



Maine's Export Industries

By Cipperly Good, the Richard Saltonstall Jr. Curator of Maritime History

When I arrived at the Museum 16 (!) years ago, I was given two immediate tasks: refresh our long-standing *Working the Bay* exhibit and “teach” a session at Belfast’s Senior College. Teach is in quotes because I learned more from the long-time residents of Waldo County than I could teach them. I like to think that in the intervening years of research that balance has shifted more in my favor.

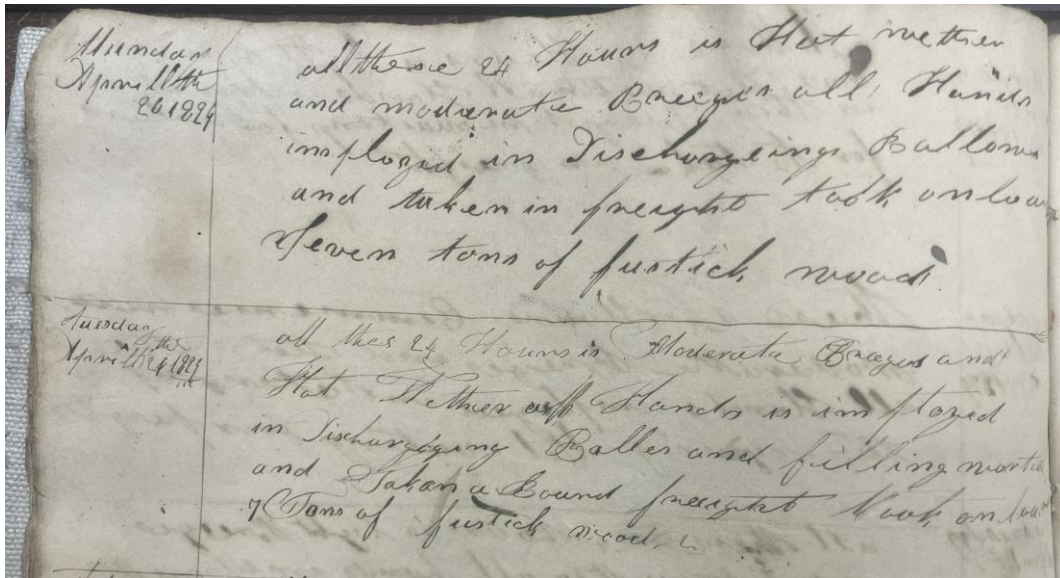
Belfast Senior College is a rich resource for area residents 50 years and older, offering non-credit classes in a variety of topics. PMM staff have been regular instructors for these month-long courses on topics enhanced by our collections. In these classes, we have met many of our trusty volunteers, who provide context to our collections from their vast knowledge of local history.

When Senior College asked me to develop a class for Winterim 2026, it seemed like time to develop finding aids for collections related to Maine’s export industries and trades, and once again refresh our *Working the Bay* exhibit.

Working the Bay delves into the extractive resources of Penobscot Bay: raw building materials such as granite; limestone fired into lime, brick, and lumber; and foodstuffs such as fish, ice, and produce like potatoes. It also explores the shipbuilding industry that created specialized cargo vessels to take those exports to market.

We are halfway through the class, and the first two sessions provided an overview of Maine’s contribution to the Atlantic world’s building trades, to feeding its population, and to transporting those goods on Maine-built and -captained cargo vessels. In the upcoming sessions, the students will take over, and they will comb through our online database for items of interest to present in virtual mini-exhibits they design.

As we wait for the class to finish their projects, I will present seven bound manuscripts and a shipping document from our Archives Collections that track Maine exports and imports on Maine-built and -captained vessels. They span a century from the 1820s to the 1920s. To see the general course tracks of the vessels, follow along on this [story map](#).



Entries for April 20 and 21, 1829 from the logbook of the 84' schooner ORATOR, 1828-1830. William Heath Jr. commissioned the schooner from Mount Desert builders in 1824. The log covers Atlantic seaboard and New Brunswick coasting and West Indies trade voyages carrying lumber and other cargo. MS 483.

