

# Sam Coverly's Journal with Historical Notes



# Sam Coverly's Journal with Historical Notes:

*Traveling and Trading  
in the Early Republic*

By

John A. Albertini

**Cambridge  
Scholars  
Publishing**



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This book first published 2022

Cambridge Scholars Publishing

Lady Stephenson Library, Newcastle upon Tyne, NE6 2PA, UK

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data  
A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

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ISBN (10): 1-5275-7603-5

ISBN (13): 978-1-5275-7603-2

For Nicholas, Holly, Max, Lucas, Francis, and Hugo;  
and to the Memory of Dorothy Hill and John Clement Albertini



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## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I remember my mother and father discussing the ship *Alert* and wondering whether a place like the Whaling Museum in New Bedford, Massachusetts (MA) would have any information about the ship's demise. My great-great-grandfather Samuel Coverly, Jr., had sailed to China as a young man on this ship. Years later, my mother gave me his travel journal and a small collection of family letters. Reading the journal in bed one evening, I came to the point on his return from China where they dropped anchor off the west coast of Africa at Ascension Island. They were boarded by the British Navy and not allowed to disembark, because Napoleon Bonaparte was being held prisoner on neighboring St. Helena Island. I was hooked and started my search for the *Alert* and the reasons Sam went to China. Donald Gill, Reader Services Librarian at the U.S. Merchant Marine Academy, Kings Point, New York (NY) sent me sources containing information about several ships of that name, including the one in Richard Dana's *Two Years Before the Mast*, but not the one commanded by Dixey Wildes. He kindly suggested other sources. The search for the ship and its cargo seemed to go nowhere. At the Maritime Division of the Federal Archives in Waltham Massachusetts, I learned that the Boston/Charlestown Customs House fire in 1884 had destroyed all customs records. The E.W. Blunt White Library at Mystic Seaport Museum in Mystic, Connecticut owned a ledger in which the American Consul in Canton had recorded all imports and exports; however, the relevant pages for the 1815-1816 season were missing.

Then came breakthroughs. With the help of Maribeth Bielinski, Collections Access Associate, at Mystic Seaport, I found a ship's description on microfilm that was a possible match. The Director of the Library, Paul O'Pecko, offered to check his predecessor's card file, and in a matter of minutes produced a card confirming the match: ship, *Alert*, built in 1810 in Milton, MA by Theodore Lyman and commanded by Dixey Wildes. Later that day, when I asked him about copper bottoms, he showed me the library's model of the *C. W. Morgan*, a whaler very close in size and rigging to the *Alert*. This was the closest I would come to a depiction of Sam's ship.

Next, I came across a citation for "Journals of Samuel Coverly" on the National Archives (UK) website. Frank Bowles, Superintendent of the Manuscripts Reading Room, Cambridge University Library, kindly helped

me determine that the document in their manuscript division was in fact Sam's *Memorandum Book*, a notebook in which he recorded purchases in China and drafted journal entries on a later voyage to England. Thanks to James Kessenides, Kaplanoff Librarian for American History, Yale University Library, I learned that the Phillips Library, Peabody Essex Museum, Salem, MA held an *Account Book* and business letters written two decades after his trip to China. Tamara Gaydos, Manuscript Librarian, and Hannah Swan, Reference Assistant, at the Phillips were most helpful.

I appreciate all the librarians, curators, and historians who, despite the restrictions and pressures created by the Covid-19 pandemic, responded generously to my requests. My thanks go to: James at AmericanAncestors.org, Jennifer Keefe, Library Assistant at the Massachusetts Historical Society, Boston, MA; Brianna Barrett, Library and Program Assistant, American Antiquarian Society, Worcester, MA; Ho Kwan Yung, Assistant Curator, Hong Kong Museum of Art; Peter Combs, Bidamount Asian Art, Gloucester, MA; Stephen Robinson, W.E.B. Du Bois Library, University of Massachusetts, Amherst, MA; Erin Rothenbuehler, Web Administrator and Local History Specialist, Ohio County Public Library, Wheeling, West Virginia; Megan Pinette, Belfast Historical Society & Museum, Belfast, Maine (ME); Karin Larson, Historian, Warren Historical Society, Warren, ME; Paige Lilly, Curator, Castine Historical Society, Castine, ME; Jean Mackay, Director of Communications and Outreach, Erie Canalway National Heritage Corridor, Waterford, New York (NY); Dori Gottschalk-Fielding, Coordinator, History Discovery Center, Seymour Library, Auburn, NY; Diane Cronin and Ron Karr, Pepperell Historical Commission, Pepperell, MA; Tom Sullivan, Vice President, Hyde Park Historical Society, Hyde Park, MA; Ron Roaks, Jefferson County Historical Society, Madison, Indiana; Allison Harig, Archives & Library Manager, Shelburne Museum, Shelburne, Vermont. As I acknowledge these valuable sources of information, I look forward to touring Sam's Boston home and thank Gillian and Vivien Gattie for their kind invitation.

