favourite*: Gouldsborough, her 25-ton sloop *Free and Easy*, and 15-ton pinkie *Success*—a prophetic name, for her entry is

¹Morison, "Maritime History of Mass.," 143, 305.

²Schlesinger, "Colonial Merchants," 87n.; *American Historical Review*, XXII, 276, n. 14.

signed by Francis Shaw, father of Major Samuel Shaw, the pioneer of the China trade, and grandfather of Robert Gould Shaw, the eminent Boston merchant.

The Penobscot River, whose shores were then in the process of settlement, sends 60 small vessels, mostly laden with firewood, which is almost the sole export of Broad or Muscungus Bay.¹ From the St. George River comes a quantity of lime, still a leading product of that region. Boothbay, still a poor settlement of log huts in 1773, is served by five trips of the 55-ton sloop *Elizabeth*. Damariscotta has the *Peggy and Jenny*, the *Betsy and Sally*, and the *Mary Ann*. The 60-ton sloop *Brittania* is the Sheepscot's most industrious packet. The 98 cargoes from the Kennebec differ from the preceding only by the addition of barrelled alewives.

At Falmouth (Portland), we reach the first port with an independent foreign trade, the results of which form an important share of the coastwise cargoes. The 20-ton schooner *Phoenix*, for instance, on her six voyages before July 1, brings Boston not only staves, shooks, shingles and hay, but sugar which came from St. Lucia in the *Fame*: cocoa which came from Grenada in the *Polly*, wine which came from Madeira in the *Lovely Lass*, and from Fayal in the *Woolwich*, and rum from Tortola and Nevis, all of which paid duty at Falmouth.

The entries from Newbury and Newburyport deal largely in returns from the flourishing West India trade of that place, and in "rum here distilled." The *Betsey*, *Lively*, *Dolly* and *Three Friends* make trip after trip with molasses and sugar. Gloucester sends cocoa, cotton and rum from Barbados, Montserrat and Mole St. Nicholas; and codfish. Gloucester's regular packets are all sloops, but some of her banker schooners make coasting voyages between trips.

¹It is my impression that Broad Bay is the old name for Muscungus Bay or Sound; but I have been unable to find the name on any of the 18th century charts or coast pilots.

The port of Salem, including Beverly, sends cargoes of great variety. The 30-ton sloop *Boston Packet* brings linen, woollens and rugs "legally imported from Great Britain"; pimento, cocoa, cotton, hides and rum from Jamaica; duty-paid molasses and brown sugar from Mole St. Nicholas and St. Martins. Most of the Salem cargoes are of like character. The 15-ton sloop *Andrew and Joseph*, however, specializes in country produce such as Beverly beans. One of her entries is signed by George Cabot, who shortly before had left Harvard College to go to sea, and who later became a United States Senator, and leader of the Federal Party.

Marblehead packet-sloops make 55 trips to Boston in 1773. Most of them belong to or are commanded by members of the Martin family. Their cargoes are similar to those of Salem and Falmouth combined, with the addition of wine, figs, raisins, oranges and lemons which were shipped to Marblehead from Falmouth, England.

Passing now to the South Shore, the coasting cargoes from the North River and Plymouth Bay are characterized by hollow ironware, produced by the little forges of the Old Colony out of iron ore raked from the bottom of ponds. The 30-ton sloop *Unity* of Plymouth brings codfish, 6 tons ironware, cotton, and "25 Chaldron Coals legally imported from Great Britain." Capt. Hopedill Delano brings firewood from Kingston in his 36-ton schooner *Glasgow* for two trips; later in the year we find him bringing firewood from Broad Bay, Maine, to Boston. Duxbury sends firewood in the 25-ton sloop *Rainbow*, Capt. Wrestling Alden; but her favorite packet is the sloop *Alithea*, Capt. Joshua Hall. Plymouth sends a certain amount of West India produce, as well.

Of the 52 entries from Cape Cod, a large number are 15- to 30-ton schooners, reporting only ballast and stores. These are probably touching at Boston merely to complete their equipment for a

fishing voyage. Several sloops, such as the *Barnstable Packet*, the *Success* and the *Remember Grace*, of Sandwich, and the *Ruby* of Harwich, are regular packets, bringing modest cargoes of firewood and barrelled alewives, clams and oysters.

The few entries from Dartmouth (New Bedford) specialize in whale oil, twine, house furniture and Spanish brimstone. Nantucket not only sends whale oil, codfish and sheepskins, but grain and provisions of evident "off-island" origin, perhaps transshipped at Nantucket to avoid the higher entrance fees exacted by the royal officials at Boston on vessels from outside the province.

The same book of coastwise entries at Boston for 1773 records the arrival of 56 vessels from whaling, 45 from fishing, and 6 from "sea-cowling." There are also five curious entries of wagon cargoes from Providence, R. I. "Henry Smith enters 2 bbl. 400 lb. Indico in a Waggon drove by Saml. Doggett from Providence there imported on the *Joseph*, Lindsay, from New York, duty paid at So. Carolina." Another vessel of similar rig, entered by the well-known merchant Samuel Breck, carries 2 casks foreign indigo, and "26 Cases Geneva distilld at New York as pr. Certificate." So even at that early date, gin was sufficiently valuable to bear the expense of land as well as ocean carriage!

