

NOVA SCOTIA CHAP-BOOKS. No. 6

The Log of a Halifax Privateer

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THE LOG OF A HALIFAX PRIVATEER.

It lies before me as I write,—the old log-book of a forgotten eighteenth century privateer. Before Poland disappeared from the map of Europe, before the Thirteen Colonies became the United States of America, before Quebec fell, and with it the power of France in the new world, this venerable sea document had been drawn up and laid away. It is curious to look at; its very appearance suggests the sea. The half-quire or so, of blank leaves are stitched into a bit of old sail-cloth, coarse in grain, and of a very "precious" dusty brown colour. Bits of red official wax stick here and there; for in the presence of one of His Majesty George II's Justices of the Peace, the keeper of the log made oath that he had kept a true record; and the log-book was duly sealed and stored up in the archives of Halifax.

A century after, a curious generation appointed a commission which broke these seals; and now anyone may read therein,—if he be skilled in paleography,—and patient. The ink is faded, and the straggling writing and frequent blots tell their own tale of the good ship labouring in the heavy seas, as the painful quill of the sailor scribe slowly traced these pages. As one deciphers the meagre entries, an obscure and forgotten chapter in our history is opened to his view; but though obscure and forgotten, it is both significant and typical. Up to the present time, privateering, though a large part of naval warfare and a legitimate form of mercantile speculation, has remained unrecorded. Logs and other sources of information were not given to the public; it was to the interest of all concerned to keep them strictly private. These tattered pages can tell a remote and peaceful generation what privateering really was. The old log-book has another interest. It carries the mind back to the great struggle of the Seven Years War,—the struggle that gave scope to the genius of Pitt, of Wolfe, of Carlyle's Frederick,—the struggle which grew from a skirmish on the borders of the American wilderness into a conflict

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as wide as the world, and drew with it the most momentous and far-reaching consequences.

My title may perhaps raise hopes that are doomed to disappointment. The log-book of a privateer suggests Smollett, Marryat and Clark Russell; but I have no lengthened tale of desperate encounters at long odds, of hairbreadth escapes and rich prizes. The record consists of some half-dozen folio pages, comparatively barren in events, and couched in the plain phrase of an unromantic Jack tar. But in this very plainness lies its chief attraction; for the curt, unpretending jottings deal with fact, and reveal the privateersman's every day life more eloquently than the novelist's most labored narrative. By piecing out the various entries with information derived from other sources, it is possible to reconstruct, in part, at least, the story of this particular cruise.

On November 16th, 1756, six months after the declaration of war, Robert Saunderson and Malachy Salter, merchants of Halifax, obtained a letter of marque for the hundred ton schooner *Lawrence*, which they owned and had fitted out as a "private vessel of war." A letter of marque empowered a vessel to make war on her own

account for the benefit of her owners; and this was only granted after Malachy Salter, Robert Saunderson and Captain Rous had given a bailbond for fifteen hundred pounds, good English money, to guarantee the fulfilment of the conditions on which the letter of marque was granted. The *Lawrence* was to bring all her prizes to Halifax to be adjudged in the Vice-Admiralty court, was to report all information she might obtain as to the enemy's movements, and to keep an accurate log. On Nov. 16th, the privateer was ready for sea.

The *Lawrence* was named evidently out of compliment to the governor of the province, under whose hand and seal her license to carry on private war was issued. She was victualled for six months and carried a crew of about one hundred men. Her armament consisted of fourteen little *carronades*, throwing a four-pound ball, and twenty swivels. These last were small pieces of ordnance, in some cases no larger than a good-sized blunderbuss. Sometimes they were provided with flare mouths to make the charge spread, and were mounted on light carriages which could easily be trundled about the decks. They were perched on the bulwarks

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sometimes, and even in the tops. Like the various machine-guns of the present day, they were intended for use at close quarters, to repel boarders, or to cover the rush of their attack. There were besides "furniture and ammunition in proportion for a six months cruise." Furniture is a word used in the Elizabethan navy. It means armourer's and gunner's stores.

The officers of our licensed pirate were Captain Joseph Rous, Robinson Ford, lieutenant, and Andrew Gardner, mate. Gardner kept the log. He was evidently a plain seaman, more familiar with cutlass hilt and rope's end than pen and ink and the mysteries of the spelling-book. Dr. Johnson's celebrated dictionary had been published only the year before, but it is quite unlikely that the great lexicographer's two stout quartos formed part of the little *Lawrence's* "furniture" for her six months cruise. The honest sailor's grammar is unfettered by pedantic rules. His spelling is phonetic and never tamely consistent. His hand of write is none of the best, even when his vessel is at anchor; but when she is bucketing about in a gale, his hieroglyphics require a second Champollion. Of Lieutenant Robinson Ford I have no facts to com-

municate. The records are dumb concerning him. Rous, the commander belongs apparently to a breed of sea-dogs, of which our early records make frequent mention. Captain John Rous, for example, was a man of mark in his time. From being the commander of a colonial privateer, he rose to the rank of captain in the Royal Navy. He was present at the first capture of Louisbourg in 1745, carried the news of that brilliant exploit to England, and received speedy promotion for his services. When Halifax was founded, he was Cornwallis's right hand. Any particularly difficult job was given to Rous. He assisted in the second capture of Louisbourg in 1756 and in the more famous capture of Quebec the next year. It was from his ship that Wolfe issued his last order. Rous himself died a year later in Halifax.