I am indebted to three scholars who guided me at crucial points in research and writing. Professor William M. Fowler Jr. agreed to see me in his office at Northeastern University, Boston, MA one very hot August day in 2010. Sitting at his desk, index cards spread out before him, he said the field *was* interested in seeing first-person narratives in print (contrary to previous advice I had received) and directed me to collections that would prove most valuable to my research. Ten years later in retirement, he graciously agreed to review a draft of this book. I thank him for his numerous helpful comments on form and content, among which were

corrections to Sam's account. It's as if he had been a companion traveling in the same coach as Sam and better-informed.

On that December day in 2010 after helping me find the *Alert*, Paul O'Pecko brought out a portfolio of exquisite prints by the brothers Daniell. Ten years later, he provided images of these and one of the *C.W. Morgan* for this volume. I am grateful too for his taking the time to review the nautical portions of this book while trying to run a library and research center on reduced staff. Kathryn Mudgett, Professor of Humanities, Massachusetts Maritime Academy, Buzzards Bay, MA, shepherded an article on Sam's trip to China into print in the *Nautilus*, a multidisciplinary maritime journal, and invited me to her "Sea Changes Conference" at the Academy in the Spring of 2012. I thank her for immediately agreeing to take on the task of reviewing this book in the midst of a busy teaching schedule. A copy editor extraordinaire and cultural historian, she suggested significant additions to the historical notes.

I am grateful for the contributions of friends and family. I thank Robert Rothman, Jorge Samper, and Mark Benjamin, for their skill and patience in creating the maps of Sam's travels and the images of the *Journal* and Sarah Jane. I thank Andrew Nemethy, Adamant, Vermont for information on his state's natural history and RJ Ruble, Rochester, NY for his tutorial on Chinese porcelain of the period. Robert Rothman and Grace Seiberling always asked the right questions. Robert and Debbie Rothman, Jutta Bauman and Jack Manley provided valuable feedback on drafts of the work-in-progress. Thanks to Members of the Rochester Genealogical Society Writers Group—Laurie Bauer, Bill Troicke, Kathleen Conti, Mary Boehm, Michael Warner, Lynn Watnik, and Andrew Paris—for their encouragement and thought-provoking discussions on family history. I thank brother, Peter Coverly Albertini for his enthusiasm and help with nautical and family details; son, Arn Albertini for his suggestions and abiding interest, and daughter-in-law, Natercia Rodrigues for pointing me towards relevant sources on women's health. I thank daughter Dorothy Albertini for her precise and generous comments which promoted further thought and, I hope, clarity of expression. To my wife, Kathleen Barry Albertini, go my heartfelt thanks for dropping her own writing to read mine and for assuming the lion's share of family responsibilities while I wrote this book.

Bringing it into print has been a pleasant experience, thanks to the expertise and efficiency of Adam Rummens, Commissioning Editor at Cambridge Scholars Publishing, Amanda Millar, Typesetting Manager, and the CSP design team.

## FOREWORD

This is the story of Samuel Coverly Jr., a merchant born and raised in Boston, Massachusetts and my great-great grandfather.<sup>i</sup> Most of the story is told by Sam himself in a journal now in my possession. He began his travel journal on his trip to Canton, China in 1815 at the age of twenty-one. This was his longest and best documented trip, for in addition to an account of life aboard the ship and in Canton, he left behind a “Memorandum Book” (Cambridge University Library, UK) containing an inventory of his purchases. In the *Journal* itself, he refers only indirectly to business objectives, so for the remaining six trips we must infer these from the places he visits and the historical record. He concludes the *Journal* with a trip to Detroit in 1822, marries and settles in Boston six years later. Thereafter, we must rely on personal correspondence kept with the family Bible, announcements in Boston newspapers, and fragments of a business accounts book (Phillips Library, Peabody Essex Museum), to sketch out his life and business dealings until his death in 1875. Sam was an entrepreneur and an adventurous traveler; one had to be in his rapidly expanding city and country. As Boston came to rely more on commerce in raw and finished goods than on foreign trade, Sam had to keep abreast of the demands of a new market economy. To place Sam in the context of this dynamic period in the early Republic, I begin each chapter with a brief historical introduction and, in a few cases, include a short narrative (in italics) to flesh out Sam’s personality.

## ABBREVIATIONS

Latt.	Latitude
Longt.	Longitude
a/c	By account
Obs.	By observation
Inst.	From the Latin, <i>instante mense</i> , “the current month.”
Ult.	From the Latin, <i>ultimo mense</i> , “last month.”
&c	etcetera
pr Ct.	per cent
Viz <sup>t</sup>	From the Latin, <i>videlicet</i> , “namely” or “to wit”
Lea.	League

## SAMUEL COVERLY JR. CHRONOLOGY

- 1787 Samuel Coverly Sr. weds Sally Winslow
- 1788 Daughter Elizabeth born
- 1790 Daughter Sarah born
- 1793 Son Samuel Coverly Jr. born (Sam)
- 1804 Sam enters Boston Latin Public School
- 1804 Sam's mother Sally dies
- 1815 Sam sails to Canton
- 1816 Sam arrives home; Sam's sister Sarah weds Ephraim Ware
- 1817 Sam travels to Maine and Missouri Territory
- 1818 Sam travels to New Hampshire and sails to England
- 1821 Sam travels to Montreal (& Detroit) and Washington, DC
- 1822 Sam travels to Detroit
- 1828 Sam weds Jane Crichton Clarke
- 1837 Daughter Sarah Jane born; Sam travels to Indiana
- 1845 Samuel Sr. dies
- 1855 Jane admitted to Dr. Cutter's Asylum
- 1859 Sam sells home at 13 Hancock Street
- 1865 Sam and family move to West Roxbury
- 1868 Sam and family move to Hyde Park

