

The American neptune.

Salem, Mass., Peabody Museum of Salem [etc.]

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Notes

SCHOONER *Thrasher*—PRIVATEER WAR OF 1812

WHEN one thinks of the cruise of a privateer one has visions of glamorous and glittering prizes: guns, rum, sugar, dyes, plate, and cash. Fish do not come readily to mind. The first cruise of the vessel *Thrasher* from Gloucester resulted in the capture of the British Barque, *Tor Abbey*. The treasurer's account of *Thrasher* reveals that the fish and boat paid a handsome profit.

Thrasher was built in 1812 at Kittery, Maine. The ship was of 174 50/95 tons. Length 86' 9", breadth 23', depth 9' 10"; one deck, two masts, square stern and registered 30 November 1812. Elias Davison, William Parrott, Richard Stanwood, Eliphalet Davis, owners and Robert Evans, Master.

In the report of Addison Plumer, treasurer to the owners of *Thrasher*, the first payment for the schooner was made in August 1812 at Portsmouth, New Hampshire in the amount of \$4,498.04. Following this expenditure is a long list of names and amounts, specified and unspecified in payments for services. Specific amounts include:

To Tim Stricker	Drumming	\$12.00
To James Nuite	Fifing	\$12.00
To Thos. Penhallow	Caboose	\$100.00
Apothecary's Bill	Medicine Chest	\$129.59

And in September 1812 bills for cannon amounted to \$661.92 and \$1,234.62.

Captain William Parsons was in command on the first voyage. His instructions were clear and detailed.

... all things being now in readiness, our orders are that you proceed to sea without delay and we recommend to you to proceed on an easterly course—until you come to the Eastward of St.

Mary's the easternmost of the Western Isles, (when there) use your own judgement with respect to cruising between the coast of Spain and Portugal and the Eastward of the Azores.

Should you join the *Swordfish* it is understood that they may cruise together in Company as long as it may be deemed proper with the commanders of the two vessels...

It is our particular request that the crew be restrained from every kind of deprivation at sea or on shore amongst any of the inhabitants—especially the poor, be humane to your prisoners and acquit yourselves with honor to our selves and your country.

The officers and crew numbered fifty. It included two lieutenants, two sailing masters, a surgeon, four prize masters and four prize masters mates, sailmaker, carpenter, steward, corporal of marines, cook, ordinary seamen, and two listed as boys. The names were carefully listed, number of shares held and amount of prize money received by each at the end of the trip.

Names	Station	Shares	Prize Money
William Parsons	Captain	8	\$291.44
John Rust	Sailing Master	4	\$145.72
Benj. Foster	Prize Master	3	\$109.20
Job. Dennen	Seaman	1	\$ 36.40
Jos. Staples	Boy	3/4	\$ 27.32

The total disbursement was \$4,731.33.

The first cruise of *Thrasher* must have been quick and complete, for on 27 November 1812, Richard P. Thacher and Eliphalet Davis, agents for the schooner gave an account of the sales at auction of the British brig *Tor Abbey* of the 'Appurtences and cargo.'

Colonel William Pearce had the largest purchase of fish receiving 2,500 quintals of fish paying \$3.55 to \$3.60 per quintal for a total of \$8,746.80. The balance of the fish were auctioned off in smaller lots, lot number five bringing a price of only \$1.30 per quintal.

A very detailed list of auction items was reported:

Samuel K. Elwell	Keg of Tongues and Sounds	\$2.15
Wm. Parrott	1 musket	\$3.00
Elias Davison	1 pr. Pistols	\$7.50

A list of expenses paid out included:

By cash given to mate of *Tor Abbey* for his assistance in getting the brig into port and his adventure \$50.00
 By cash given to two lads for ditto \$20.00
 For expenses of prisoners to Salem to be interrogated \$6.75
 1½ bu. Potatoes \$.75
 Calvin Swift taking care of *Tor Abbey* 7 nights 1 day \$4.50
 Postage of letter 8c.

James Mansfield bought *Tor Abbey* for \$2,230.00 and renamed the brig *Strong*. It sailed for the Mansfield firm in Gloucester commanded by Captain Harvey C. Mackey. Voyages and accounts of *Strong* are found in account books of Captain Mackey.

Strong is registered in Gloucester ship registers as a brig of 187 62/95 tons with a woman's figurehead, having one deck, 2 masts, and a square stern. It was registered 19 September 1814 and was 'captured in war by citizens of the U.S. and lawfully condemned as a prize by the name of *Tor Abbey* by a degree

of the District Court of Mass, Boston Nov. 12, 1812.' James Mansfield, Harvey C. Mackey were the owners and Harvey C. Mackey was master.

The second voyage of *Thrasher* under Captain Robert Evans was not a success, and resulted in the capture of *Thrasher* by the British. In the *History of the Town of Rockport*, page 271 is the story of William Tarr Abbott. 'He served as captain of a gun, nine pounder, on board the schooner *Thrasher*, Captain R. Evans. During this cruise they captured the English ship *Port Sea* and were recaptured by the English ship *Eleanor* and taken to England and put on board a prison ship in the river Thames at a place called Jolicum's Reach or Ranch, where they were imprisoned about three months and then set at liberty.'

Extracted from the log of vessel *Thrasher* at Cape Ann Historical Association, Gloucester, Massachusetts.

WILLIAM PRESSON