The logbook of the ORATOR follows a series of exports and imports starting in New York with an export of lumber and ending in Portland, Maine with an import of grain. While I cannot completely verify that the New York export of lumber, staves, and barrels originally came from Maine, our state was the major exporter of such goods to lumber merchants in Boston and New York. Between illegible cursive and archaic spelling, I am having trouble discerning the word balles [sic], which Captain Reuben MacKenzie (1790-1851) ships to Darian, Georgia in January of 1829. From there, he loads wood for St. Thomas in the West Indies. While it may seem odd to load three different shipments of lumber in various ports, further research shows Maine white pine is best suited for masts, Southern yellow pine for planking, and tropic woods for decorative finishes. At St. Thomas, Captain MacKenzie distributes the yellow pine to other vessels in March of 1829.

From St. Thomas, the ORATOR heads to Maracaibo, Venezuela (see image above) where they discharge ballon [sic] and load fustick wood, coffee, indigo, and oil. Fustick is also known as *Maclura tinctoria*, a yellowish-dye-producing wood. From Venezuela, the schooner heads to Kingston, Jamaica for repairs, before proceeding back to New York in July of 1829. The next point of interest begins in October of 1829, when Captain (and owner) William Heath (1793-1864) of Tremont takes command and ships a cargo of staves and barrels to St. John, New Brunswick, returning to New York with lumber and plaster in December of 1829. In the spring of 1830, ORATOR carries the plaster to Philadelphia and

the lime trade with New York City. Breakaway Rockland, made up of the original section of Thomaston that housed the lime kilns, took its place.

33
Brig Black Swan & Owners Co.
July 18th/53 To freight from Bucksport to Savannah on 211 tons of Ice at \$2.50 per ton 527.50
Aug 17/53 To freight from Savannah to Boston on 128,598 feet of yellow pine lumber at eight dollars per thousand feet 1028.78
Sept 12th/53 To freight from Bucksport to Philadelphia on 166 tons 198 lbs of ice at \$2.50 per ton 415.80

Page from Captain John Heagan's accounts with the brig BLACK SWAN detailing a cargo of ice from Bucksport to Savannah on July 19, 1853, yellow pine lumber from Savannah to Boston on August 17, 1853, and ice from Bucksport to Philadelphia on September 12, 1853. Part of a ledger of accounts, debits and credits to various ships by Captain John Heagan, 1851-1876. The bulk of the accounts are for port expenses for coasting voyages with cargos of lumber, pine, oak, coal, and granite. MS 136.

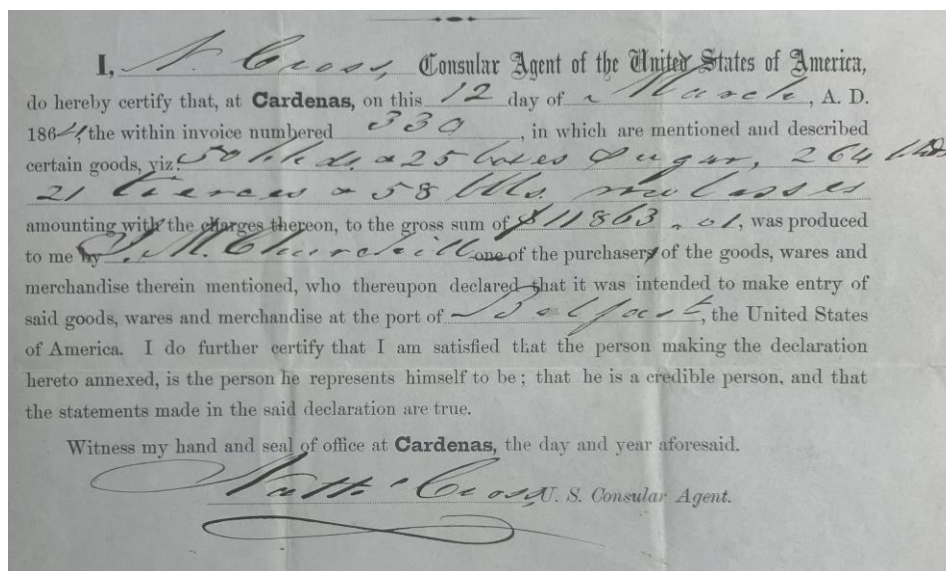
Captain John Heagan (1828-1886) of Prospect worked on various cargo schooners and brigs, mostly built in Bucksport. Heagan owned shares in the vessels with other local residents, such as N.T. Hill, Sarah Harding, Robert Killman and Henry Staples of Stockton; R.P. Buck & Company of Bucksport; and Searsport's own William McGilvery. Heagan's accounts show the importance of mid-Atlantic coal as an exchange commodity with Maine lumber. Coal heated Maine homes and fueled the Atlantic seaboard's Industrial Revolution.