The likeness between his career and that of Joseph Rous seems to point to likeness in blood. His name also occurs in documents relating to the founding of Halifax. He was agent for the Lunenburg settlers, held various commands, and, in his old age apparently, was made keeper of the lighthouse at Sambro and Captain of the Port. It would seem, then, that while his

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services were appreciated, his cruises had not made him a wealthy man. In the entries of these appointments, he is styled 'gentleman' and 'senior.' A junior Joseph Rous emerges as captain of the pilot schooner *Dolphin*, in 1753. Unless he is the son of Joseph Rous senior, the distinction would be meaningless. Even a fourth of the name, one William Rous, crops up as commander of the *Anson* schooner, in 1750. It would seem safe to infer that the Rous family took naturally to seafaring, and were men of ability and trust.

So much for the officers: what of the crew? No record of their names has reached the scribe, but something is known of them in the lump. That the new fiat city on the shores of *Baie saine* was settled by trade-fallen soldiers and sailors is known to all; but the war in which they fought is forgotten. England has fought so many wars. This was worthy of memory because it was precipitated by a tale of outrage upon a single Englishman. It saw for the last time a King of England in battle, fighting at the head of his men. It lasted nine years. One incident was the vain attempt of the handsome, gallant heir of the Stuarts to regain the English throne, a

fruitful source of song and story. As epitaph for the fallen was composed the most beautiful requiem ever written for the heroes in an English war.

How sleep the brave who sink to rest
By all their country's wishes blest.

But who remembers how "Old Grog" made good his boast of taking Porto Bello with six ships of the line? Who remembers how Anson repeated the exploits of Drake and Cavendish in the South Pacific; sailing round the world, and bringing home Spanish treasure, which thirty-two waggons could hardly carry from Plymouth to London? Yet among the many "mariners" who filled the famous thirteen transports were men who had sailed in H. M. S. *Hampton Court* which led the line into the narrow entrance of Porto Bello, and H. M. S. *Burford*, the fourth, which carried Vernon's flag right up to the guns of the Spanish forts. There were men who had sailed in the *Centurion*. In the list are the proud old names which date from Elizabeth's navy—*Dreadnaught*, *Revenge*, *Rainbow*, *Tiger*, *Vanguard*—and which were destined to win new glory under Nelson and Jellicoe.

It was men from these ships who first settled Halifax, and manned the little *Lawrence*. The governor complained that there were no laboring men in the town; they had all gone privateering. Accustomed to the unspeakably rough, hard, roving life of the old navy, these mariners could not settle down into peaceful husbandmen or fishers. The "King's hard bargains" most of them undoubtedly were; life ashore did not suit them; the breath of war blew in their ears, and they took to the sea again.

Thus victualled, armed, officered and manned, the *Lawrence* sailed out of Halifax harbor some time in November, 1756 to do battle with the enemies of King George the Second on the high seas. What she did between that time and the following spring, whether she was lucky in the way of prizes or not, I cannot tell. But on March 22nd, 1757, she was at anchor in the port of George's, Bermuda. On that day, Andrew Gardner, mate, wrote the heading of a new log, the old one probably having been deposited with the authorities of that port. The blank pages were ruled like a modern log-book, with columns at the side for the hours and

knots, and a wider space for the remarks. The heading that Andrew wrote was this:

"A Log and Journal of Our Intened Cruze by the Permison of God in (end of leaf gone). Against His Majest Enemis the Frech in the Lawranes Schoones Prived Vessel of Ware Joseph Rous Commander from Bermuda, March 22, 1757 Cap Cept by me Andrew Gardner."

The next day at noon the *Lawrence* weighed anchor and got under sail in a very leisurely fashion. The little four-pounders banged away in a nine-gun salute to the town and were answered by a single gun from the shore. A certain captain "Hale" and "severile gentlemen" were on board, no doubt discussing the chances of prize-money, and drinking success to the run. When the schooner crossed the bar, she hove to, sent the gentlemen ashore, and paid them the compliment of a five-gun salute. We were ceremonious in those old days. Then she bore away for Halifax, and at six o'clock in the evening the eastern end of the island was four leagues astern. The clear weather which permitted Andrew Gardner to make the good observation he noted with satisfaction, continued next day, and the *Lawrence* bowled along with a

following wind. On Friday, the "modred and clear weather" continuing, the privateer sighted at one o'clock a strange sail, apparently a full-rigged ship, a Frenchman for he carried a tier of round ports. The little wasp of a *Lawrence* manoeuvred to windward of the stranger, and then, with the British ensign flying, bore down on her expected prize. Still he showed no colors, as a peaceable and friendly trader should have done. The failure to respond to signals was suspicious;

"So our Capt. Desird the peple to get Redey for we were almost alongside he gave orders to fire 2 Guns."

