



The brig *Charlotte* of Newport, Rhode Island, would have closely resembled the two-masted vessel depicted in this mid-eighteenth-century painting. Brigs such as this were a common sight on the trade routes of the Atlantic. *Shipping Becalmed in the Solent* [fragment] by Charles Brooking, c. 1755. © National Maritime Museum, Greenwich, London.



## *Charlotte* at Sea: An Atlantic Odyssey on the Eve of Revolution

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THE brig *Charlotte* was one of thousands of vessels that worked the overseas trade of British America in the century and a half before the American Revolution. On the surface, there was nothing remarkable about this workaday ship riding at anchor in the harbor at Newport, Rhode Island, in the summer of 1766. Among the hundreds of North American merchantmen active in Atlantic trade in the middle decades of the eighteenth century, the square-rigged forty-ton brig and its crew of nine would have passed unnoticed. Built in 1761, the *Charlotte* was small but not tiny, and she was not exceptionally fast, agile, or seaworthy. Unlike the well-documented great warships of that time, for which good detail exists, we have only a rough idea of the dimensions of trading ships like the *Charlotte*. She was a brig—that is, a double-decked “merchant-ship with two masts,” and based on her tonnage, she may have had a deck as long as forty-five feet, with a beam (the width of the vessel at its widest point) of perhaps fourteen feet.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>The National Archive, CO 142/17, fol. 76 (hereafter cited as TNA); William Falconer, *An Universal Dictionary of the Marine* (London: T. Cadell, 1769). Randal M. Biddle of Windship Studios provided expert advice on the dimensions of the brig *Charlotte*. The author would like to acknowledge the support of Glucksman Ireland House at New York University (Kevin Kenny, director) for its assistance funding the maps that accompany this text. The author is grateful, as well, for the assistance of archivists and staff at the Newport Historical Society (Rhode Island); the Rhode Island Historical Society (Providence); the American Jewish Historical Society (New York City); the New York Public Library; the National Archives of United Kingdom (Kew); and the Cork City and County Archives (Cork, Ireland).

Seen in the aggregate, however, vessels like the *Charlotte* were the tools that built the American economy. They operated in a challenging commercial environment notable for its volatile markets, scarcity of financial resources, fragile long-distance relationships, and dependence on the enslaved labor of captive Africans. Mounting a transatlantic voyage required access to capital on an impressive scale by the standards of mid-eighteenth-century British America. In addition to the cost of purchasing and outfitting the vessel, *Charlotte's* owner bore the expense of manning his ship, procuring its cargo in local markets—typically with cash—and meeting unexpected contingencies that were a feature of every trading venture. And without ready access to credit, it would have been impossible to do business with correspondents abroad and acquire cargoes in distant ports. To succeed, merchants in Atlantic trade needed a keen understanding of markets, always unpredictable and constantly in motion. Decisions about what (and when) to buy and sell were based on information typically months out of date. Merchants like the owner of the brig *Charlotte* were fortunate if they could move their vessels (at least partly) through kinship networks in places far from home, places where goods, services, and financial resources were typically exchanged by traders who had never met face to face.

Importantly, *Charlotte's* voyage illustrates the extent to which slavery was woven into colonial New England's commercial life. By the mid-1760s, Aaron Lopez, the vessel's owner, had grown to prominence among the slave traders of Newport, Rhode Island, North America's preeminent slave-trading port. Between 1756 and 1774, he invested in fourteen slaving voyages to the Guinea coast of Africa.<sup>2</sup> Not all of Lopez's voyages were profitable, but earnings from those that were contributed to the growing pool of capital he drew upon to purchase and outfit

<sup>2</sup>Sarah Deutsch, "The Elusive Guineamen: Newport Slavers, 1735–1774," *New England Quarterly* 55 (1982): 231 (hereafter cited as NEQ); Virginia Bever Platt, "And Don't Forget the Guinea Voyage: The Slave Trade of Aaron Lopez of Newport," *William and Mary Quarterly* 32 (1975): 601; and Jay Alan Coughtry, "The Notorious Triangle: Rhode Island and the African Slave Trade, 1700–1807" (unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, University of Wisconsin-Madison, 1978).

ocean-going ships like the *Charlotte*. Furthermore, in preparing his vessels for their long voyages, Lopez benefited from the labor of an enslaved workforce—a significant presence in Newport—whose members served as carters, warehousemen, dock hands, and a variety of skilled craftsmen. Slavery was likewise evident in the vessel's cargo which included sugar and mahogany (products of the slave-based Caribbean economy), as well as camwood, an African hardwood likely acquired on a slaving voyage. Well into their journey, the officers and men aboard the *Charlotte* saw firsthand the viciousness of a slave regime in the aftermath of a violent uprising on Grenada, a small island in the eastern Caribbean. Finally, *Charlotte* herself became a direct participant in the slave trade when she carried twenty Africans from Jamaica to the Bay of Honduras in the spring of 1767.<sup>3</sup>

Like every ship that crossed the world's oceans, *Charlotte* had a story to tell. However, narrative accounts of mid-eighteenth-century trading voyages are exceedingly rare. The serendipitous survival of bits and pieces of scattered evidence in archives on both sides of the Atlantic allows us to fill in detail and put a human face on *Charlotte's* adventure. What follows is a micro-history of that adventure: a journey exemplifying both the potential for gain and the array of unforeseeable risks that were features of the Atlantic economy on the eve of the American Revolution.

