

## THE FIRST VOYAGE OF THE SCHOONER *GROWLER*: SALEM PRIVATEER IN THE WAR OF 1812

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“Know all Men by the Presents, that we Saml. Burrill Graves and others ... officers and Crew of the private armed Schooner Growler bound on a Cruise against the Enemies of the United States of America ... .”<sup>1</sup> So begins a 7 November 1812 power of attorney filed by the crew of the “good privateer Schooner *Growler*” naming Henry Prince and Samuel Ward, both of Salem, Massachusetts, their lawful attorneys in all matters relating to any prizes captured by the *Growler* in this first cruise “against the Enemies of the United States of America.” The document is signed by the eighty-four members of the *Growler*’s crew with each man’s prize share appended to his name. Every man associated with this cruise, from the ship’s owners to the ship’s boys, was gambling money—or life—in the hope of accumulating wealth. Would they be successful?

On 18 June 1812, the United States declared war on Great Britain. At the time, the country’s navy comprised a total of twenty ships, three large 44-gun frigates, three smaller 38-gun frigates, fourteen other ships, eight of them not seaworthy, and 62 small gunboats.<sup>2</sup> The 26 June 1812 passage of “An Act concerning Letters of Marque, Prizes, and Prize Goods” allowed the country’s merchant fleets to turn privateer, greatly augmenting the United States’ naval force and, hopefully, generating a profit for their owners and crew.<sup>3</sup> Within ten days of receiving the declaration of war, the town of Salem had outfitted and sent out eight privateers carrying about 400 men.<sup>4</sup> By the end of August, that number had reached thirteen,

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<sup>1</sup> *Prize and Related Records for the War of 1812 of the U.S. District Court for the Southern District of New York, 1812-1816*, microfilm publication M928, 9 rolls (Washington: National Archives and Records Service, 1973), roll 1 (1813), S.B. Graves et al. (*Growler*) v. Annabella (1813), pp. 52-53, Samuel Burrill Graves, et al., to Henry Prince, et al., power of attorney (1812); digital images, *Fold3* (<http://www.fold3.com/image/17838127/> : accessed 22 July 2012).

<sup>2</sup> Office of the Chief of Military History, United States Army, “The War of 1812,” extracted from *American Military History: Army Historical Series*, 132; online transcription, *US Army Center of Military History* (<http://www.history.army.mil/books/AMH-VI/ch06.htm> : accessed 10 March 2012); also William S. Dudley and Michael J. Crawford, editors, *The Naval War of 1812: A Documentary History*, 3 volumes (Washington: Naval Historical Center, Department of the Navy, 1985), I: 53, 187, 197, 209; digital images, *American Naval Records Society* (<http://ibiblio.org/anrs/1812.html> : accessed 1 June 2014).

<sup>3</sup> U.S. Congress, *The Public Statutes at Large of the United States of America ... 1789 to March 3, 1845*, vol. 2 (Boston: Charles C. Little and James Brown, 1845), 2: 759, 26 June 1812, “An Act concerning Letters of Marque, Prizes, and Prize Goods”; digital images, Library of Congress, *A Century of Lawmaking for a New Nation* (<http://memory.loc.gov/> : accessed 1 June 2014); hereinafter cited as 2 Stat. 759 (26 June 1812).

<sup>4</sup> Dudley and Crawford, *The Naval War of 1812*, I: 204.

and Salem's merchants would soon be receiving the first of a group of new ships, built specifically as a private armed vessel, a privateer.<sup>5</sup>

The *Growler* was one of those new ships, a schooner built in the Baltimore shipyards, rigged in the clipper style. She was commissioned by the White brothers, Joseph and Stephen, and her building was overseen by their friend Joseph J. Knapp. She was one of the larger Salem privateers, 172 tons, and equipped for one 24-pound gun and fourteen 6-pounders.<sup>6</sup>

Samuel Burrill Graves, 33, was her captain. He had been sailing Salem's ships for years, was part owner of the *Mary Caroline*, and had been a ship master since 1806.<sup>7</sup> Graves was very experienced, highly respected, and a member of the exclusive Salem East India Marine Society, joining in September 1808.<sup>8</sup>

The crew ranged in age from the twelve-year old Burrill Manning to experienced sailors in their mid-forties. The African-American cook, Christopher White, might have been as old as sixty. His age varies widely in Salem crew lists, making it difficult to assess his year of birth with any accuracy. The bulk of the men came from Salem, Marblehead, and Beverly. Six of the men had recently returned on the *Mercator*, sailing with Samuel Graves from Charleston, South Carolina, to Italy, and then home to Salem.<sup>9</sup>

The *Growler*'s privateer commission was issued on 4 November 1812, she had a crew of ninety men, and her owners planned a three-month cruise.<sup>10</sup> This first voyage did not have an auspicious start. After receiving her commission, the *Growler* was taken out on a short cruise to test her sails and guns.