In July of 1851, the 137-ton lumber schooner SEA MARK (built in Bucksport in 1848) sailed from Bangor with a cargo of lumber, pickets [fence posts], and shingles for New London, Connecticut. The schooner then headed down Long Island Sound to Port Richmond on Staten Island to load coal bound for Cambridge, Massachusetts. A year later in May of 1852, it took Mount Waldo granite from Frankfort to Baltimore and exchanged it for coal for Boston. In 1853, it freighted Vinalhaven granite to Philadelphia, where it loaded coal bound to Portsmouth, New Hampshire.

Bucksport shipbuilder Andrew Wescott built the 94-ton schooner WILLIAM CARROLL in 1853. Its 1855 voyages show us an interesting new play on the traditional sugar trade. In

January it freighted Mount Waldo granite from Frankfort to Pensacola, Florida on the Gulf Coast. There it picked up lumber bound for St. Jago [Santiago], Cuba and exchanged it for sugar and tobacco bound for Philadelphia. In Philadelphia, the schooner picked up coal bound for Roxbury, Massachusetts. Months later in July, the coal exchange continued: Bangor lumber, pickets, and lath carried to Alexandria, Virginia, the port city for Washington, DC, and exchanged for coal bound to Boston. The CARROLL eventually wrecked in 1878 off Salisbury Point on Cape Ann, Massachusetts, carrying lumber from Bangor to Fall River, Massachusetts.

1853 also saw the launch in Bucksport of the 189.75-ton brig BLACK SWAN. At one point, the SWAN listed its homeport as Georgetown, South Carolina, near Bucksville, a community founded by Bucks from Bucksport, Maine. The SWAN's voyages show Penobscot Bay's connection to the Southern economy prior to the Civil War. In July 1853, it shipped Bucksport ice to Savannah in exchange for yellow pine lumber for Boston shipbuilders (see scan of account book above). It then returned to Bucksport for more ice in September and headed to Philadelphia to pick up coal bound for New Orleans. It overwintered in New Orleans and returned with merchandise for Baltimore in February. There it picked up more merchandise for Charleston, South Carolina and exchanged it for timber bound back to Baltimore. It then sailed down the Chesapeake to the Nanticoke River, a tributary on the Delmarva Peninsula, to pick up oak needed for ship frames in Bath, Maine.



Detail from the Belfast brig FREDONIA's March 12, 1864 United States Consular form issued for a cargo of sugar and molasses bought from J.M. Churchill in Cardenas, Cuba. Vessel File Archival Collection, PMM 32-1607.

N.H. Hall of Ellsworth built the 215 ton, 103.6' brig FREDONIA in 1854. FREDONIA made its voyage with a cargo of sugar from Cuba to Belfast in 1864 for New York merchants C. and E.J. Peters. The voyage took place during the Civil War, so venturing into Southern waters and evading Confederate Naval ships would have proved risky. In Cuba at this time, enslaved persons grew sugar cane and processed molasses.

July 20. Finished discharging, weather cold, wind from the N.N.W. Went to St. Petersburg, came back by 3 o'clock boat. Gave away the consignment of vessel. Spencer White died today.

July 21. Weather a little warmer today. Trimmed ballast to right the ship up. Draft 19 inches by the stern. Aft, 13 - 1; forward, 11 - 5.

July 22. Remitted Baring Bros. second of exchange for £200. favor of Gilman Ky. & Co., Boston.

July 23. Fine cool weather. On board alone all day. Wrote a letter to my wife.

July 24. Remitted bill to Baring Bros. for £ 1500, cr. H. Lord, dated July 9, old style.

