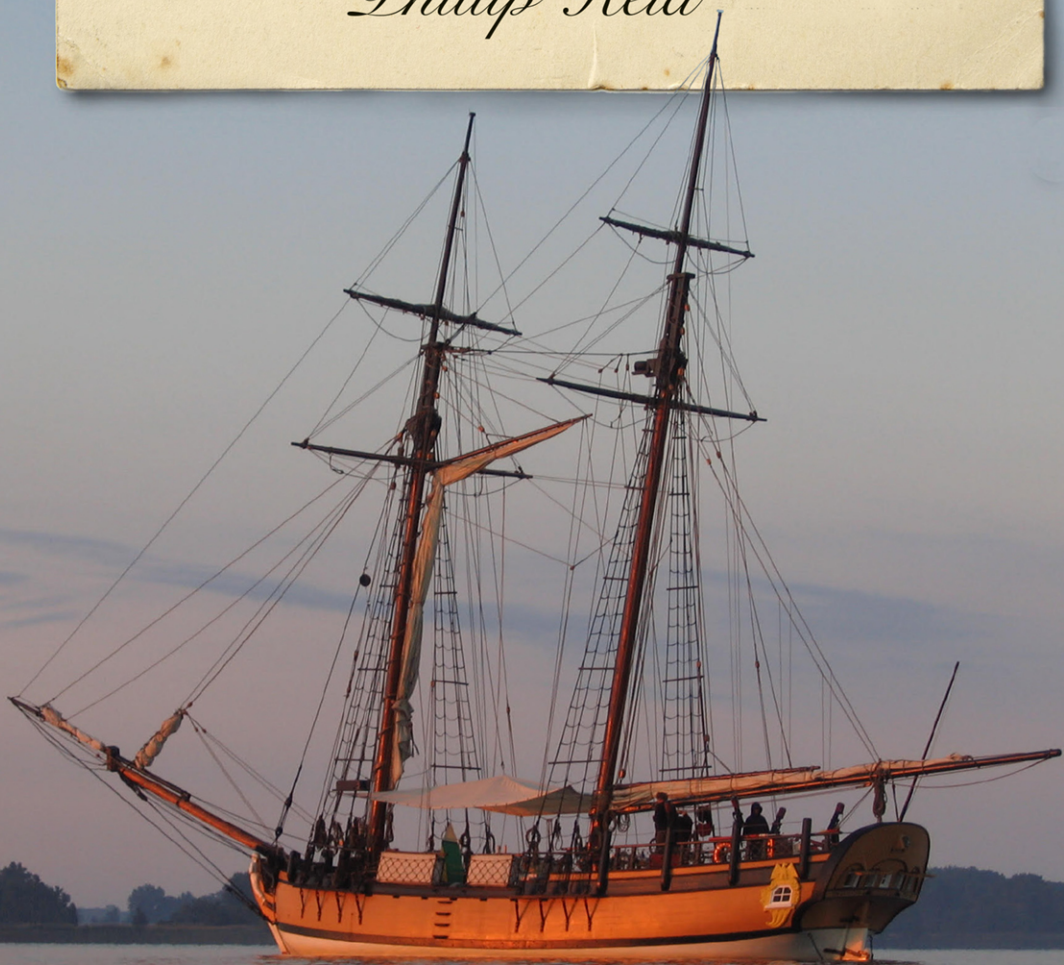




A BOSTON SCHOONER
in the ROYAL NAVY,
1768–1772

COMMERCE *and* CONFLICT *in*
MARITIME BRITISH AMERICA

Phillip Reid



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THE BOYDELL PRESS

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Cover: Replica of *Sultana* | Photo: Drew McMullen

For the people of *Sultana* (II)

Each of us deserves to be forgiven, if only for
Our persistence in keeping our small boat afloat
When so many have gone down in the storm.

Robert Bly

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Preface

That the Boston schooner at the center of this history happened to serve in the Royal Navy is key to what this history is about, but I did not set out to write a naval history book. I do not consider myself a naval historian. In general, I am interested in the human use of water and watercraft for contact and commerce, and in situating ordinary technologies in their particular social and cultural environments – especially technologies displaying strong continuities, as a counterpoint to the general apprehension of technological history in our innovation-obsessed culture. To both ends, I work on the technology of ordinary merchant vessels in the seventeenth- and eighteenth-century British Atlantic. For three primary reasons, however, it is impossible to separate mercantile from naval affairs in that world. First, the technology overlaps far too much. Second, the merchant fleet and the Navy shared the same labor pool, and it was common for sailors – and thus their skills and experience – to move between merchant and naval service. Finally, the records needed to study vessel technology are far more complete for naval vessels than for merchant vessels, given the Navy’s penchant for documentation and record-keeping – typical of centralized state bureaucracies. The technological overlap has limitations, given that merchant and naval vessels were built to accomplish different purposes, but it was not uncommon for the Navy to buy and use vessels originally built for merchant service, usually for auxiliary purposes such as troop transport or, in the case of this book’s subject, Customs enforcement. When they did so in the eighteenth century, they typically documented the vessel. They made an accurate physical survey of her in a naval dockyard, from which they drew up a line drawing and listed her exact dimensions. They made a complete inventory of her equipment and stores, and they made a valuation of her. Many such documents survive, as do the logbooks and muster books (lists of crew members and information about them) required by the Navy to be kept by every commander. Thanks to that fact, we are in possession of a rich archival trove of information on some ordinary workaday vessels whose counterparts in the merchant service left no such records. As I discovered while working on my first book, such is the case for the small New England-built schooner *Sultana*.

Given the atypical wealth of source material available on such an ordinary vessel, the story of the schooner *Sultana*’s service in the Royal Navy on the

North American station from 1768 to 1772 presents a rare opportunity to explore the intersection of naval and maritime history – of commerce, and the conflict it generated – in the eighteenth-century British Atlantic. Ten years earlier, *Sultana* would never have been a naval vessel. She would likely have served out her days as a coastal or island trader, attracting no notice and leaving a paper trail no more permanent than her wake.