1870	Sam's sister Sarah dies
1871	Jane dies; Sam's sister Elizabeth dies
1872	Sam's daughter Sarah Jane weds Joseph Hill
1875	Sam dies

### Note

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<sup>i</sup> See Appendix 1, Samuel Coverly Family Tree



## PROLOGUE

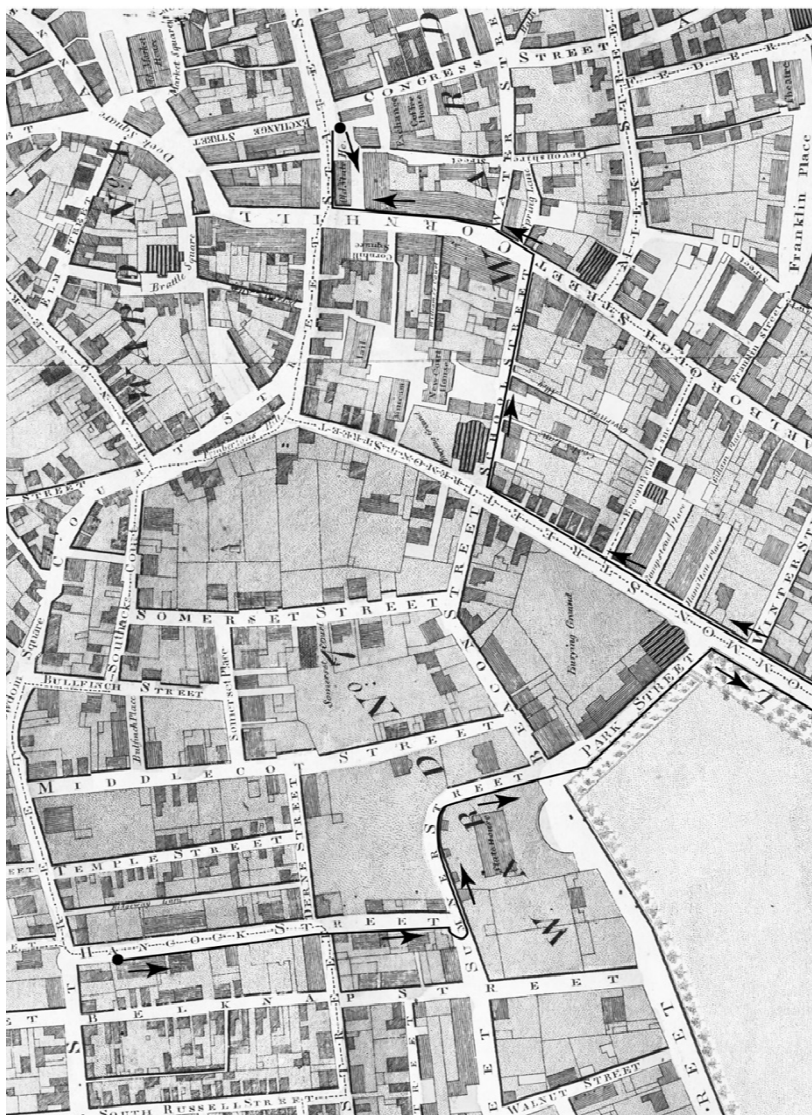
BOSTON, 1790-1815

### *A Walk to Work*

*Sam can't sleep. He is up before light, pulling on breeches, shirt, waistcoat, and frock coat. He has errands to run before opening the shop at ten. He must fetch provisions for dinner, paper and ink for receipts, and cash for the till. Not a bad thing. Sam enjoys walking through the city as it is coming to life. He hears Eliza moving about and a sizzle on the fire. He hopes she is cooking eggs to go with the mutton, toast and crackers. Sarah will be up soon and so will Father. Just finishing his tea, he hears a knock at the front door and knows it is young John Hardy, enterprising and dependable, who will accompany him to the market. It's a cold and blustery end-of-February day, so he throws on his surtout for another layer and steps out onto Hancock Street with John, basket in hand. John's father, Charles,<sup>1</sup> has done an admirable job of sweeping the sidewalks clean all winter, yet the thaw and freeze has made the bricks slippery and they must tread carefully uphill towards Sumner Street and the State House.*

*Once around the State House, they head down Sumner towards Park. At Common Street they turn south along the Common towards Boylston. Not yet warmed up, he draws his surtout tighter at the neck and picks up the pace. Once at Boylston Market, they move swiftly through the stalls. Ham, tongue, figs, almonds and English cheese for today's dinner, salt cod for Saturday. And coffee. The basket full, he tips John a half cent and sends him back to Hancock Street with the groceries. He's considerably warmer walking back up Common Street towards the State House, the sun glinting off its copper dome produced by Paul Revere.*

*According to Father, Mr. Revere has turned over his silver shop to his son, Paul, Jr., and for some time now has been producing copper sheathing for merchants' ships at his rolling mill out in Canton. Continuing north he passes the Granary Burying Ground and thinks of Mother who will have been dead eleven years this April. Aunt Sally (his great aunt, really) is also buried there. She fled Boston in April of 1775 before the British landed. Once safely in Providence, Rhode Island, she wrote to Mother describing*



1. John Groves Hale and Thomas Wightman, *Map of Boston in the state of Massachusetts* (Boston?: s.n., 1814). Map Courtesy of the Library of Congress. Map detail by Jorge Samper.