July 25. Rec'd a letter from wife, Amanda [his sister] and Annie [his daughter]. Was very glad to hear from home. Hope to charter today.

July 26. Rec'd a letter from Mr. Lord. Strong gales or squalls from all points of the compass.

July 27. Strong gales from the S.E. Chartered to go to Helsingfors to load for Bristol Channel, Liverpool or Dublin; 47/6 to Channel or Liverpool, 50/ if ordered to Dublin.

Excerpt of typed transcript of Captain Joseph Park Sweetser's diary aboard the ship ZEPHYR detailing the discharge of New Orleans cotton at Kronstadt on July 20, 1871, and the chartering of the ship to go to Helsingfors [Helsinki] for lumber for the Bristol Channel market on July 27, 1871. Colcord Collection, PMM 29-361.

Searsport Sea Captain Joseph Park Sweetser (1831-1889) exemplifies those who captained ships built and owned out of state. In 1871, he commanded the 1356.6 ton, 193.8' ship ZEPHYR, built in 1854 in East Boston, Massachusetts. The typescript of Sweetser's diary shows the captain's role of negotiating charters at each port stop. In Boston he loaded ice for New Orleans. Boston companies owned many of Maine's ice houses. At New Orleans, Sweetser considered offers of cotton freight for Liverpool or Antwerp but decided to sail for the Baltic ports of Revel [Tallin, Estonia] and Kronstadt [the port city of St. Petersburg, Russia]. In the scanned excerpt above, Sweetser negotiated a Helsingfors [aka Helsinki, Finland] charter to load lumber and deals for the Bristol Channel. At Bristol, he loaded iron bound for a port in Gulf of Mexico, probably New Orleans. At the time of his death, Sweetser commanded a New Orleans tugboat.

weather took in 3129 bags Coffee
 her took in 3264 bags Coffee
 mate goes to the Hospital sick
 weather mate came on board from
 it took in 491 bags of Coffee
 implants the Cargo of 7936 bags
 cargo book

Excerpt from the bark EMMA C. LITCHFIELD's logbook. A later owner repurposed it as a scrapbook, obscuring the entry recording 3264 bags of coffee loaded at Rio de Janeiro, Brazil for New York. MS 581.

Rockland's B. Litchfield built the 483.3 ton 128.5' bark EMMA C. LITCHFIELD in 1866. Its logbook, kept by Captain William S. Crockett (c. 1832-1873), documents a two-year series of voyages between the New York, Georgia, and South America. The bark, homeported in Rockland, carried 329,000 board feet of lumber from Brunswick, Georgia to Rio de Janeiro in the late fall of 1872. At Rio de Janeiro, they loaded 7,936 bags of coffee for an early winter 1873 return to New York. Crockett would die during that voyage.

Remarks, 30th day of Sept 1891
 this 24 hours continual heavy
 weather
 under small runners

 at 12 mid wind suddenly
 changed to NW -

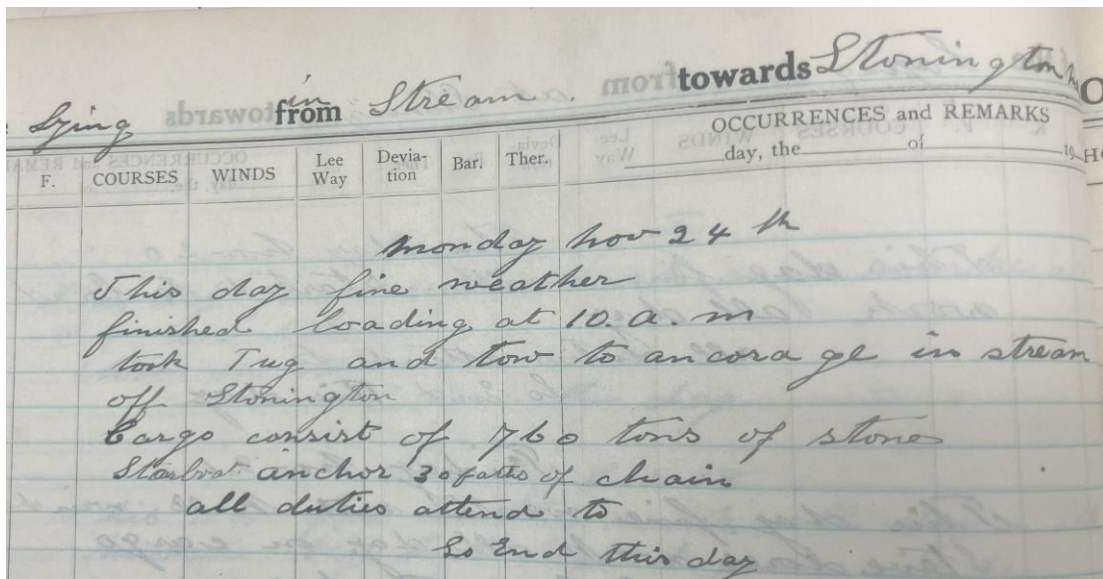
 wave ship striking quantities water
 washed away some of the bulworks
 and started the tarpaulins from
 the main hatch.