But the 1760s were new circumstances for the British Atlantic. The Empire had grown and changed so dramatically during and after the Seven Years War that those who ran it and profited from it, regardless of where in the world they lived, had to adapt to new opportunities and new challenges. Among those opportunities were expanded markets and safer seas for British Atlantic maritime commerce. Among the challenges were the need to protect a much larger British North America, and the need to figure out how to pay for it. The responses to both were part of a new sense of urgency to reform the Empire so that it could meet these and other challenges. One area in particular need of reform, in the minds of leading members of the British political establishment, was the collection of Customs revenues and the interdiction of smuggling in the American colonies.

It was for that purpose that *Sultana* and several other American-built schooners were taken into naval service. Like the others, she had not been built for the Navy.¹ Her service to government came about thanks to a particular set of exigencies, and it is thanks to those exigencies that we know anything about her. As an individual vessel, she was not important. She does not even garner mention in the albeit-limited historical literature on the Navy's efforts in North America in this period. As a representative vessel, however – of the squadron of schooners that served in this capacity in the 1760s and early 1770s, of the Navy's efforts at Customs enforcement, of a successful type of small merchant vessel, and of the success of British American-built merchant vessels in general – she is important indeed.

This book is a continuing exploration of themes and questions from my first one, and it uses roughly the same source-diverse methodological approach. When I wrote that book, I presumed no prior knowledge or appreciation of maritime technological history on the part of the reader. I took it as my task to explain to that reader both how that technology worked and why that matters to early modern history. I also took it as my task to present actual evidence on the operation and performance of early modern vessels, rather than continue to repeat received wisdom and inherited assumptions based on earlier literature and more modern sailing experience.

1 I should add the caveat here that there is some chance her builder hoped to sell her to the Navy when he built her; so far as we know, no evidence survives to confirm or contradict that speculation.

The same is true of the present work. Otherwise, however, this is a different sort of book. While the first was an overview of the British Atlantic merchant vessel in general, this is a microhistory – a detailed examination of a specific vessel, operating in a relatively brief period of time, in specific social, economic, political, and cultural contexts. That examination, in turn, serves as an entrée into broader historical considerations. What is the relationship between the development of the British American merchant shipping industry and the larger British shipping industry – and the British state? What were the roles of technological continuity and innovation in that development? What is the relationship between policy and the technology chosen to serve it? What can *Sultana*'s unusual career teach us about the complex interplay of agendas and points of view, interests and conflicts thereof, at work in the relationships not only between different constituent parts of the British Empire, but within those constituent parts as well? All of those considerations are related to each other, and the naval service of His Majesty's Schooner *Sultana* connects them all.

Acknowledgements

One organization made it possible for me to write this book: the Sultana Education Foundation of Chestertown, Maryland, which owns and operates a carefully designed and built reconstruction of the original schooner, launched in 2001. Now with twenty years of experience at sailing the closest thing possible to the original, those who have skippered and crewed the ‘new’ *Sultana* have shared insights that most maritime technological historians and archaeologists of this period could only fantasize about. I am grateful to Drew McMullen, the Foundation’s co-founder and President, for his time and support, and to Captain Aaron Thal, for his time, insights, and turning up the heat in the boat shop while I was working on the logbooks in there. All the SEF staff I met were friendly and supportive and made lonely work less so.

The Foundation also owns copies of the master’s logs, commander’s logs, muster books, and the Admiralty survey, made by the National Archives (UK), which holds the originals. Far more accessible to me than England, these were the primary source documents upon which this study is mainly based, and once again I must thank the Foundation for allowing me access to them and commodious workspace in their lovely headquarters building in which to work. Travel and lodging for two research trips to Chestertown were made possible by the generosity of the Early American Industries Association, which awarded me their Carter Fellowship in 2019; the National Coalition of Independent Scholars, which awarded me a research grant the following year; the Society for Nautical Research, which awarded funds from the Anderson Bequest; and the group of people I have deemed the ‘patrons’ of this project, who responded to my supplication for ‘crowdfunding’ when it became clear that grant sources would come up short. Those lovely souls are: Frank and Geneva Reid, John and Barbara Cady, Lyn Meisenheimer, Trey Brown, Carol Driggers and David Hatch, Diane and Craig Snow, Ben and Amy Trawick, Tara and Martin Eichert, and Victoria Wheeler. It is a special privilege to thank individuals whom I know personally for ensuring that the book you are now reading could be written.

In addition to Drew McMullen and Captain Thal, I must single out Captain Jan Miles and Nick Burningham for engaging in a rigorous round of correspondence on the more advanced issues of hydrodynamics and sailing principles related to how the schooner sailed, and why she performed the way she did. I

consider those discussions central to whatever related insights this book may provide the reader. For additional support and advice, I thank Guido Abbatista, Randy Biddle, Jim Candow, Emma Christopher, John Concannon, Larrie Ferreiro, Giulia Ianuzzi, Jack James, Olaf Jansen, Neil Kennedy, Sarah Kinkel, Steve Klomps, Wim Klooster, Pam Long, Kenton Sanders, Julia Stryker, Jim Tildesley, and Karen Underwood. All of these people helped save me from errors; any that remain are solely my responsibility.

Archival staff and reference librarians make research projects possible. I am grateful to Ben Aston and to the records-copying team at the National Archives UK, the reference staff at the Caird Library of the National Maritime Museum, Royal Museums Greenwich, Ann-Marie Fitzsimmons of the Archives of the UK Hydrographic Office, Jennifer Hornsby of the Phillips Library, Patrick Kerwin at the Library of Congress, Victoria McCann at the Lancashire Archives, Jay Pinson of the New Hanover County Public Library, and Liz Stewart of National Museums Liverpool.