The range was short, and the *Lawrence's* gunners, doubtless old men-o'-war's men, were skilful or lucky, for both shots got home.

"One went threw his foremast and the other carid 2 of his fore srouds."

Seeing that the little schooner was very much in earnest, the stranger then "hell ope his Colors," which apparently were English, or Dutch. A parley ensued.

The two vessels remained alongside, till the stranger captain told Rous that he hailed from Charleston, South Carolina, which was still one

of our American plantations. This was not sufficient for the privateersman. The stranger was ordered to heave to, and send his captain and his papers on board.

"Then Capt. Rous examined them and found he cleared out as he said."

Evidently the merchantman did not much relish being run down and fired into without word or warning; for honest Andrew records that "he was very Sasey and yoused Capt. Rouse with Bad Langwich," emphasizing the stranger's curious incivility with capitals, "which," he continues with a delicious flavor of Bret Harte, "Capt. Rouse ordered the Liftand and I to go into the Bote and Examen the peple and Shartch the Shipe which wee did." As she lay helpless under the guns of the privateer, the unlucky trader from Charleston, S. C. could do nothing but submit. Evidently there were high words; Rous would not be altogether mute, and the "Sascy"-ness of the merchant captain only provoked him into further annoyance. In passing, it would be interesting to know approximately how bad was the deep-sea "Langwich," which would excite remark in a salt of the eighteenth century. Robinson Ford

and Gardner found only two English sailors and two Frenchmen on board; the rest were Dutch. These four they brought back to the schooner's quarter-deck, where Captain Rous questioned them to see if their tales agreed with the ship's papers; and "wee found" (to our visible regret) that "we cold not make a prise of her."

It was too bad that the little mistake had occurred, and Captain Rous does all in his power to make amends. He sent the stranger captain and his four seamen back to their ship, with Gardner and two carpenters. But the other captain turned sulky. Gardner records that he "was note willing to go on Bord." Perhaps he had some notion of getting compensation for the injury and delay. Rous was not to be trifled with. "But Captain Rous ordered him in the Bote," and,— "wee went." Till dark the two carpenters were busy cutting up a spar to fish the wounded foremast. Night came on before the work was finished, and they returned to the *Lawrence*, leaving the stranger to mend his mast, and proceed on his voyage as best he might. It must have been at the close of this eventful day that Andrew Gardner sat down in the cabin to write out his version of the affair. The entry

is the longest and most graphic. Evidently there were several "scenes," and many strange oaths. If we could only fish up from its corner in Davy Jones's locker the corresponding entry in the stranger's log!

The same night the privateersmen had again hopes of booty. Another sail was sighted, but the *Lawrence* was becalmed and could not make chase. At ten, a light breeze sprang up, and, at half-past twelve, they sighted the stranger again. The watch below were called from their hammocks, and the decks were cleared for action. By two o'clock, they had overhauled the chase and found, no doubt to their intense disgust, that she was a schooner ten days out from Jamaica. The rules of the war-game do not permit making prizes of our own ships, so the *Lawrence* had to shorten sail, and proceed, prizeless, on her course.

By this time, the schooner had reached the stormy northern latitudes and was nearing the Nova Scotian coast at the very worst season of the year. From March 27th till April 5th, the *Lawrence* was battling with a succession of storms a landsman would call them. But Andrew Gardner was not an emotional person;

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he never errs on the side of over-statement. He admits there was a "gale" now and then; he will go so far as to say the wind was "fresh;" but from various happenings on board, it is easy to infer the actual state of affairs. First, it is found necessary to "house" the guns, that is, run them inboard, and lash them fast with their noses held immoveably against the inside of the bulwarks. Then the weather is noted as being dark and cloudy, with "a very large Seee from the W. Bord." We must proceed cautiously, with two reefs in the foresail and three in the mainsail; and under such reduced canvas the little *Lawrence* climbs the huge seas "from the W. Bord" in the rolling forties.

On Wednesday, March 30th, just a week after leaving Bermuda, the entry in the log is very ill-written and the lines straggle away to one corner. Plainly it was no easy task to drive the quill across the paper as the vessel rolled and jumped about in the rough sea. Then came two days of rain squalls and variable winds. Suddenly the wind shifted and then died away. In the lively pitching which followed, the *Lawrence* racked her bowsprit out. Her crew had barely time to secure it and make repairs

when the gale was upon them again. With a mere rag of canvas showing, a double-reefed foresail, this privateer scudded before the storm, or lay to, and hoped for better weather.

