

1787-88 Bermudian Fishing Fleet Caught Poaching off Newfoundland

In the years 1787 and 1788 a new trade question arose- a formidable competition in a most unlooked for quarter, Bermuda...thirty four sloops of 30-60 tons each, 8-10 men in each, three parts of whom consisted of robust able black men, natives of Bermuda and slaves to owners of said vessels, other part were old country men, hired for splitting, salting and conducting things on board said vessels on the banks, and the large vessels had each one of our own expert fishermen to instruct the crew in managing their lines and disengaging the hooks with quickness when swallowed by the cod. These vessels came early in the spring from Bermuda with salt from Turks Island. Fishing on the banks by Bermudians was contrary to the Treaty of Paris of 1763."

E. A. McCallan, Life in Old St. David's, p. 110

1782- Captive Slave Crew Commandeer Vessel Home

"The most famous and fascinating capture, during the American Revolution, involved the Bermudian privateer "Regulator". A new and fast 160 ton, cedar built privateer, hit the water for the first time, in January, 1782....On Thursday, 6th March, mounting 16 carriage guns and carrying shot of six pound weight, (she) sailed on a cruise with 75 men (with) seventy ... black."

After capturing an American sloop off South Carolina on May 7th, Regulator herself was captured by the 32 gun American frigate "Deane" and taken as an American prize to Boston, Massachusetts". "The "Regulator's" 70 slave crewman were given the choice, by the Court, of immediate freedom, or return to Bermuda and slavery. They all chose to return to Bermuda.

Governor John Hancock made arrangement for the prisoners to be sent to New York. The flag of truce sloop "Duxbury" sailed from Boston, 9 June, filled with "prisoners on parole"...Off Cape Cod, the next morning, a resounding cry was heard on deck: 'Hurra for Bermuda'. The prisoners seized the "Duxbury", and shaped their course for Bermuda, with Henry Hall, serving as navigator. The "prisoners on parole" arrived safely in Bermuda, on the 'Duxbury'.

Cyril Outerbridge Packwood, Chained on the Rock, pp 43-44

As highly skilled boat builders and navigators- the records attest to this- it probably was their intentions to return to the island and to try to secure freedom for their families one way or the other"

Nellie Musson, Mind the Onion Seed, pp. 65-67

THE GREW DAWN LIGHT on the morning of May 9, 1782, revealed to the masthead lookout of the Continental frigate "Deane" a strange sail on the horizon. Even at a distance, he guessed that the vessel with the raked-back masts to leeward was a Bermudian privateer. This late in the War of Independence, only fast runners, privateers, and warships cruised the waters off the Carolinas. She would bring welcome prize money to the Deane's crew, rounding out a highly successful cruise. Capture was almost certain, since she was caught on a lee shore with nowhere to run and her sixteen six-pound cannon were no match for the frigate's twenty-eight twelve-pounders. Trapped and out-gunned, Captain George Kidd struck his colors, and the Bermudian privateer Regulator fell prize to the United States navy.

The men of the Deane were no doubt amazed to find that seventy of the seventy-five-man crew on the Regulator were black slaves. Kidd and his four officers were the only white men on board. A further surprise occurred at the vice admiralty court trial of the Regulator when, breaking with precedent, the Massachusetts justices offered the slaves among the crew their freedom rather than condemn them, as forfeited chattel, to be sold at auction. To a man, the black Bermudians declined the offer and asked instead to be sent to their island home as prisoners of war on the next flag-of-truce. Rather than embrace the freedom offered to them by this new republic, they chose to return to Bermuda and slavery. Contemporary Bostonians and modern readers alike might puzzle over the seemingly incongruous choice of the Regulator's black sailors. To understand their decision requires a close look at their complex motives, embedded in the

structure of Bermuda's maritime community, its male workforce, and centuries of historic development of slavery on the island.

Nearly six hundred miles to the east of the North Carolina coast, the island of Bermuda maintains a lone outpost in the midst of the wide North Atlantic. Neither American nor Caribbean, this ancient British colony has escaped the attention of most colonial historians, a neglect perhaps owing to its small size and anomalous location. 3 Far from marginal, Bermuda lay at the crossroads of the Atlantic world in the age of sail, when one contemporary claimed that nine out of ten vessels sailing between the Caribbean and Europe passed within fifty miles of the island. It was the most central location in England's American empire, roughly equidistant from all the colonies in a broad thousand-mile arc from Newfoundland to Antigua

"Maritime Masters and Seafaring Slaves
in Bermuda, 1680-1783"
Dr. Michael J. Jarvis

1799- Privateer Bags Eighteen Prizes

Bermudian sailors of fortune continued to sail their merchant ships, manned with guns and large crews, of which the majority were black. The larger the crew, the more "prizes" could be taken. Sometimes Bermudian privateers sailed with crews of over a hundred men. The best time for the taking of prizes occurred the Haitian Revolution, 1790-1804....

In 1799, Captain (Darrell) Harvey set out with a crew of 125 men, "armed to the teeth". He returned to Bermuda with eighteen captured ships.