For permission to reproduce illustrations, I am grateful to Paul Fontenoy, editor of the *Nautical Research Journal*; Kurt Van Dahm, President of the Nautical Research & Model Ship Society of Chicago; Sandra Webber; Bloomsbury Publishing Plc; and Prof. Guido Abbatista, Principal Investigator, Global Sea Routes Database Project, University of Trieste. I would like to acknowledge the great boon it is to eighteenth-century ship historians that the Sjöhistoriska Museet, Stockholm makes available high-quality images of Frederik Henrik af Chapman's drawings free of charge.

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As always, my wife Andie kept the lights on, the mortgage paid, and food on the table, and makes this rewarding but decidedly un-remunerative vocation much less lonely than it otherwise would be.

Finally, if you are a student or novice scholar reading this, keep in mind that Prefaces to published books are rather triumphant affairs. We do not list the grants and awards we did not get. We leave out the crises of confidence and the sometimes-exhausting intellectual struggles necessary to produce and publish an original work. The privilege of writing this comes after persevering through discouragement and obstacles as well as taking advantage of encouragement, opened doors, and good counsel. The wise scholar, whether new or seasoned, will turn constructive criticism into better work, and rejection into redoubled determination.

P.F.R.
Wilmington, North Carolina
June 2022

Abbreviations

NMM	The National Maritime Museum, Royal Museums Greenwich
TNA	The National Archives of the United Kingdom
UKHO	United Kingdom Hydrographic Office

Notes to the Reader

The ability to visualize relative direction in terms of the points of the compass will prove helpful. A brief orientation may be found in Appendix E.

Some terms with which the reader may not be familiar are briefly explained in the text; full definitions of nautical terms may be found in the Glossary.

Introduction

For perhaps 40,000 years prior to the events considered in this book, humans had been building seaworthy watercraft out of wood, setting up masts in them, and hanging sails from those masts to catch the wind and drive those craft across the water.¹ Eighteenth-century Atlantic mariners drew on that cumulative experience to contrive variations on that technology so sophisticated and intricate that their use took years to master.² They used that technology to expand the maritime empires founded by their immediate predecessors, effecting transatlantic migration, the transfer of goods and pathogens, and the expropriation of an enslaved labor force of at least twelve million people from Africa to the Americas, all of whom were shipped across the Atlantic in ships made from trees and powered by the wind.³

1 Atholl Anderson et al. (eds.), *The Global Origins and Development of Seafaring* (Cambridge, 2010).

2 Howard I. Chapelle, *The Search for Speed under Sail, 1700–1855* (New York, 1967); Robert Gardiner (ed.), *The Heyday of Sail: The Merchant Sailing Ship, 1650–1830* (Edison, NJ, 2002); David R. MacGregor, *Merchant Sailing Ships 1775–1815: Their Design and Construction* (Watford, 1980); and *Fast Sailing Ships: Their Design and Construction, 1775–1875* (Lymington, 1973); Alan McGowan, *Tiller and Whipstaff: The Development of the Sailing Ship, 1400–1700* (London, 1981); and *The Century before Steam: The Development of the Sailing Ship 1700–1820* (London, 1980); and Phillip Reid, *The Merchant Ship in the British Atlantic, 1600–1800: Continuity and Innovation in a Key Technology* (Leiden, 2020).

3 Philip P. Boucher, *France and the American Tropics to 1700: Tropics of Discontent?* (Baltimore, 2008); H.V. Bowen et al. (eds.), *Britain's Oceanic Empire: Atlantic and Indian Ocean Worlds, c. 1550–1850* (Cambridge, 2012); Paul Butel, *The Atlantic*, trans. Iain Hamilton Grant (London, 1999); and *Histoire des Antilles françaises, XVII^e–XX^e siècle* (Paris, 2002); Carlo M. Cipolla, *Guns, Sails, and Empires: Technological Innovation and the Early Phases of European Expansion, 1400–1700* (New York, 1965); Alfred W. Crosby, *Ecological Imperialism: The Biological Expansion of Europe, 900–1900* (Cambridge, 2004); John H. Elliott, *Empires of the Atlantic World: Britain and Spain in America, 1492–1830* (New Haven, CT, 2007); David Hancock, *Citizens of the World: London Merchants and the Integration of the British Atlantic Community* (Cambridge, 1997); Wim Klooster, *The Dutch Moment: War, Trade, and Settlement in the Seventeenth Century Atlantic World* (Ithaca, NY, 2016); J.R. McNeill, *Mosquito Empires: Ecology and War in the Greater Caribbean, 1620–1914* (Cambridge, 2010); J.H. Parry, *Trade and Dominion: The European Overseas Empires in the Eighteenth Century* (London, 1971); Richard Rosecrance, *The Rise of the*

In the nineteenth century, a westward-looking preoccupation with continental expansion reinforced the pressure of nationalism to reconfigure North Americans' appreciation of their own history. They no longer thought of themselves as denizens of the western coastal provinces of an Atlantic empire, but as owners of landmasses surrounded by water. More and more of them had only an indirect connection to maritime commerce, and would live out their lives never having witnessed it in person.

That process was only just beginning in the late eighteenth century. Then, most North Americans of European or African origin lived near water and used it for transportation, in everything from a canoe to a three-masted, 300-ton ocean-going ship. Daniel Baugh has written that 'the superior weight-carrying efficiency afforded by water transport in respect to trade was the central technological-economic factor of the Early Modern era.'⁴ Roads were few and usually bad, especially when it rained or snowed. Almost everything we now load onto trucks and trains, they loaded into skiffs, periaugers, flatboats, sloops, and schooners.⁵ People and goods making ocean passages, whether up or down the Eastern Seaboard, across the Atlantic, to or from the Caribbean, would do so on sloops, schooners, brigs, snows, and ships. The news, official documents, letters, government and military orders traveled the same way, and connected Boston to Charleston, Philadelphia to London, Tidewater Virginia to Glasgow, New York to Barbados. Maritime networks – official, commercial, familial, and cultural – granted and rescinded credit, conducted trade, made and attempted to enforce imperial policy, and kept British subjects in touch with each other, whether they were separated by three miles of water or three thousand.⁶

Trading State: Commerce and Conquest in the Modern World (New York, 1986); Barbara L. Solow (ed.), *Slavery and the Rise of the Atlantic System* (Cambridge, 1991); Nuala Zahedieh, *The Capital and the Colonies: London and the Atlantic Economy 1660–1700* (Cambridge, 2010).