On Friday, six of her guns and all her twenty swive's had to be lowered into the hold to steady her and to take the weight off her deck. From the flocks of gulls about the ship, "the executive" feared they were too near some coast to be safe, but the leadsman could find no bottom at ninety fathoms. By this time, the rigging was beginning to show signs of strain. There was a succession of more or less serious accidents. On Saturday, the clue of the mainsail broke off short, and it took two hours to repair the damage. For Sunday, the entry reads, "a hard Gale of Wind and Raine and Squales of Snow and Very Cold." On this day the topping-lift block on the main boom split, and the schooner was hove to until it was replaced. From all this, the legitimate inference would seem to be that the *Lawrence* was a staunch craft to survive such a buffeting, and that her crew were as stout as her timbers.

On Tuesday, April 5th, the wind moderates in the afternoon, and land is seen on the weather

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bow. It is Cape "Heare," and for the first time in ten days the *Lawrence* was able to shake out all her reefs, and carry all her small sails. By noon next day, she is abreast of Cape Negro, and the weather is again "mored and clear." They are now in Nova Scotian waters, and, after their two disappointments and the long siege of rough weather, fickle Fortune smiled for a moment on the privateersmen. They actually have a brush with a genuine Frenchman. On Wednesday they sighted a strange sail making towards them under a cloud of canvas, carrying even his "ringtail," a narrow little "kite" rigged outside the spanker, and his "driver," the square sail underneath the bowsprit. The *Lawrence* stood on, hoisted her six guns out of the hold, and "got all ready to in Gadge." As soon as the Frenchman was near enough to get a good look at the schooner's swarming decks, and wicked looking guns, he sheered off and changed his course. The Bourbon Lilies and St. George's Cross fluttered out in defiance of each other; the stranger discharged his larboard broadside, doing apparently no damage, and the privateer replied with all the starboard guns she could bring to bear. The Frenchman ran for it; but the

British ship was not so speedy. In her very thorough preparation for a hard fight, the *Lawrence* had "crotched her booms," to give more elbow room on deck. The consequent delay in making sail gave the foreigner a great advantage and enabled him to escape. Gardner's note reads, "We Cold not tell which went best, but it Brest (breezed?) oup and we seemed to gain upon him but nite Coming one and it being dark we lost site of him our Cheas was a sloop of 8 or 10 Gones." With a touch of imagination he adds, "we Jodged (Jogged?) along our Corse along shore at 8 Cloake Cape le Have Bore N." The encounter shows the spirit of the privateer, for the sloop was a full-rigged sloop-of-war, the size below a frigate, and yet the *Lawrence* did not hesitate to tackle her. Godfrey of the *Rover* privateer, after consulting his crew, sailed into a clump of six hostile armed vessels, nearly fifty years later.

The next day, the *Lawrence* anchored in Halifax harbor opposite the Governor's Battery at the foot of George St., and her cruise was over. On April 23rd. Andrew Gardner appeared before John Duport, Esquire, J. P., and swore that his log as aforesaid, was "a just

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and true Journal of the Cruize from the time of the said Privateer's sailing from the Port of Bermuda to her arrival at the Port of Halifax."

Then this rough record of the *Lawrence's* voyage was laid away in the provincial archives for a century and a half. Of the hundred men who trod her decks, and worked her in fair weather and foul, and stood to her guns, each with his own history and passions and hopes, if only for a fair run and plenty of prize money, only this frail memorial remains,—of interest to none but the curious antiquary.

AUG - 5 1965

NOTE.

This paper appeared first in *Acadiensis*, July, 1902. It has been revised and re-written with important additions. In preparing my material I received invaluable assistance from the late Captain John Taylor Wood, of *Tallahassee* fame.

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NOVA SCOTIA CHAP-BOOKS

- * 1 *Three Sea Songs*
- 2 *The Nova-Scotianess of Nova Scotia*
- 3 *Changing Halifax*
- 4 *The Memorial Tower*
- * 5 *The Orchards of Ultima Thule*
- * 6 *The Log of a Halifax Privateer*
- 7 { *Glamming*
The Nereid's Embrace
The Two Games
- 8 *The Loss of the Atalante*
- 9 *"Nova Scarcity"*
- 10 { *The Pleasance*
From Minas to the Wotan Line
- 11 { *The Sky-Line*
Old King's
- 12 { *Spring in Ultima Thule*
The Potato Patch
- 13 *The Luck of the Grilse*
- *14 *Twelve Profitable Sonnets*
- 15 *Twelve Unprofitable Sonnets*
- 16 *Afoot in Ultima Thule*

* Already published

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