The variety and richness of the coastwise commerce that these records reveal, is in strange contrast to earlier complaints of the Boston merchants. In their "Observations on Several Acts of Parliament" (1769), the merchants state that various sorts of bonds not to transgress the laws of trade, are required of coasters, even those passing one point to another of the same customs district; and coasters are also required to take out cockets of, and sufferances for, their cargoes at the royal custom houses. They claim that these regulations, combined with heavy fees (ten to sixteen shillings sterling for a small sloop), and the necessity

to visit a custom house before loading anything, are killing the coasting trade.¹

The explanation is that these unreasonable regulations had been done away with by 1773. The coast-wise entry-book for Boston, of that year, notes what bonds, if any, a coaster had. The brigantine *Sisters*, entering at Boston, March 3, from Falmouth, Maine, with a cargo of lumber, carries "non-enumerated" and "lumber" bonds, not to land its cargo in northern Europe. The sloop *Boston Packet* from Salem with a mixed cargo, carries "non-enumerated" and "Isle of Man" bonds, not to land rum at that center for British smuggling.² But only those vessels carry bonds which clear from a port such as Falmouth, Salem, Marblehead and Plymouth, where a customs official resides. John Temple, head of the Commissioners of the Customs, had asked his home government for this sensible concession as early as 1768;³ and although no formal permission is recorded, the local authorities had evidently accorded to the wishes of the New England people. If they had not, a large part of the coasting trade here recorded would have been unprofitable.

Whatever fees may have been exacted of coasters in 1773, they were certainly not the prohibitive ones mentioned in the Boston merchants' "Observations."⁴

In conclusion, the commerce of Boston seems to have been in a fairly flourishing condition on the eve of the Revolution, within the somewhat narrow chan-

¹ Cf. Channing, "United States," III, 90, and D. D. Wallace, "Henry Laurens" (1915), ch. vii.

² Blank forms of these bonds are bound up with a copy of "Instructions by the Commissioners of His Majesty's Customs for the due Collections of his Majesty's Revenue of Customs in America," in bundle 0.26.4, Massachusetts Historical Society.

³ Professor Channing's notes on Temple's correspondence in "Winthrop Papers," XXVI, XXVII, Mass. Hist. Soc.

⁴ A copy of the fee table at the port of Salem & Marblehead under 5 George III is among the Channing transcripts of "Treasury Board Papers." According to this, it cost 2s. 9½ d. to enter or clear a vessel from or for a port in the Province of Massachusetts-Bay; 28s. 5d. to clear for the Southern colonies, 26s. 3d. to clear for the West Indies, and 32s. 9d. to clear for Southern Europe. Cockets and bond certificates cost two or three shillings additional, and a certificate of landing to cancel the bond, 2s. 8d.

nels permitted by Parliament. But if the Boston merchants were anything like business men of today, they were thinking more of the Mediterranean trade they had lost, and the greater prosperity of New York and Philadelphia, than of the money they were making in 1773. For the statistics show that Boston was no longer the first commercial center in the continental colonies. In every branch of commerce save the coasting trade, it is decidedly inferior to Philadelphia, and distinctly so to New York.

It must have added to the Boston merchant's irritation to know (if they did know) that the customs duties collected at Boston greatly exceed those obtained by His Britannic Majesty at any other continental port. For 1771, the customs receipts at the principal ports are as follows:¹

	£	s	d		£	s	d
Piscataqua	1661	9	5	Boston	8921	8	11
Salem and Marblehead	1155	0	0	New York	4811	16	9¼
Rhode Island	2050	0	0	Philadelphia	5429	13	3½
				Charleston	3159	19	6½

Evidently the presence of the Commissioners of the Customs at Boston had an invigorating effect on the subordinate customs officials at that port.

We also find that the Province of Massachusetts-Bay was accorded the doubtful privilege of having as many royal officials on the royal pay-roll as all the other continental colonies put together. The following payments out of the customs receipts are recorded in the same Treasury Board Papers at London:

Thomas Hutchinson, Governor of Massachusetts-Bay, 1770-74	£6342
Thomas Hutchinson, Back pay as Chief-Justice, 1768-71	335
Andrew Oliver, Lieutenant-Governor, 1770-74	1169
Robert Auchmuty, Judge of Vice-Admiralty Court, Boston, 1768-75	3968

¹"Treasury Board Papers," Public Record Office, T. 1/482. Transcript made for Prof. Channing.

Jonathan Sewall, Judge of Vice-Admiralty, Halifax, 1768-75	1657
Jonathan Sewall, Attorney-General of Massachu- setts-Bay, 1772-75	375
Peter Oliver, Chief-Justice of Massachusetts-Bay, 1772-74	800
Samuel Quincy, Solicitor-General, Massachusetts- Bay, 1772-75	125

Having these facts in mind, and considering the prospects of still further revenue acts and restraints on colonial trade, to be enforced by the now efficient royal customs service, the Boston merchants were unwilling to exchange present prosperity for future insecurity. At the next forward step of Parliament, merchants and radicals made common cause.¹ Is it surprising that the Tea-Party took place in Boston, and that the American Revolution followed?

¹Prof. A. M. Schlesinger, in his able thesis on "Colonial Merchants and the American Revolution," states (p. 604) on the authority of Sabine's *Loyalists*, I, 25, that "more than 200 members of the trade" evacuated Boston with the British army; but what Sabine says is that "of merchants and other persons who resided in Boston," 213 evacuated. Of the "Addressers" and "Protesters" of 1774 (*Proceedings Mass. Hist. Soc.*, XI, 392) only a small minority are merchants. A minority of the 147 representative merchants who formed the Society for Encouraging Trade and Commerce in 1763 (*Publications Col. Soc. Mass.*, XIX, 163) became Tories. Some of the most prominent Sons of Liberty, such as John Hancock, Thomas Cushing and William Molineux, were merchants. It is true, however, that the merchants lost the lead at Boston, in 1774, to more radical elements; and I very much doubt whether the merchants, if left to themselves, would ever have taken the radical step of independence.

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