4 Daniel A. Baugh, 'Elements of Naval Power in the Eighteenth Century,' in John B. Hattendorf (ed.), *Maritime History, Volume 2: The Eighteenth Century and the Classic Age of Sail* (Malabar, FL, 1997), pp. 119–36, at p. 121.

5 William A. Baker, *Sloops and Shallops* (Barre, MA, 1966); Joseph T. Butler (ed.), *The European Origins of the Small Watercraft of the United States and Canada* (Thibodeaux, LA, 1992); Howard I. Chapelle, *American Small Sailing Craft: Their Design, Development and Construction* (New York, 1951); Eric McKee, *Working Boats of Britain* (London, 1983).

6 Bernard Bailyn, *Soundings in Atlantic History: Latent Structures and Intellectual Currents, 1500–1830* (Cambridge, MA, 2009); Kenneth J. Banks, *Chasing Empire across the Sea: Communications and the State in the French Atlantic, 1713–1763* (Montreal, 2002); Peter A. Coclanis (ed.), *The Atlantic Economy during the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries* (Columbia, SC, 2005); Jack P. Greene and Philip Morgan (eds.), *Atlantic History: A Critical Reappraisal* (Oxford, 2009); Ian K. Steele, *The English Atlantic, 1675–1740: An Exploration of Communication and Community* (Oxford, 1986); John J. McCusker, 'The Demise of Distance: The Business Press and the Origins of the Information Revolution in the Early

Indeed, such connections extended well beyond the Empire itself. British Atlantic subjects conducted trade (both legally and otherwise) with Portugal, Spain, the Netherlands, France, and their empires, with the Baltic countries, and with the indigenous American peoples, whose power was always to be reckoned with. The supply of African prisoners for slave labor depended on the maintenance of diplomatic and commercial relations with West African rulers. The East India Company extended the Empire's interests and trade to the other side of the world.

By the 1750s, two developments in the British Empire demanded a reckoning. The first was the now-mature maritime commercial economy of British America, and the second – closely related to the first – was the imperial rivalry with France, complicated in North America by the political and commercial relationships between the French and the indigenous peoples. British Americans, by their unwillingness to coexist peacefully with either, saw to it that the second reckoning happened first. The war of 1756 to 1763, which started in the backwoods of British America and ended with the Treaty of Paris, was the first global conflict of the British Empire. When it was over, the British government was deeply in debt, and newly-saddled with what had been French Canada, ceded in exchange for the return of lucrative West Indian sugar islands captured during the war. It would have to maintain land forces to defend what it had won – and its subjects who lived there – to keep the peace between the British Americans and the indigenous Americans, and to discourage any French attempt to recoup losses by force or trespass.⁷ Those demands, and the unprecedented Atlantic maritime supremacy now enjoyed by the Royal Navy, combined to turn British official attention to the other reckoning, now overdue: with the mature and wealthy – and, to many British minds, far too autonomous – British American maritime commercial economy.⁸

While some were beginning to call the assumption seriously into question, there is no doubt that, to the overwhelming majority of the British political establishment, colonial enterprise was to be controlled, limited, and regulated for the benefit of the British home island.⁹ There is also no doubt that, to

Modern Atlantic World,' *American Historical Review* 110:2 (Apr. 2005), 295–321; Nancy Rhoden (ed.), *English Atlantics Revisited* (Kingston, ON, 2007).

7 Fred Anderson, *Crucible of War: The Seven Years War and the Fate of Empire in British North America* (New York, 2001).

8 On the development of the Royal Navy in the 'long eighteenth century,' see John Brewer, *The Sinews of Power: War, Money and the English State, 1688–1783* (Cambridge, MA, 1988); Richard Harding, *Seapower and Naval Warfare, 1650–1830* (London, 1999); and *The Emergence of Britain's Global Naval Supremacy: The War of 1739–1748* (Woodbridge, 2010); and N.A.M. Rodger, *The Command of the Ocean* (London, 2004). For broader context, see Jan Glete, *Navies and Nations: Warships, Navies and State Building in Europe and America, 1500–1860* (Stockholm, 1993).

9 David Armitage, *The Ideological Origins of the British Empire* (Cambridge, 2000).

that same majority, British failure to control, limit, and regulate the American maritime commercial economy in anything like adequate fashion had allowed that economy to grow not only rich, but, to a degree alarming to many, independent. A strong political faction, not limited either to Parliament or to the British home islands, was determined to ‘discipline the empire.’¹⁰ These ‘authoritarian whigs,’ as Sarah Kinkel calls them, had been primarily responsible for the professionalization of the Royal Navy beginning in the 1740s, and this professional navy was now associated ‘with authoritarian trends in society,’ with people who believed in using coercive means, including the Navy, to impose order and obedience.¹¹

As ministers and Parliament in London wrestled with unprecedented demands on their political imaginations, against a backdrop of instability that saw four ministries rise and fall in seven years, British American merchants along the Eastern Seaboard looked after their own interests, relying on agents in London to represent those interests to the government, and reacting to a series of bills passed at Westminster intended to raise revenue and tighten Customs collection in the colonies. The idea, though hotly debated in both houses of Parliament and in every colonial assembly and public house in British America, was that America’s maritime commercial interests should help pay for the recent war, largely fought in, and for, British America, and for the continued and expanded defense of the Eastern Seaboard colonies from the French, the Spanish, and the indigenous nations. It was an idea that, despite the debates and repeals and the political vicissitudes of George III’s governments, none of those governments proved willing to abandon.¹²

As the colonies and London negotiated – and postured, and tended to other pressing matters – the Royal Navy was charged with playing a much more active role in enforcing Customs duties on merchant shipping and intercepting smugglers in North America and the West Indies.¹³ As early as July 1763, the Southern Secretary wrote to the colonial governors, informing them that His Majesty expected Customs duties to be collected, and that he was assigning

10 Sarah Kinkel, ‘The King’s Pirates? Naval Enforcement of Imperial Authority, 1740–76,’ *The William and Mary Quarterly* 71:1 (Jan. 2014), 3–34, at p. 8.