*her harrowing flight. Next to her lies Mr. Deming, who stubbornly remained in Boston throughout the siege.*

*Now here they were at the end of the second war with their Motherland, which Father has opposed from the very beginning, dependent as he is on England for tea, cloth, dinnerware, and even white lead for paint. For eight years Boston Harbor has looked like a forest of bare trees with so many ships lying idle. If they hadn't found ways to continue some shipping, President Jefferson's embargo and then this war would have put Father out of business.*

*On Tremont Street he sees King's Chapel at the corner of Tremont and School streets, where just three days ago citizens held a Peace Jubilee Concert to celebrate the Treaty of Ghent, signed 24 December 1814. Word has it, it went so well that the group will continue to perform pieces by Messrs. Handel and Haydn at Boylston Market. Passing Boston Latin, he turns north onto Corn Hill, but not before glancing south towards Old South Meeting House on the corner of Milk Street where the Sons of Liberty met before dumping 200 odd chests of tea into the Harbor. Mother and Father married there, and Father still serves as deacon.*

*On Corn Hill, he stops in at #10 to see cousins Wells and Edward. Renewed activity in the Harbor and the printing of extra editions of local newspapers has driven up the demand for printing supplies. Customers are arriving early, so he takes his leave with paper and ink in hand and continues north towards Faneuil Hall. Soon its handsome cupola comes into view. Mr. Bulfinch did a fine job indeed reconstructing the hall. The new third floor was a grand place to drill with Osgood's Regiment.*

*Turning on to State Street, he finds it abuzz with talk of outfitting ships and speculation about new tariffs. This morning, happily, there is more talk of resuming trade than complaints against the government in Washington. Father said he spoke with Mr. Lyman, owner of the ship Alert, about doing business directly with the Chinese. Could that mean a voyage to China? Sam manages the shop when Father is absent, but how would he feel trading with a heathen people in a foreign tongue? Checking his watch, he sees he has no time to linger on the street or in the Coffee Exchange. He must head over to Broad Street to open the shop.*

## Note

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<sup>1</sup> Charles Hardy, a freed man of African descent, was paid by property owners to sweep the streets (See Appendix 2).

## INTRODUCTION

Samuel Coverly Jr. was born and raised in Boston. Both his mother's and father's families had lived in New England since the seventeenth century. His mother's family was descended from Mary Chilton who came to America as a girl on the *Mayflower* and married John Winslow, the brother of the colony's first governor. John arrived after Mary on the ship, *Fortune*. Sam's great grandfather was Captain Thomas Coverly, a ship-builder and merchant who traded up and down the coast from Bath, Maine to Jamaica, West Indies. In the seventeenth century, branches of the family also lived in the Bahamas and on Barbados.<sup>1</sup> His grandfather, also named Thomas, commanded ships sailing to and from the West Indies. The third Thomas, Sam's uncle, was a successful Boston merchant like Sam's father. Another uncle, Nathaniel Coverly, was a printer who produced most of the broadside ballad sheets popular in Boston from 1810 to 1815. Nathaniel, Jr., eventually took over his father's print shop. His younger brothers, Edward and Wells, became merchants like cousin Sam, and at one point, cousins Sam, Edward, and Wells occupied shops on different floors in the building owned by Sam's father.<sup>2</sup>

Sam's father married Sally Winslow. Upon hearing of her marriage to Samuel Coverly in 1787, her aunt, Ann Winslow, wrote to inquire about the new husband:

I am please [sic] with the modesty which appears in your encomiums – but as Mr. C is a perfect stranger & no one mentions him to us me thinks you might have said whether he was old or young large or small whether he is an artificer or merchant whether in the law or phisical [sic] line or if he has devoted his time to the study of Divinity & has placed you at the head of the parish – Now my niece [sic] when you write again I shall expect to be enformed [sic] of all those particulars & as many more as your leasure [sic] & inclination will allow me.<sup>3</sup>

Her query reflects the ranking of professions in Boston society at the time. While trading was a respectable profession, the ministry was the most honorable occupation. Though neither father nor son pursued the study of divinity, the family were churchgoers. Sam's parents were married at the Congregationalist Old South (Third) Church of Boston by the Reverend

Joseph Eckley, whose “stern demeanor and powdered headgear were the symbols of the Boston divine who exacted total deference from his congregation.”<sup>4</sup> Sam’s father served as deacon there for many years. Sam’s mother died in April 1804 at the age of 49 leaving behind her husband, daughters Elizabeth and Sarah, and Sam not yet eleven years old.