*Charlotte's* year-long voyage began in July 1766 when the brig cleared the coast of New England and spanned the Atlantic to the port of Bristol in the West Country of England. From there, after emergency repairs at Milford Haven in Wales, she moved on to Cork in southern Ireland where she took on a cargo for the eastern Caribbean. In those warmer waters, *Charlotte* called at Grenada, Dominica, and St. Vincent, islands recently acquired from France under the 1763 Treaty of Paris that ended the Seven Years' War. Then, sailing over a thousand miles west to Jamaica, the battered vessel and her crew arrived

<sup>3</sup>Gregory E. O'Malley, *Final Passages: The Intercolonial Slave Trade of British America, 1619–1807* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2014).

at Savannah La Mar on the far west of the island, from where, after refitting, they crossed into the Gulf of Honduras and entered contested Spanish territory. From the tropical coast of Central America, the final leg of *Charlotte's* odyssey brought her home to Newport, Rhode Island, in July 1767.

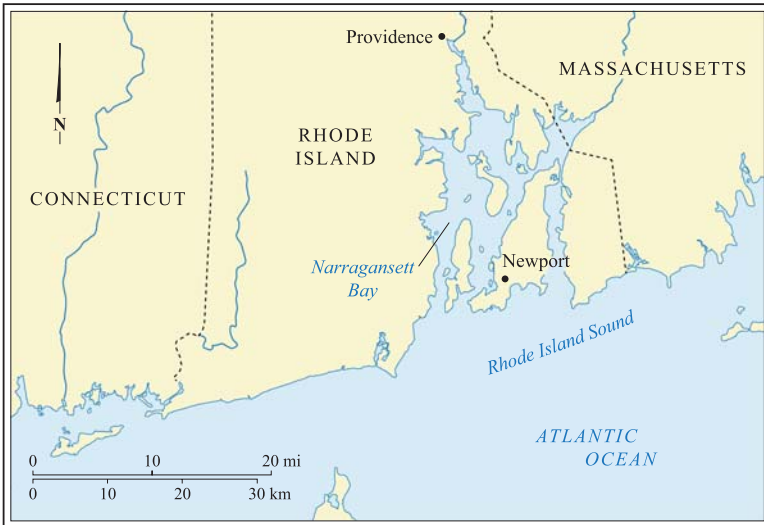
*Charlotte's* 12,000-mile journey is a case study illustrating the market-driven imperatives that bound together the versatility of the New England carrying trade, the slave-based productivity of the West Indies, and the early stages of England's consumer-driven industrial revolution. It captures, as well, the free-flowing character of Atlantic trade, elements of which operated beyond the reach of the commercial legislation of European maritime states, in this case the British Navigation Acts.<sup>4</sup> But most of all, *Charlotte's* wooden world was a stage upon which a human story unfolded, one of trust and resourcefulness, but also of infidelity.



We begin in the spring of 1766. In May of that year, as the brig *Charlotte* inched closer to the North American coast on her return from a trading venture to England, word arrived in Newport that the British Parliament had at last repealed the hated Stamp Act of 1765. American non-compliance and passive resistance in the form of non-importation agreements had brought “a total stagnation in shipping goods to any part of the American colonies,” reported an English newspaper. Newport celebrated the news: “All the bells in the town were set a ringing, drums were beat, music played, and guns were discharged,” wrote the *Newport Mercury*. Repeal raised the prospect of a reinvigorated Atlantic trade after years of post-war depression and political strife.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>4</sup>Thomas M. Truxes, *The Overseas Trade of British America: A Narrative History* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2021), 102–3, 129–30, 147–49.

<sup>5</sup>Felix Farley's *Bristol Journal*, February 15, 1766; *Newport Mercury*, June 2, 1766.



MAP 1.—Departing Newport, Rhode Island, on the southern New England coast in July 1766, the brig *Charlotte* began her year-long odyssey with an uneventful North Atlantic crossing. Bill Nelson Cartography, Accomack, Virginia.