11 Sarah Kinkel, *Disciplining the Empire: Politics, Governance, and the Rise of the British Navy* (Cambridge, MA, 2018).

12 Jack P. Greene, ‘An Uneasy Connection: An Analysis of the Preconditions of the American Revolution,’ in Stephen G. Kurtz and James H. Hutson (eds.), *Essays on the American Revolution* (Chapel Hill, NC, 1973), pp. 32–80; Pauline Maier, *From Resistance to Revolution: Colonial Radicals and the Development of American Opposition to Britain, 1765–1776* (New York, 1972); Kenneth Morgan, ‘Robert Dinwiddie’s Reports on the British American Colonies,’ *William and Mary Quarterly* 65:2 (Apr. 2008), 305–46.

13 Neil R. Stout, *The Royal Navy in America, 1760–1775: A Study of Enforcement of British Colonial Policy in the Era of the American Revolution* (Annapolis, MD, 1973).

forty-four warships to that end.¹⁴ British American merchants, however, were by now well-accustomed to two things: not paying duties, and smuggling.¹⁵ That is not to say that none of them paid duties and that all of them smuggled. A great many of them, however, had long ignored the stipulated duty on sugar products required by the ‘Molasses Act’ of 1733, passed at the behest of the British West Indian sugar lobby to protect their more expensive products from cheaper French alternatives. A great many British American merchants smuggled, too – tea and gin and manufactures from the Netherlands, French molasses, sugar, and rum, wines from Spain and France. Forty-four warships might seem formidable, and they were – but, in important ways, they were inadequate to police British American shipping. They were too large and drew too much water to be the most effective near-shore patrol craft, and they were expensive to man and maintain. In January 1764, the Admiralty ordered Rear-Admiral Lord Colville, commander on the North American station, to purchase ‘six Marblehead schooners or sloops’ to help with the work.¹⁶ Originally, these vessels were to patrol the River and Gulf of St. Lawrence, to interdict smuggling from the little French islands of St. Pierre and Miquelon, just south of Newfoundland, into newly-British Canada. Hence, they were all named after locales in that area: *Chaleur*, *St. John*, *Gaspee*, *St. Lawrence*, *Magdalen*, and *Hope*. By June, Colville had procured these vessels, and was fitting them out and attempting to man them.

In their letter to Colville, the Admiralty’s use of ‘sloops’ does not refer to sloops of war, a class of warship that, though small compared to a battleship, was considerably larger than the vessels Colville was purchasing.¹⁷ Their Lordships may have had in mind the late eighteenth-century mercantile use of the term, referring to the smallest ocean-going vessels, with what we still call the sloop rig: a single mast, with a fore-and-aft mainsail, and one or more triangular headsails called jibs.

What is clear is that the vessels purchased by Colville were a mix: four schooners, and two sloops.¹⁸ There is no size-to-rig correlation. What is also

14 Anderson, *Crucible of War*, p. 563.

15 Wim Klooster, ‘Inter-Imperial Smuggling in the Americas, 1600–1800,’ in Bernard Bailyn and Patricia L. Denault (eds.), *Soundings in Atlantic History: Latent Structures and Intellectual Currents, 1500–1830* (Cambridge, MA, 2009), pp. 141–80; Patricia Rogers, ‘Rebels’ Property: Smuggling and Imperial [Dis]loyalty in the Anglo-American Atlantic,’ *Journal of Early American History* 2:1 (Jan. 2012), 32–67; and Thomas Truxes, *Defying Empire: Trading with the Enemy in Colonial New York* (New Haven, CT, 2008).

16 Harold M. Hahn, *The Colonial Schooner 1763–1775* (Annapolis, MD, 1981), p. 20; Jim Tildesley, ‘I Am Determined to Live or Die on Board My Ship’: *The Life of Admiral John Inglis: An American in the Georgian Navy* (Kibworth Beauchamp, 2019), p. 109.

17 Ian McLaughlan, *The Sloop of War, 1650–1763* (Barnsley, 2014).

18 Hahn, *Colonial Schooner*, p. 22.

clear is that, sometime after purchase, both of the sloop rigs were converted to schooner rigs, indicating deliberate technological choice for the latter.

We do not know when *Gaspee* was converted. We do know that *Chaleur* was converted per order of Commodore Hood, Colville's successor, in early July of 1768.¹⁹ It is likely that Hood also ordered the same conversion for *Gaspee* at the same time. There is no reason to think that Hood was motivated by economy in this decision. As a naval commander, he was not under the pressure to contain labor costs that a merchant owner would be. Also, the conversions would cost money and take the vessels out of operation temporarily. The best explanation is that Hood believed that the schooner rig was better-suited for the operational needs of his small interceptors, despite the long history of the sloop as a fast, small ocean-going type in the Americas.²⁰ That is likely because of its flexibility, and the successful employment of that flexibility for coastal trade and the North Atlantic fisheries. It is also likely that Hood made his decision, not over the objections of the vessels' commanders, but in accordance with their requests. Maritime historians and archaeologists need to look further into the comparative labor demands and costs of sloops versus schooners.