Sam probably attended a public “reading school” until the age of eleven when he entered Boston Latin Public School. There, the curriculum focused on religion, Latin, and classical literature. In his free time, he drilled as a private with a company of Osgood’s Regiment of the Massachusetts Militia and worked in his father’s shop at 17 Broad Street. In 1796, Jay’s Treaty reestablished trade with England, and Boston merchants prospered for twelve years.<sup>5</sup> His father traded in English, India, and European goods,<sup>6</sup> later specializing in China goods such as teas, silks, cotton fabric, Chinaware, cassia (Chinese cinnamon), and rattans (wickerwork). Commerce, especially overseas trade, was the backbone of Boston’s economy, and because its back country produced few exportable staples, merchants there were constantly in search of cargoes.<sup>7</sup> President Jefferson’s ill-conceived shipping embargo in 1808 and then the War of 1812 shut this trade down.

Sam was nineteen years old in 1812 when the United States declared war on England. The main reason given for war was the seizure of American ships and impressment of American sailors by the British Navy. Western politicians also had their eyes on Canadian land, and southern and Pennsylvania Republicans objected to British restrictions on American shipping on the high seas.<sup>8</sup> To some, America’s focus was never unified and no single cause justified going to war. The decision to declare war was foolhardy and the war itself “a catalogue of American disasters.”<sup>9</sup> After two years of fighting, neither side gained a decisive advantage, the government was running low on cash, and public support was waning. Sam’s company, part of Osgood’s Regiment of the Massachusetts Militia, never left the Commonwealth.<sup>10</sup>

By the autumn of 1814, Federalist sentiment in Boston against the war with England had reached its peak. The General Court of Massachusetts summoned a convention in Hartford to plan the secession of Massachusetts from the union and consider other means of defending itself against President Madison’s administration and the enemy.<sup>11</sup> Because of the shipping embargo, over two hundred idle ships, barques, brigs, and schooners were now berthed in Boston harbor.<sup>12</sup> The flow of British manufactured goods, Chinese teas and silks, and Boston’s commercial profits from this trade had by and large ceased. No wonder then that news of the Treaty of Ghent (signed December 24, 1814) spread like wildfire

through the state and that in its honor, a Peace Jubilee concert was held in King's Chapel on February 22, 1815.<sup>13</sup> With the lifting of the embargo, seamen who for the last few years had been digging potatoes and picking apples, poured into Boston eager "to be once more ploughing the ocean."<sup>14</sup>

On May 5, 1815, less than three months after news of the armistice reached Boston, twenty-one-year-old Sam sailed from Boston harbor for Canton, China, aboard the ship *Alert*.<sup>15</sup> Bostonians were spending again and demand for Canton Goods was high. On this voyage, Sam kept a "Sea or Log Journal"<sup>16</sup> in which he recorded weather conditions and the ship's position in nautical time, and a travel journal in civil time for himself. He would continue this travel journal (henceforth, the *Journal*) on subsequent business trips until 1822. Sam began the *Journal* for his "own amusement" and to comfort himself on this his first journey from home. In several entries, he addresses his father and sisters directly. The entries would have to take the place of letters, since the only way of communicating with home was to hail a ship bound for Boston and beg a favor. (See Illustration 2, *Journal* page)

In April 1817, less than a year after his return from China, he traveled to Thomastown (now Thomaston), Maine and St. Louis, in the Missouri Territory. In February 1818, he took a stage to Concord, New Hampshire and in June, sailed to England in the company of Thomas H. Perkins of Perkins & Company, the most famous trading house in Boston. In May of 1821, he went again by stage to Concord, New Hampshire and thence by stage and steamboat to Montreal, Lake Erie, Detroit, Niagara Falls, and home through New York and Connecticut. Finally, he chronicled trips to Washington, DC in 1821 and again to Detroit in 1822.

His entries on these eight trips, but especially the early ones, radiate excitement, curiosity, and a deep interest in the development of his country. The risks of the high seas and treacherous roads through the mountains of Pennsylvania are offset by the novelty of his experiences in Canton and in settlers' cabins. To be sure, he experiences sickness, homesickness and anxiety, but in the *Journal*, he writes mainly about weather, road conditions, and advances made by industrious countrymen and women. He writes little about his day-to-day business dealings or the fruits of his trading. The purpose of Sam's trip to China was to purchase goods for his father's shop, and fortunately, he left behind a detailed record of these purchases in a notebook he called his *Memorandum Book* now residing in the Cambridge University Library (UK).<sup>17</sup> For the period covered in the *Journal*, this is the only extant inventory of purchases. On the other trips, he mentions only delivering letters of credit, however from the sales notices he publishes subsequently in Boston newspapers, we may

assume that he was purchasing and arranging shipments of the raw materials and products mentioned in his entries. These entries form a picture of a young merchant making a decent living in a rapidly expanding republic. From his last entry in 1822 until his death in 1875, there remain a few personal letters and an assortment of other documents.<sup>18</sup> These suggest that keeping up with the changing market demands continued to be a challenge and that Sam fell into hard times.

Unlike his father and future father-in-law who conducted coastal and foreign trade on their own accounts, Sam functioned as a "commission merchant."<sup>19</sup> In Belfast, Maine, for example, he would have had lumber and wood products shipped to Boston in return for cotton yard goods, Boston rum and molasses, and sugar from the West Indies all on commission. In this way he contributed significantly to the economy of Belfast and the other small communities he visited.