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<sup>5</sup> Michael H. Rutstein, *The Privateering Stroke: Salem's Privateers in the War of 1812* (Salem, Mass.: CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform, 2012), "Salem Privateering Ventures" (table), 279-284; also, Robert Booth, *Death of an Empire: The Rise and Murderous Fall of Salem, America's Richest City* [Kindle Edition] (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2011).

<sup>6</sup> Hurd, *History of Essex County, Massachusetts*, 211.

<sup>7</sup> A. Frank Hitchings, *Ship Registers of the District of Salem and Beverly, Massachusetts, 1789-1900* (Salem, Mass.: Essex Institute, 1906), 117, 120, 178, 202; digital images, *Google Books* (<http://books.google.com/books?id=Z2saAAAAYAAJ> : accessed 25 May 2012).

<sup>8</sup> "Death of Another Salem Shipmaster" [William, son of Samuel B. Graves], *Salem (Massachusetts) Register*, 29 January 1872, p. 2, col. 4; digital images, "Historical Newspapers", *GenealogyBank.com* (<http://www.genealogybank.com/gbnk/> : accessed 26 May 2014). Walter Muir Whitehill, *The East India Marine Society and the Peabody Museum of Salem* (Salem, Mass.: Peabody Museum, 1949), 163, Samuel B. Graves, member no. 135; digital images, *Hathi Digital Trust* (<http://hdl.handle.net/2027/mdp.39015056996500> : accessed 1 June 2014). The Salem East India Marine Society was founded on 21 August 1799, "to form an association to consist of such Ship Masters only as have had a Register from Salem and who have navigated those Seas at or beyond the Cape of Good Hope ... ." In 133 years, 402 Salem ship masters qualified for membership. None qualified after July 1902.

<sup>9</sup> "Salem, Mass. Crew Lists Index: 1799-1879" and "Seamen's Protection Certificate Register Database," search of all names found on the 7 November 1812 agreement; databases, Mystic Seaport Museum, *Mystic Seaport* (<http://library.mysticseaport.org/> : accessed 28 May 2014). Not all names were found in these two databases, and not all individuals could be uniquely identified.

<sup>10</sup> Rutstein, *The Privateering Stroke*, 259.

*A sad acc'dent happened here on Wednesday afternoon. The new privateer schooner Growler went into the offing to try her sailing and prove her guns. A large company was on board on the occasion. On firing one of the cannon (a 6 pounder, heavily charged) it burst and flew into atoms, scarcely a remnant of it or the carriage remain'ng—Seven persons were wounded, two or three severely, having their bones broken. Fortunately and wonderfully no person was killed although one of the maimed was not expected to survive.<sup>11</sup>*

The newspaper notice was premature. Daniel Shehane of Salem, 45, husband and father, died of his wounds.<sup>12</sup> He was the first of the *Growler* crew to die. James Barr, Jr., Captain's clerk, and Samuel Brown, seaman, were injured too badly in the blast to sail with the ship. Barr had a compound fracture of his leg, and Brown had a severe head wound.<sup>13</sup> Short one gun and with a slightly reduced 84-man crew, the privateer schooner *Growler* sailed on November 11<sup>th</sup>, heading for the North Atlantic region around Madeira and Cape Verde islands.<sup>14</sup>

On 27 November 1812, the *Growler* captured the British schooner *Prince of Wales*, out of Madeira on her way to Newfoundland. Unfortunately, the schooner was in ballast, carrying only "six pipes Wine, and a few bbls Oranges." *Growler* confiscated the wine, oranges, and a few other necessary articles, and then gave the British ship up to her crew. The *Prince of Wales* was not worth taking into port.<sup>15</sup>

One week later, on the fourth of December, the *Growler* encountered the British ship *Annabella*, Richard Clark, master, near the island of Madeira. The *Annabella* was a 252 ton ship, armed with twelve guns, and crewed by the master, ten men, and four boys. She had set sail from Bristol in September en route to Tobago

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<sup>11</sup> "Salem, Nov. 6," *New-England Palladium* (Boston, Massachusetts), 13 November 1812, p. 2, col. 5; digital images, "Historical Newspapers", *GenealogyBank.com* (<http://www.genealogybank.com/gbnk/> : accessed 28 May 2014).