* * *

Meanwhile, in April 1764, Parliament passed the American Revenue Act, which halved the duty on molasses, while requiring more earnest efforts at actually collecting the duty. Sugar products were a form of currency in the British American economy – an economy perennially short of specie. Thus, the trade in those products was even more important than the strong demand for them on the consumer market would suggest.²¹ The Revenue Act also added to the list of enumerated goods – goods which had to go through Britain before being imported to or exported from the American colonies. That provision meant that valuable American exports, used to buy European products or sell to European markets for specie, would go to merchants based in Britain rather than British America. American merchants judged this more hurtful than a stepped-up attempt at collecting molasses duties.²² Particularly problematic was

19 Hahn, *Colonial Schooner*, p. 41.

20 Amanda M. Evans, 'Defining Jamaica Sloops: A Preliminary Model for Identifying an Abstract Concept,' *Journal of Maritime Archaeology* 2:2 (Dec. 2007), 83–92; Michael J. Jarvis, "'The Fastest Vessels in the World': The Origin and Evolution of the Bermuda Sloop, 1620–1800,' *Bermuda Journal of Archaeology and Maritime History* 7 (1995), 31–50; Eldon Trimmingham, 'The Development of the Bermuda Rig,' *Bermuda Journal of Archaeology and Maritime History* 2 (1990), 127–42.

21 Sidney W. Mintz, *Sweetness and Power: The Place of Sugar in Modern History* (New York, 1985); Richard B. Sheridan, *Sugar and Slavery: An Economic History of the British West Indies, 1623–1775* (Kingston, Jamaica, 2000).

22 John W. Tyler, *Smugglers and Patriots: Boston Merchants and the Advent of the American Revolution* (Boston, MA, 1986), pp. 79–80.

that British American trade with the Iberian Peninsula had grown important in the mid-eighteenth century, 'and colonial merchants depended on the trade surpluses they earned there.'²³

The timing of Grenville's Act was particularly bad for Boston, whose trade was in a postwar slump.²⁴ The following August, Boston resolved to implement the first Non-Importation Agreement – a collective pledge not to import British manufactures, as a protest against the Act. At the time, given the mercantilist structure of the British Atlantic economy, under the Navigation Acts, imports to the colonies from Britain and Ireland were worth four times more than imports from all other areas combined, with England contributing 90 percent of those imports, Scotland 9.5 percent, and Ireland 0.5 percent.²⁵ So, while the boycotts certainly stood to hurt British mercantile interests, they would also demand considerable sacrifice from British Americans.²⁶ The 'authoritarian whigs' argued that 'easy access to consumer goods had destroyed social order,' especially among the 'idle and licentious' poor. The British Atlantic would soon learn what the voluntary denial of those 'consumer goods' would do to that 'social order.'²⁷

Against this backdrop of unrest and commercial upheaval in the major British American ports, the six schooners, and other warships, were re-directed south from Canada. Their officers and crews stopped boats and ships, checked manifests and cargo holds, and questioned masters, as did the small vessels assigned to local Customs Houses, though the naval and Customs vessels usually operated independently.²⁸ Frequently, if no contraband was discovered, they would either put men aboard or follow the merchant vessel to ensure that it called at the Customs House to declare. A common tactic for evading the payment of duties, and for smuggling, was to land or offload goods before officially entering port.²⁹ Should contraband be discovered, the vessel and goods would be seized, and were subject to condemnation and sale at auction, if so ordered by a Vice-Admiralty Court.

Those specialty courts, set up to try maritime cases, were already a locus of vexation for both the British authorities and British American maritime

23 Tyler, *Smugglers and Patriots*, p. 82.

24 Tyler, *Smugglers and Patriots*, pp. 65–6.

25 James F. Shepherd and Gary M. Walton, *Shipping, Maritime Trade, and the Economic Development of Colonial North America* (Cambridge, 1972), pp. 112–13.

26 Jonathan Barth, 'Reconstructing Mercantilism: Consensus and Conflict in British Imperial Economy in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries,' *William and Mary Quarterly* 73:2 (Apr. 2016), 257–90.

27 Kinkel, 'King's Pirates?' p. 9; T.H. Breen, 'An Empire of Goods: The Anglicization of Colonial America, 1690–1776,' *Journal of British Studies* 25:4 (Oct. 1986), 467–99.

28 Stout, *Royal Navy*, pp. 128–9.

29 On the process for entering a ship, see Thomas C. Barrow, *Trade and Empire: The British Customs Service in Colonial America, 1660–1775* (Cambridge, MA, 1967), p. 265.

mercantile interests, including Benjamin Hallowell, *Sultana*'s builder, who had declared the one in Massachusetts 'to be a Nuisance!'³⁰ The conflicts in those courts were not limited to immediate material considerations; the courts, which sat no jurors, were an arena for trials between the extent of colonial self-government and the direct reach of London's power, and between Americans more sympathetic to one and those who perceived their interests as aligning more with the other. London's efforts to remove what it considered untoward American influence and prejudice from the Vice-Admiralty benches contributed to the intensification of tension over maritime commerce and its regulation.³¹

Open hostility met the schooners almost immediately. In July, *St. John* was attacked at Newport, Rhode Island, and took shelter under the stern of the sixth-rate *Squirrel* after being fired upon by the harbor fort.³² Violence against the vessels and their crews would continue. Unable to recruit adequate crews otherwise, the Navy did what it always did when faced with that situation: it impressed experienced seamen. In protest, *Chaleur*'s tender – her boat – was seized and burned in front of City Hall in New York.³³

In March 1765, Parliament followed the Revenue Act with the Stamp Act, which imposed direct taxation on the paper goods required for communication and business transactions. Merchants in major American port cities signed new non-importation agreements in the fall. Mobs and gangs threatened and assaulted anyone attempting to comply with or enforce the Stamp Act. They burned, or simply tore down, private homes, and hung effigies of their owners from trees. The British government was genuinely shocked when it received reports of the violence of the reaction. Meanwhile, Westminster remained volatile; the Grenville ministry fell in July, before the Act even went into effect.³⁴