In Maine, Sam's credit rested on family connections and relationships with Boston bankers. In the Missouri Territory, he had to depend on letters of credit delivered to local banks. Initially, this worked well for him. There was real growth in the new territories. Improved turnpikes and canals in the east brought more and more settlers.

Federal land sales mushroomed and shipping became much more affordable. In 1817, farmers could easily raft their products hundreds of miles downriver to New Orleans on the Mississippi and Ohio, but then had to row store-bought goods back up river in keelboats. By 1820, however, steamboats were carrying freight in both directions for a fraction of the cost.<sup>20</sup>

Increased commerce in the west led to new investment opportunities and an increased demand for capital. To meet this demand banks sprang up overnight. Kentucky chartered 46 new banks in 1817, the same year that Sam went to St. Louis. Because there was only so much silver specie (coin) in circulation, most state banks relied on promissory notes for silver kept at the federal government's depository. Before long, these banks were extending loans that far exceeded their own specie reserves and the amount of their federal notes. The result of this speculative excess was uncontrolled inflation. As the value of bank notes depreciated, people stopped buying and businesses closed. In 1819, panic hit cities in the northeast. In Philadelphia, three out of every four workers were out of work and 1,808 were jailed because they could not pay their debts.<sup>21</sup>

Boston in general was spared the worst of this panic because of its specie-strong banks, yet Sam published only one sales notice in 1819, which was for goods he had purchased the previous year in England. This drop in sales volume points to probable financial difficulties. In an early draft of his

father's will, Samuel Sr. names his grandnephew Edward to manage his estate until his son can discharge his own debts, "and not before."<sup>22</sup> Though the draft is undated, we know it is an early draft because it concludes with the statement, "Mr. Coverly has no grandchildren." His first grandchild, Sarah's son, Samuel C. Ware, was born in 1818.

Before the war, farm families mainly consumed what they produced, bartering with others for what they could not. Travel to markets by land was difficult and, in some seasons, impossible. After the war, the nation turned its attention to the development of canals and turnpikes. In 1816, the longest canal in the United States was the Middlesex, which brought New Hampshire products 27.25 miles to Boston Harbor; but by July 1817, construction was begun on a New York canal which would stretch 364 miles from Albany to Buffalo,<sup>23</sup> thus opening a safe and affordable means of transportation to and from the western frontier. By the 1820s, the textile mills in Lowell were producing inexpensive finished cloth,<sup>24</sup> thus reducing the demand for English cloth. The construction of turnpikes meant faster and easier access to raw materials and new markets on the western frontier. The rapid increase in local industry meant less demand for certain imports, and improvements in transportation opened new markets on the western frontier. Construction on a national road and plans for a grand canal to the west were underway. As a consequence, merchants like Sam needed to adapt quickly to their customers' changing tastes and needs.

On his voyage to England in 1818, Sam visits bankers and a warehouse of China goods; in Manchester, he visits textile mills; and in Liverpool, the harbor. In 1823, after he stopped writing in the *Journal*, he and his father advertised furs and imported foods such as figs, raisins, and Havana brown sugar in the Boston newspapers. In 1859, Sam sold the house on Hancock Street and retired to a frame house in the country. By then, he was dealing mostly in real estate. To understand his life in the years from the *Journal's* conclusion to his death, 1822 to 1875, we must rely on correspondence, deeds, and newspaper announcements. These will be considered in the Epilogue.

The accounts of his travels from 1815 to 1822, occupy one hundred and forty-eight handwritten journal pages. In transcribing the entries, I have kept his original spellings but expanded abbreviations of names and nautical terms. Ships' names are given in italics. Archaic place names are followed by their current names in square brackets (for example, Batavia [Jakarta]); and I have used brackets for brief clarifications and editorial comments. Lengthy comments and notes are provided as endnotes. Numbers at the left margin indicate the page numbers in the original. I have broken up



extremely long sentences for ease of reading and added section headings in italics to mark significant points in Sam's narrative of his trip to China.

Born in 1793, the same year George Washington began his second term as President, Sam lived to see a national road and a canal built to the west and steamboats on rivers and lakes. He also lived to see a ten-fold population increase in his beloved Boston<sup>25</sup> and a more than doubling of the country's landmass. Sam's career spanned a period of dramatic economic change, now known as the "Market Revolution." From 1815 to 1846 this revolution drastically changed the lives of the average American. It certainly affected how he did business. He lived through two divisive wars, the administrations of seventeen Presidents and the assassination of one. By the time Sam died in 1875 he had travelled to "the four corners of the world" and visited fourteen of the thirty-seven states, two territories, and the District of Columbia.

## Notes

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<sup>1</sup> Kate Van Winkle Keller, "Nathaniel Coverly and Son, Printers, 1767-1825," *American Antiquarian Society* (2007), 214.

<sup>2</sup> See Thomas Coverly Family Tree, Appendix 3

<sup>3</sup> Letter from Ann Winslow, April 9, 1788, Quebec, to Mrs. Sarah Coverly, Marlborough Street, Boston, via Halifax. *Coverly Papers*.

<sup>4</sup> Harold Kirker and James Kirker, *Bulfinch's Boston, 1787-1817* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1964), 229.

<sup>5</sup> Kirker and Kirker, *Bulfinch's Boston*, 122.

<sup>6</sup> Keller, "Nathaniel Coverly," 236.