<sup>12</sup> "Died" [Mr. Daniel Shehane], *Essex (Massachusetts) Register*, 18 November 1812, p. 3, col. 3; digital images, New England Historic Genealogical Society, "Early American Newspapers Series 1, 1690-1876," *AmericanAncestors.org* (<http://www.americanancestors.org/> : accessed 26 May 2014).

<sup>13</sup> Samuel Brown (Seaman, Privateer Growler, War of 1812), Navy invalid file no. 206; War of 1812 Pension and Bounty Land Warrant Application Files, ..., 1812--ca. 1900; digital images, *Fold3* (<http://www.fold3.com/image/300905066/> : accessed 28 May 2014); imaged from Pension and bounty land application files based upon service prior to the Civil War; Department of Veterans Affairs, Record Group 15; National Archives, Washington, D.C.; and James Barr Jr. (Captain's clerk, Privateer Growler, War of 1812), privateer pension no. 73[?]; digital images *Fold3* (<http://www.fold3.com/image/287460758/> : accessed 28 May 2014).

<sup>14</sup> "Ship News," *Salem Gazette*, 13 November 1812, p. 3, col. 3. The number of crew assumes that only those named in the 7 November 1812 agreement sailed on this cruise. It's possible that replacements were found for the injured men, but that cannot be determined with available records.

<sup>15</sup> "Ship News--Port of Salem," *Essex Register*, 27 February 1813, p. 3, col. 2.

carrying coal, brick and lime, clothing, furniture, and dry goods, and was planning to return with rum and sugar to England. She had become separated from her convoy in a storm, leaving her prey to the *Growler*.<sup>16</sup> After “a warm action of about three quarters of an hour,” she surrendered to the *Growler*.<sup>17</sup> This ship was worth sending to a friendly port! A prize crew, with Daniel Andrews, prize master, was put on board, and the *Annabella* reached New London in February 1813. After all fees and duties were paid, the sale of the *Annabella* and her cargo brought \$13,967.64 to the *Growler*’s thirteen owners and 84 crew men.<sup>18</sup>

The *Growler* continued prowling the North Atlantic, and on 18 December 1812, she encountered the English brig, *Ann*, midway between the Canary Islands and Cape Verde. After “an action of an hour and a quarter,” the brig surrendered. The *Ann* was a 226 ton ship, armed with six 9-pound guns, and bound from Liverpool to Nassau, New Providence (in Bermuda), carrying a cargo of dry goods and crates of British ceramics.<sup>19</sup> Her prize crew sailed her into Salem, where the *Ann* and her cargo were sold at auction on 13 April 1813.<sup>20</sup> This prize netted the *Growler*’s owners and crew \$55,000!<sup>21</sup>

The American privateers’ harassment of British cargo vessels created a significant financial hardship for British merchants. This military effort was not a privateer’s main purpose, however. The essential difference between a commissioned privateer and an American Naval vessel is illustrated by the *Growler*’s fourth encounter with the enemy.

*Jan. 11, at 1 A M, saw a ship in the east; shortly after saw another strange sail in the north, standing to the SW--at 5 saw the brig cause the ship to heave too with English colours--at 1 A M, saw our chase on the other tack--we likewise tacked after her. At half past 1 gave her a broadside--she then tacked and we immediately after her--at 2 she gave us two shot, and the action became warm on both sides--at daylight she shewed English colours with a signal forward--saw a number of shot holes in her*

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<sup>16</sup> *Prize and Related Records for the War of 1812 ... U.S. District Court ... Southern District of New York*, *Growler v. Annabella*, pp. 11-25, specifically 12, Richard Clark, master of the *Annabella*, interrogatory, 13 February 1813; pp. 94-98, Daniel Andrews, prize master, deposition, 25 February 1813.

<sup>17</sup> “Ship News--Port of Salem,” *Essex Register*, 27 February 1813, p. 3, col. 2.

<sup>18</sup> *Prize and Related Records for the War of 1812 ... U.S. District Court ... Southern District of New York*, *Growler v. Annabella*, p. 50, final account, 1 March 1813.

<sup>19</sup> “Ship News--Port of Salem,” *Essex Register*, 27 February 1813, p. 3, col. 2

<sup>20</sup> “Prize Goods at Auction,” *Essex Register*, 7 April 1813, p. 3, col. 4. For an analysis of the *Ann*’s cargo, see Lisa Kraus, “Piracy ... or Pottery Barn?,” Maryland State Highway Administration, *War of 1812 Archaeology*, 23 January 2013 (<http://warof1812archaeology.blogspot.com/2013/01/piracyor-pottery-barn.html> : accessed 26 May 2014).