On March 10, 1766, a group of North American and West Indian merchants met at the Kings Arms Tavern in London to discuss reforms to trade laws and realistic options for discouraging smuggling. All of their recommendations were accepted into a new Revenue Act, but once it went into effect, petitions against it were sent to London from New York and Boston.³⁵

Eight days after the Kings Arms meeting, and four days shy of the first anniversary of the Stamp Act's passage, George III gave royal assent to the unpopular Act's repeal. While bowing to the demands of merchants and manufacturers on both sides of the Atlantic hurt by the non-importation

30 Tyler, *Smugglers and Patriots*, p. 37.

31 Carl Ubbelohde, *The Vice-Admiralty Courts and the American Revolution* (Chapel Hill, NC, 1960).

32 Hahn, *Colonial Schooner*, p. 23.

33 Hahn, *Colonial Schooner*, p. 38.

34 Edmund S. Morgan and Helen M. Morgan, *The Stamp Act Crisis: Prologue to Revolution* (Chapel Hill, NC, 1953).

35 Tyler, *Smugglers and Patriots*, pp. 95–6, 105.

agreements, Parliament added a loud ‘however’ to its repeal of the Stamp Act by passing the Declaratory Act, explicitly stating its right to tax America as it did Britain.

It was now the turn of the most ambitious imperial reformer of the period to implement his program. Charles Townshend was appointed Chancellor of the Exchequer in August 1766, under a new Pitt ministry.³⁶ With Pitt largely absent, Townshend was a particularly powerful Chancellor. He set to work on a plan to raise revenue in America without, he promised, causing offense there, as his plan would impose only import taxes, to which the Americans were long-accustomed, and no direct taxes like the hated stamp tax. The distinction was made in the context of an ongoing debate over ‘external’ versus ‘internal’ taxation. Some British politicians flatly and publicly dismissed the distinction as meaningless to anyone but American propagandists. To those who did accept the distinction, external taxes were those imposed on trade between the American colonies and Great Britain or foreign states. Internal taxes were those imposed on transactions between the colonies and colonists themselves, and the imposition of those had, historically, been reserved for American colonial assemblies.

Townshend’s program was passed by Parliament on June 29, 1767. Two months later, its author caught a fever and died. He would never realize how optimistic he had been that British American mercantile interests would accept his revenue-collection scheme. But the task facing the Navy in America was not getting easier even before the Townshend Acts. The ships and schooners were patrolling from the Gulf of St. Lawrence to the Bahamas. In November, two of the American-built schooners were sent to Jamaica. In March 1768, the American Board of Customs Commissioners in Boston wrote a letter to Commodore Hood, the new commander of the North American station, outlining their precarious situation in Boston. Hood forwarded that letter to the Admiralty.³⁷

A few months earlier, in either September or October, the Boston shipyard of Benjamin Hallowell completed and launched a small schooner, perhaps on order, or perhaps on speculation, meaning that she was not commissioned by a client, but built at the builder’s own expense in hopes of finding a buyer for her after the fact. Hallowell was the most prominent shipbuilder in Boston, so he certainly could have afforded to build such a humble vessel on his own account; she was but fifty-three feet on deck (16m), and just under fifty-three tons.

The schooner, already named *Sultana*, was sailed to England, at which point she came into the possession of Sir Thomas Hesketh, 1st Baronet of

36 Patrick Griffin, *The Townshend Moment: The Making of Empire and Revolution in the Eighteenth Century* (New Haven, CT, 2017); Peter D.G. Thomas, *The Townshend Duties Crisis: The Second Phase of the American Revolution, 1767–1773* (Oxford, 1987).

37 Tildesley, *Inglis*, pp. 110–11.

Rufford.³⁸ It is unclear how or why; perhaps Hesketh had commissioned her from Hallowell's yard, but it would have been unusual for a British-based owner to commission a small schooner for use in England. Besides, Hesketh was a Lancashire country gentleman, not a merchant. He may have intended to use her as a yacht, but *Sultana's* hull, while not a tub, was not built for outright speed. Regardless of how or why he came to acquire the little vessel, in the spring or early summer of 1768, he offered her to the Royal Navy, touting her as suited for 'cruizing against the smugglers' in America. The Deptford Navy Yard had her surveyed, found her fit, and recommended her purchase to their Lordships, though they noted that she was, in fact, considerably smaller than the sixty-five tons claimed by Hesketh.³⁹

That discrepancy by no means proves that Hesketh was being dishonest with the Navy. Vessel tonnage was a moving target at the time, to say the least. Several methods for measuring it led to several different types of tonnage, and recent scholarship has shown that wide discrepancies existed between different estimated tonnages of the same vessel, especially before the Registry Act of 1786.⁴⁰

In an effort to make the little schooner as effective as possible, the yard re-rigged her, increasing her potential speed on any point of sail (angle to the wind); while this would add substantially to the labor demands aboard, that was no matter, as she was to carry a crew of twenty-five. In her merchant configuration, she could have been sailed by eight. Other disadvantages to a more powerful rig for which the schooner had not been designed would manifest themselves at inconvenient times. The Admiralty instructed that she was to be commissioned as *Sultana*; they did not change her name.⁴¹

Sultana was the same length as the trailer part of a U.S. tractor-trailer (articulated lorry) rig. Judged too small to carry even the smallest carriage guns, she was fitted with eight swivel guns – rail-mounted shotguns, firing scatter shot or a half-pound ball too small to damage another vessel larger than a small boat, only effective against soft human targets. She could not carry enough beer to meet the Navy's standard allotment for her crew, so she was allowed to carry brandy as a substitute, to be diluted. The boat she was issued, with which her crew could row ashore, retrieve an anchor, or board another vessel, was too big;

38 Letter, Lords of the Admiralty to the Navy Board, Feb. 12, 1768, The National Archives of the United Kingdom (hereafter TNA), ADM 2/237, p. 425.