Cyril Outerbridge Packwood, Chained on the Rock, pp 41

1817- Slave Shipwright Buys Freedom

See attached letter of Charles Roach Ratteray

1835- Bermuda Frees U.S. Slave Ship "Enterprise"

One year after Emancipation, an American slave ship, the "Enterprise", driven by gale force winds, entered Bermuda's harbour with a cargo consisting mainly of mothers and suckling babies and little children of five or six years of age. The "Enterprise" was a commercial vessel- a slave ship- and had not the Coloured Friendly Society, one of several Black organisations formed earlier for the purpose of helping their people, gone "all out" to free their fellowmen, the ship's visit might never have made history.

The "Enterprise", en route from Alexandria, Virginia, to Charleston, South Carolina, encountered a storm which drove the vessel off the American coast and into Bermuda waters...on the ocean for 21 days, she put into "Fort Hamilton (*sic- Barr's Bay, Hamilton*) for provisions".

A Bermudian inspector went on board and discovered seventy-eight slaves...Forty-one were women...some with babies only a few months old...More than fifty were children under sixteen. At least thirty three had been taken from the parents...The ship's master, Elliott Smith was informed that slavery no longer existed in Bermuda and though the slaves were Americans, since the ship was in Bermuda waters, the slaves were entitled to go free.

Subsequently, a legal battle ensued (*sic- because it had entered Bermuda after August 1st, 1834, the day British emancipation in the West Indies took effect*). In the meantime, Coloured Friendly Society members were determined to help their kinsmen go free and obtained from the Chief Justice of Bermuda a writ of "habeas corpus" to have the slaves appear in the Hamilton Court to answer for themselves. They were brought ashore around 9:00pm one night and were taken to the Court, which extended its session until after midnight. The Attorney General asked each person separately if he wanted to remain in the ship or to remain in freedom of Bermuda....they all chose freedom except one woman and five children. The Mayor of Hamilton gave the freed

people temporary use of an unoccupied storeroom, and members of the Coloured Friendly Society helped the adults find jobs and many took the orphans into their own homes.

The incident, which received international coverage, caused a flurry of excitement in the West Indies and in England where British authorities (*sic- The Foreign Secretary*) agreed with the Bermuda decision.”

Nellie Musson, Mind the Onion Seed, pp. 65-67

April, 1860- Launching of HARVEST QUEEN, Joyce’s Dock, Hamilton parish

“...The launching took place at half past eight in the morning, on a full tide. Even at that early hour, an enormous crowd had collected from all parts of Bermuda, including, of course, almost every one from Bailey’s Bay. It was a glorious spring day and the ship made a brave appearance in her cradle, decked in gay streamers fluttering in the breeze. Practical seamen and shipbuilders walked around the vessel, appraising her lines and making suggestions about the launching. Then the ways were thoroughly greased, the chocks knocked out one by one....

The great moment had come. As the vessel began to move slowly down the ways, cheers from the crowd rent the air. The lady standing near the bow, holding a magnum of champagne, stepped forward and broke the bottle smartly against the hull, calling out as she did, “I name thee HARVEST QUEEN.”

Gathering speed, HARVEST QUEEN sped down the ways to her destined element while the flags and pennants whipped in the breeze and the spectators cheered and applauded. Once afloat the launching crew rushed from side to side to test her stability, and as soon as this was seen to be satisfactory, the launching was declared to be satisfactory.

With this important business happily concluded, festivities commenced. Luncheon to which everyone was invited went on most of the afternoon. In the evening, there was dancing to the music of the fiddle, and this continued almost all night.

Eventually, towards morning, the party dispersed, declaring no one would ever forget the launching of the HARVEST QUEEN- and it never has been forgotten, otherwise the story could not have been told here.”

William Zuill, Bermuda Journey,

1868- Three Pilot Gigs a Racing in a Gale

“Left Philadelphia for Bermuda. Detained in New York ...by ice.

We left very cold weather at New York; salt water froze rapidly.... we were within 200 miles of Bermuda on the third day....It blew a regular gale all night and I enjoyed the excitement of being on deck and felt the sublimity of the storm, and, though without fear, wondered how the skill of so little a creature as man could ever carry our little brig through such a battle with the elements safely to haven.

The next morning the gale abated somewhat, and at 9:00am, we again made land, and soon after the lookout shouted from aloft, first one, then two, then three pilot boats had started for us. We were then 6 or 8 miles from the north side, near the west end, and we hove to, waiting for a pilot, and watching the race between the three boats. The sea was running very high, and the wind still blew a moderate gale, and it was wonderful how such small boats could live. On they came, apparently almost abreast, under triple reefs, yet dashing through the foam, sometimes lost in the valleys of the waves, and then sailing- almost flying- on their crests, high above us. As they approached, the scene became very exciting. Each struggled to reach us first, as the unsuccessful ones would have their sail and drenching for nothing. One boat was now in the rear, the other two were almost up to us...Our glasses were now directed to boat No. 2, for incredible as it seemed to me, she was actually about to drop overboard a little dinghy which she carried on deck. No sooner was this done, than a man leaped into her with a spring, and he was dancing, on

the sea in a cockle shell, with one small scull (oar), tied on a by a fishing line, with which he kept the bow of the dinghy towards the crest of the waves. Watching his chance, when the vessel approached him, and a tremendous wave lifted him up almost on board, he made a tremendous spring, leaped onto the side of our vessel, holding onto a ledge like a fly...”

From a Diary kept by Albert A. Outerbridge, January 1868 (courtesy of Bermuda Maritime Museum)