<sup>7</sup> George Taylor, *The Transportation Revolution, 1815-1860, Vol. 4, The Economic History of the United States* (New York: Harper & Row, 1951), 8.

<sup>8</sup> Alan Taylor, *The Civil War of 1812: American Citizens, British Subjects, Irish Rebels, and Indian Allies*. (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2010), 134.

<sup>9</sup> Troy Bickham, *The Weight of Vengeance* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 6.

<sup>10</sup> Kirker and Kirker, *Bulfinch's Boston*, 236.

<sup>11</sup> Samuel Eliot Morison, *The Maritime History of Massachusetts, 1783-1860*. (Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin Co, 1941), 209-210.

<sup>12</sup> Morison, *Maritime History*, 206.

<sup>13</sup> In April that same year, principals of the group formed Boston's first musical society, the Handel and Haydn Society.

<sup>14</sup> Kirker and Kirker, *Bulfinch's Boston*, 258.

<sup>15</sup> Not to be confused with a ship of the same name, built about 1828 and described by Richard Henry Dana, Jr. (1815-1822) in his book, *Two Years Before the Mast*.

<sup>16</sup> Sam states he is keeping the "Log Journal" in nautical time but the *Journal*, "being intended for my own amusement," in civil time. (*Journal*, 2) Thus it appears he is

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keeping the “Log Journal” for Captain Wildes. Normally the ship’s log was kept by the first mate. Its whereabouts is unknown.

<sup>17</sup> The *Memorandum Book* was left to the library by Dr. Mark Kaplanoff (1949-2001). A native of San Francisco and graduate of Yale University, Dr. Kaplanoff was University Lecturer in American History at Cambridge University and a Fellow at Pembroke College when he died. The author was unable to determine how he acquired the Coverly manuscript.

<sup>18</sup> His *Account Book* contains receipts for goods from the southern states, the West Indies, and South America. *Account Book and Letters of Samuel Coverly Jr. 1832-1836*.

<sup>19</sup> Taylor, *The Transportation Revolution*, 10-11.

<sup>20</sup> Charles Sellers, *The Market Revolution: Jacksonian America, 1815 – 1846* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), 131-2.

<sup>21</sup> Sellers, *The Market Revolution*, 137.

<sup>22</sup> Will of Samuel Coverly, nd., Coverly Papers.

<sup>23</sup> George Taylor, *The Transportation Revolution, 1815-1860, Vol. 4, The Economic History of the United States* (New York: Harper & Row, 1951), 33.

<sup>24</sup> Rebecca Beatrice Brooks, “Role of the Massachusetts Textile Mills in the Industrial Revolution,” January 9, 2017, Accessed, 7 June 2020.

<https://historyofmassachusetts.org/massachusetts-textile-mills/>

<sup>25</sup> “Population history of Boston from 1790-1990,” Accessed 15 January 2020,

<http://physics.bu.edu/~redner/projects/population/cities/boston.html>.

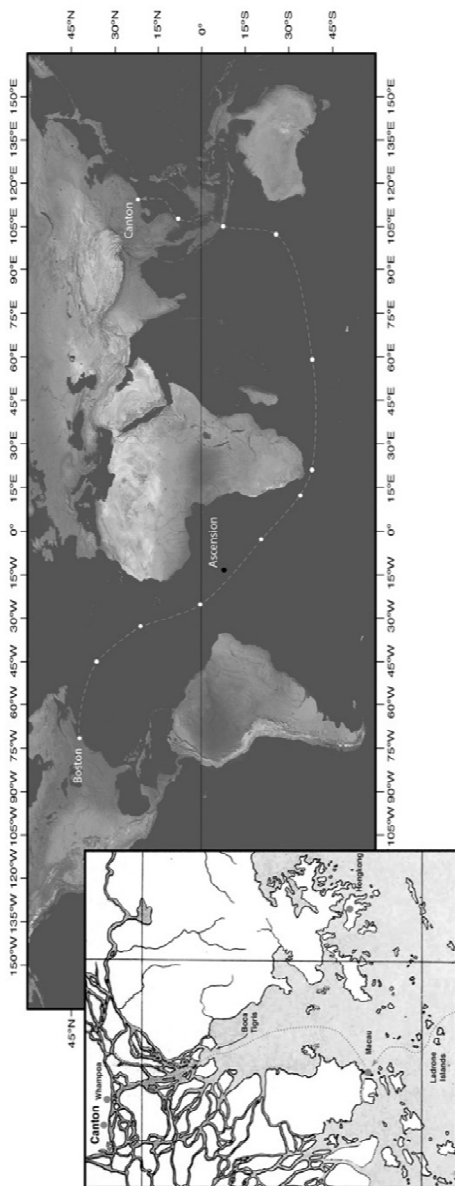
# CHAPTER 1

## VOYAGE TO CANTON, 1815-1816

### Introduction

Sam departed Boston on the ship *Alert* on May 4, 1815 and arrived at Whampoa, Canton's anchorage 12 miles south and east of the city, on Monday September 11. He concluded his business in China on December 11 and arrived home on May 9, 1816, after being away for a year and six days. Sam reckoned the total distance of the voyage to be 33,382 miles.