39 Hahn, *Colonial Schooner*, pp. 53–4.

40 John J. McCusker, 'Colonial Tonnage Measurement: Five Philadelphia Merchant Ships as a Sample,' *Journal of Economic History* 27:1 (Mar. 1967), 82–91; and *Essays in the Economic History of the Atlantic World* (London, 1997); Stephen D. Behrendt et al. (eds.), 'Tons, Tonneaux, Toneladas, Lasts: British and European Ship Tonnages in the Eighteenth and Early Nineteenth Centuries,' *Histoire & Mesure* 35:2 (Jun. 2021), 197–232.

41 Hahn, *Colonial Schooner*, p. 54.

it blocked the companionway – the opening from deck to interior – so she was supplied with a smaller one, built to order. Taken into the service thanks to the exigencies of the American situation in 1768, *Sultana* was herself an exigency. She was available, her price was modest, and the Navy's surveyor judged her adequate for the task. It remained to be seen whether or not he was right.

Why did the British Navy brass decide to deploy these New England schooners for this purpose, rather than whatever alternatives might have been available? For that matter, were there any viable alternatives? Was cost a primary consideration? Was it a consideration at all, or was performance the driving priority? How did these vessels work? What were their strengths and limitations? How can understanding the selection of *Sultana* and the other colonial-built schooners contribute to a more complete perspective on the overall effort of the British government to use the Navy for Customs enforcement? Why was that effort so important to every group of people caught up in it, from the Admiralty in Whitehall to the tradesmen in Boston? To answer this last question requires that we understand an Atlantic world in which a much greater proportion of people were directly involved in the maritime commercial economy; they lived in it, profited from it, suffered from it and with it, saw it, heard it, and smelled it, in their everyday lives. The key technology of that economy was the ordinary sailing vessel. Understanding that economy, and the eighteenth-century Atlantic world, requires understanding the abilities and vulnerabilities of that technology.

This book offers the student of the early modern British Atlantic an accessible explanation of how an ordinary eighteenth-century Atlantic sailing vessel worked, and how that helps us understand how these people in this world worked – assuming no prior technical understanding on the part of the reader. Avoiding presupposition and offering accessible explanations will, it is hoped, help the reader approach Atlantic and maritime history with a better sense of how early modern humans used the sea.

The book will follow the schooner *Sultana* from the Boston yard to the fitting-out at Deptford in the summer of 1768, to her voyage back across the North Atlantic to take her place with the American squadron. It will consider what she was: a small New England merchant schooner, put to novel use; and what she could, and could not, do. It will introduce the men who served on her, and what they went through. It will follow her four years of Customs enforcement interception, and the day-to-day struggles and work required to keep her going and keep her crew alive and well. We will get a deck-level view of her encounters with the merchant vessels she stopped, and with various British Americans, from the most wretched to the elite – encounters that promise to vivify what would otherwise remain the sort of abstraction with which one must be content when sufficient detail is not available to offer something closer to reality. *Sultana* offers us the reality of British American maritime commerce

at its height, the reality of the most serious attempt Britain ever made to control it, and how that attempt played out on the water.

This story introduces the sophisticated craft of artisanal shipbuilding, the vagaries and violence of the wild Atlantic, the techniques and trials of sailing an eighteenth-century schooner, the peaceful everyday carrying-on of trade, and the sudden eruption of large conflicts of interest into small but important conflicts of people, all of whom owed loyalty to the same King, and all of whom had a stake in the same imperial enterprise. From the shipyard in Boston, the center of so much of that conflict, to the Navy yard across the sea, charged with helping to manage it, to Halifax, and Virginia, and Newport, and Philadelphia, and New York, to the Cape Fear River at the southernmost tip of North Carolina, *Sultana* cruised as His Majesty's Schooner, as her conscientious British American commander did his duty, annoying and at times enraging merchant vessel masters, owners, and those whose livelihood depended on them. Over the course of four years, *Sultana* served as the smallest of all the interceptors on station – in fact, as the smallest schooner ever commissioned in the Royal Navy, so far as we know.⁴² Like her counterparts, she stopped hundreds of vessels, while committees met and Parliament debated, mobs gathered and went home, troops landed, and merchants fretted, took risks, and complied with or flouted the law and the non-importation agreements. We will stay with *Sultana* through speed and success, failure and frustration, cooperation and confrontation, damage and desertions, tedium and terror. We will get acquainted with how such a vessel worked and what it was like to work aboard one. Along the way, we will consider questions such as: How did the relationship between labor and technology differ between naval and merchant service? Who was 'American' and what was 'British'? Was that changing? If so, how and why?⁴³ Was *Sultana* effective technology in these circumstances? Why or why not? How does her story reflect the larger story of the Navy's effort to fulfill the mission set for it by the government in London?

Finally, we will reckon with the implications, both technological and political, of *Sultana*'s ultimate recall from American service, and the end of her naval career. To what extent was she successful, and what does that mean? How are the answers to those questions related to the success – or failure – of the enterprise she served?

42 Hahn, *Colonial Schooner*, p. 53.

43 Timothy Breen, 'Nationalism on the Eve of the American Revolution: Revisions Once More in Need of Revising,' *Journal of American History* 84:1 (Jun. 1997), 13–39; Linda Colley, *Britons: Forging the Nation 1707–1837* (New Haven, CT, 1992); Stephen Conway, 'From Fellow-Nationals to Foreigners: British Perceptions of the Americans, circa 1739–1789,' *William and Mary Quarterly* 59:1 (Jan. 2002), 65–100; and Michael Zuckerman, 'Identity in British America: Unease in Eden,' in Nicholas Canny and Anthony Pagden (eds.), *Colonial Identity in the Atlantic World, 1500–1800* (Princeton, NJ, 1987), pp. 115–58.