 Trimm'd brick from Starboard
 to Port side in lower hold

 we are in trouble
 all the old ropes are giving way

Excerpt from the bark CONQUEST's logbook documenting the transport of bricks from Glasgow to Pictou, Nova Scotia, and a stroke of bad luck on September 30, 1891 when the bulwarks and tarpaulins wash away from the main hatch. With the bark taking on water, the crew trimmed the bricks from the cargo hold's starboard to port side to keep the bark steady. MS 239.

Searsport's Alanson Ford (1838-1903) also served on a Boston-based ship. Captain Ford had a string of disasters on three consecutive commands: the bark EMERALD burned at the dock in Port Gamble, Washington in 1889; the schooner LACKAWANNA sank off Jeremie, Haiti on December 22, 1889; and Azorean authorities condemned the bark CONQUEST as unfit for service in November of 1891. Paul and J.O. Curtis of Medford, Massachusetts built the 516 ton, 133' bark CONQUEST in 1862. It wrecked on a Boston to New Orleans voyage in 1865, but shipbuilders resurrected it. By the time Ford took command, it was a leaky old ship. In August of 1891, the bark loaded timber, lumber, and deals at Pictou, Nova Scotia, arriving in Glasgow a month later. There they loaded 400 tons of brick for a return journey to Pictou. Unfortunately, they hit the North Atlantic's stormy season. As we can see in the excerpt above, the bricks in the hold shifted and the crew spent the rest of the voyage alternatively pumping out the leaking ship and restowing bricks to balance the hull. They eventually sought the nearest port in St. Miguel in the Azores where the log abruptly ends when authorities condemned the ship.



Excerpt from the log of the schooner HELVETIA loading Stonington "stones" [granite] for the Boston market on November 24, 1919. The log covers voyages from October 1919 to September 1921, with port stops along the United States Atlantic Seaboard, West Indies, and Canadian Maritimes. MS 2.

I.L. Snow & Company of Rockland built the 499.9 ton, 157.3' schooner HELVETIA in 1905. Ardie H. Thomas (1878-1956) of St. George served as its captain during the period of the logbook. The HELVETIA carried Stonington granite to Boston in November 1919. It sailed a short distance to Weymouth to load at Bradley's Fertilizer Works bound for Windsor, Nova Scotia. However, ice prevented entry into Windsor, so the schooner landed at Lubec to await orders. The shipping agents redirected the schooner to Annapolis, Nova Scotia to unload. After a short passage to Digby, HELVETIA loaded load lumber for Fall River, Massachusetts in March 1920.

While we glorify the grand deep-sea voyages of the Maine Downeaster, which trans-shipped goods from one port to another across the Seven Seas, these logbooks remind us of the sturdy schooners and brigs that carried Maine exports closer to home. The age of cargo schooners began in the 1720s and they steadily plied their trade into the 1920s; whereas era of the global trade aboard Downeasters only lasted from the 1840s to the early 1900s. The original windjammers carrying passengers on Penobscot Bay got their start as cargo schooners carrying granite, lime, lumber, bricks, ice, fish, and produce from the Bay. Bravo to the workhorses and the local goods they carry.