<sup>21</sup> Rutstein, *The Privateering Stroke*, 272.

*sails--the action still warm and undecided. At 9 finding our cartridges expended, and shot scant, we passed ahead, filled up the remainder of the powder, and got prepared. This brig by every appearance was a packet, from 14 to 16 guns, and well manned. **Thinking her of small value, concluded not to recommence the action ...*** [emphasis added]<sup>22</sup>

The privateer's main purpose was the capture of prizes. If the prize wasn't worth the risk, that risk would not be taken.

Three weeks later, on 2 February 1813, the *Growler* ran into trouble. She spotted a brig, gradually bore down on her, and prepared for action. The weather was squally, and the *Growler*'s shots were not as effective as usual. After three and a half hours of battle, with her hull and rigging shattered and colors shot away twice, the British brig still refused to surrender. The battle ceased at nightfall, and in the morning, the *Growler* crew lay by to take stock and effect repairs.

*In examing the vessels bottom we discovered ten shot holes; a great number in the quarters, and one hundred and forty through the sails. Our antagonist must have suffered in a much greater degree, as their men were seen tumbling from aloft; the water gushing in fore and aft, and quarters partly rased to the deck; we were within pistol shot during the principal part of the engagement; our top men saw 12 or 15 men laying on her deck, and blood running from her scuppers. Likewise saw 14 carriage guns, and all must have been 9 pounders, as there were no less shot holes discovered, (except grape). Several 9lb shot lodged on board of us.*<sup>23</sup>

The failure to capture the brig and the damage to the *Growler* itself were not the worst of the situation. Michael Veal, prize master, Luke Elliott, quarter master, and thirteen-year old George Eden, boy, were dead. Stephen Abbott was badly wounded, Michael Coombs was slightly injured, and Captain Graves' left arm had been broken by a shot. The damage was so severe that William Canfield, the surgeon, was forced to amputate that arm. It was time to head for home.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> "Ship News--Port of Salem," *Essex Register*, 27 February 1813, p. 3, col. 2.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>24</sup> Joseph Simmons (2<sup>d</sup> Lt.), Nathan Green (Sailing master), John Burrill (Captain's clerk), deposition, Salem, Mass., 8 September 1813; in Samuel B. Graves (Capt., Privateer *Growler*, War of 1812), pension no. 669; War of 1812 Pension and Bounty Land Warrant Application Files, ..., 1812--ca. 1900; digital images, *Fold3* (<http://www.fold3.com/image/247/313427385/>; accessed 28 May 2014). Other pensioners from this voyage include: Stephen Abbott (never regained full use of one arm), privateer pension no. 2; Mary, widow of Luke Elliott, privateer pension no. 410; James Barr Jr. (wounded in the gun explosion before the first cruise), privateer pension no. 73; Samuel Brown (wounded in the gun explosion before the first cruise), Navy invalid file no. 206;

Five days out of Salem, on 20 February, the *Growler* came up with the Portuguese schooner *Henriquetta*. The schooner was leaky, her rudder was almost gone, the sails were worn out, and her provisions were almost consumed. The thirteen persons on board, the schooner's cargo of salt—and about \$12,000 in gold—were taken on board the *Growler*, and the *Henriquetta* was abandoned. On 25 February, 102 days after she left Salem, the *Growler* came home.<sup>25</sup>

This first voyage did not break any privateer profit records, but the cruise did net the *Growler* owners and crew almost \$71,000.00. Half belonged to the owners, and the remaining half was split into 121.75 shares. The value of a boy's half-share was about \$145, easily a year's wages.<sup>26</sup> Despite the four deaths, most Salem residents, imbued with the seafaring culture, would consider this a successful voyage.

The *Growler* would set out on her second cruise 10 April 1813; Nathaniel Lindsay, Samuel Graves' second-in-command, would take his place as ship master.<sup>27</sup> Would this second voyage be as successful as the first?

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Bethiah, widow of Daniel Shehane (died of wounds received in the gun explosion before the first cruise), privateer pension no. 124. William Canfield's widow, Mary, applied for a widow's pension under the 1871 act, W.O. 12426, but was unable to document her husband's service.

<sup>25</sup> "Ship News--Port of Salem," *Essex Register*, 27 February 1813, p. 3, col. 2.

<sup>26</sup> Calculated by the author from accounts and receipts.

<sup>27</sup> Rutstein, *The Privateering Stroke*, 259.