- Friday, May 5, "Passed the Boston light"
- Saturday, May 13, "2 hours before Boston"
- Friday, May 26. "South of the sun"
- Friday, June 9. "Crossing the Equinoctial line"
- Saturday, June 17. "Fresh breezes & clear wholesome weather"
- Tuesday, July 4. Cape of Good Hope
- Tuesday, July 11. Indian Ocean
- Saturday, July 22. "Gales of wind with rain...Lost my hat overboard"
- Tuesday, Aug 8. "Running down the coast of New Holland"  
[Australia]
- Tuesday, Aug 15. Sunda Strait, Java Head
- Tuesday, Aug 29. China Sea
- Friday, Sept 8. "Sent a boat to Macao...to procure a pilot for Canton."
- Sunday, March 17, 1816 (en route home). Ascension Island



3. Map of route from Boston to Canton, 1815. Insert: Route up the Pearl River Delta from the Ladrone Islands to Canton. Maps by Robert Rothman.

On this his first overseas voyage, he encounters different fish and fowl and learns a new language, Pidgin English. In the *Journal*, he punctuates his daily entries by recording the ship's position and distance from Boston. This practice often takes him on imaginary excursions home to family and friends. He praises the virtue and courage of the crew when mishaps occur and places his fate in the hands of Providence when in danger.

"When from home a week" (May 11, 1815), Sam opens a packet containing a letter from his father, one from his sister Sarah, and a book entitled, *A Father's Advice to His Son*. His only remark after reading the letters is that they speak more for themselves than anything he can say, and that their contents will be evident to the extent that he follows their advice. A book with that title was published in London in the previous decade and contains didactic tales of foolish boys and animals.<sup>1</sup> One story describes the behavior of playmates from different stations in life. One is the pampered son of an English baronet and the other the conscientious son of the gardener and housemaid at the estate. The lesson to be derived from the tale is that diligence and honesty are more to be admired than wealth and prestige. Two days later, realizing they have run more than 1200 miles from Boston, he writes,

I did not think we should leave home so fast, but the pleasure of going back as fast or faster at a future day, takes place by anticipation of the regret I feel in leaving you my family & friends at this time, & may Heaven grant that we find each other in as good or better health than when we parted, & mutually grateful for the protection and multiplied blessings which shall have been afforded us while absent from each other.

When almost two weeks out, he describes the "regulations on board." They breakfast at 8, dine at 12, and drink tea at 6. Dinners are to some extent regulated by the day of the week. Thus, according to New England custom, they have salt fish on Saturdays, a day devoted to airing bedding and cleaning the ship to prepare for Sunday and to ward off scurvy. Passing a homeward bound ship, Captain Wildes recognizes too late that she was American and thus misses an opportunity to send word home. Sam writes, "Although more than 1000 miles from home, my thoughts often fly over the space between my Friends & me, & partake of their employments & amusements as if present; my best wishes attend you."

The behavior of the crew impresses Sam. On Friday, May 19, two weeks out, the gunner falls overboard from the bobstays into the cutwater. Sam describes what then took place:

Immediately backed Main Top Sail, threw overboard the top of the sky-light, lowered the boat with three hands, took him up in about ten minutes 100 rods astern, just as he was sinking, being taken when two feet under water, & brought him on board; exhibited no signs of life when first taken into the boat, & was insensible until he had been on board ship a few minutes. He was wrapped in Blankets, rubbed, & in about two hours took an emetic.

The next day, Sam writes:

The Gunner is much better, complains of weakness, & inward soreness. Says that he could feel the bottom of the ship as it passed over him & that he was prevented by it from coming to the surface of the water. I was much gratified yesterday to see every man so ready & willing to give assistance to the utmost of his power.

The *Alert* was a “regular trader” of 376 tons rigged for speed (see Illustration 4, the *Charles W. Morgan*). It had three masts, two decks, a squared stern, and a figurehead. It measured 108 feet in length, 28 feet in width, and 14 feet in depth.<sup>2</sup> The trip out took 130 days, not the fastest considering another of Theodore Lyman’s ships, the *Atahualpa*, had made the Canton run in 106 days in 1811.<sup>3</sup> But the return took five months, a very good passage considering they had run aground and encountered foul weather and that, prior to the war, a six-month passage home was not unheard of.

Captain Dixey Wildes commanded a crew of nineteen, larger than that of an ordinary merchantman but typical of “a sharp ship” of 300 tons.<sup>4</sup> The crew included “Louis, a Greek,” “Wm. Henry McNeill, Boy,” and “Peter Sullivan (Black), Cook.” Should they encounter pirates or a belligerent ship ignorant of the peace treaty, the crew also included a gunner. Sam Jr. and another merchant, Mr. John Butterfield, brought the total on board to twenty-two. The *Alert* was light and quick, since she carried only gravel for ballast and \$300,000 in silver specie (coin). American traders at this time typically relied on specie to pay for Chinese goods.<sup>5</sup> Before the war, American ginseng and furs were in demand. The market now demanded Mexican silver, which American traders obtained by selling goods in South America. It was likely that a business partnership among the ship’s owner, its captain, Sam’s father, and John Butterfield, had been formed to finance the venture. That twenty-one-year-old Sam was entrusted with such a large sum was not exceptional. Massachusetts men