In Great Britain, a broad front of commercial interests had worked tirelessly to achieve repeal of the Stamp Act. “I was three weeks in London, and every day with [a] member of Parliament,” wrote the Bristol merchant Henry Cruger Jr. in January 1766. “It is surprising how ignorant some of them are of trade and America.” At the outset of the crisis, British lawmakers were determined to hold their ground, but unemployment in the manufacturing towns and the mounting losses of merchants in London, Bristol, and Liverpool were inflicting serious pain on the British economy. By the end of February, oddsmakers in London were offering two-to-one in favor of repeal.<sup>6</sup> “Immediately upon hearing . . . that a bill was to be brought in the House of Commons for a total repeal,” Cruger told Aaron

<sup>6</sup>Henry Cruger Jr., Bristol, to John Cruger, New York, February 14, 1766, in *Commerce of Rhode Island, 1726–1800*, ed. Worthington Chauncey Ford, 2 vols. (Boston: Massachusetts Historical Society, 1914–15), 1:139; *Felix Farley’s Bristol Journal*, March 1, 1766; and Truxes, *Overseas Trade of British America*, 240–44.

Lopez, the brig's owner in Newport, "I set about providing your orders, all which I hope to have shipped on board the *Charlotte*."<sup>7</sup>

It was mid-April before the brig departed Bristol for her home port in North America. There had been delays completing repairs, delays stowing the cargo, and delays brought on by a spring snowstorm, "thought to be the greatest that has happened for above forty years past." They ruined any chance of a quick getaway. The articles stowed aboard the *Charlotte* were typical of the output of English West Country workshops suitable for the American market. There were dozens of casks, crates, bundles, and hampers filled with metal goods, glass, earthenware, sailcloth, cordage, hats, shoes, beer, and "wares" of all kinds. At last in Newport, on the evening of Tuesday, June 10, 1766, "arrived the brig *Charlotte*, Capt. Brown, in eight weeks from Bristol," announced the *Mercury*.<sup>8</sup>

In Bristol, Henry Cruger had invoiced the cargo at £2,510:9:2 sterling, roughly four times the value of the goods that *Charlotte* had carried from New England to Great Britain in October 1765. Lopez, the brig's thirty-five-year-old owner and the star of Newport's Jewish trading community, had purchased a "choice assortment of European goods" taking advantage of liberal commercial credit extended at the British end. The

<sup>7</sup>Cruger Jr., Bristol, to Lopez, Newport, March 1, 1766, *Commerce of Rhode Island*, 1:145-46.

<sup>8</sup>Thomas Brown, master, "Receipt of Cargo Taken Aboard the Brig *Charlotte*," April 12, 1766, Aaron Lopez Papers, Newport Historical Society (hereafter cited as NHS); Thomas Brown, master, "Accounts of the Brig *Charlotte*," February 9 to April 20, 1766, in *ibid.*; *Felix Farley's Bristol Journal*, April 5 and 19, 1766; *Newport Mercury*, June 16, 1766; Bristol: "Received on board the Brigantine *Charlotte* the under mentioned goods all in good order, which on my arrival at Newport in Rhode Island I promise to deliver to Mr. Aaron Lopez or his assigns in the like good order (the danger of the seas excepted), vizt: 6 bundles frying pans, 12 crates glass flint, 10 casks shot, 2 roles lead, 56 crates ware, 20 ditto, 24 casks nails, 1 box, 3 casks merchandize, 1 bundle warming pan handles, 25 mats sail cloth, 2 casks pewter, 2 ditto brimstone, 2 trunks shoes, 1 bale merchandize, 12 ditto sail cloth, 2 hogsheads hats, 1 hogshead, 1 bundle brushes, 2 cases & trunks paper, 3 casks, 4 cases, 1 box, 6 bales merchandize, 3 casks starch, 14 bundles steel, 2 tons brimstones, 6 sides, 30 boxes crown glass, 45 coils cordage cables, 6 tons hemp, 4 sacks malt, 2 small boxes marked glass, 50 hampers bottled beer, 2 tons oakum, a parcel saltpeter, 6 hampers empty bottles. Witness my hand, Bristol, April 12<sup>th</sup> 1766, Thomas Brown" (Thomas Brown, master, "Receipt of Cargo Taken Aboard the Brig *Charlotte*," April 12, 1766, Aaron Lopez Papers, NHS).

enormous flow of British manufactures into North America was typically supported by twelve months credit, sometimes even longer. Lopez, in turn, was expected to offer similarly favorable terms to his American customers. Pressed hard to find the means to repay debts across the Atlantic and continue the flow of trade, Lopez wasted no time refitting his vessel for a return voyage.<sup>9</sup>

“The brig *Charlotte*, now loading at Mr. Lopez’s wharf,” announced the *Mercury* on June 23, 1766, “will sail for Bristol with all expedition.” Captain Thomas Brown, a tough and experienced veteran of Newport’s Atlantic trade, received his sailing orders from Lopez on Wednesday, July 2nd: “The brig *Charlotte* now under your command being ready fitted for the seas you are to embrace the first fair wind and proceed directly to Bristol,” delivering the cargo “to Mr. Henry Cruger, Junior.” *Charlotte*’s lading, invoiced by Lopez at £620:19:3 sterling, consisted of North American and West Indian produce (spermaceti oil, turpentine, sugar, mahogany boards, pine boards and joists, lignum vitae, camwood, and bark). It was exactly the kind of cargo that had been anticipated by the English Navigation Acts, seventeenth-century parliamentary legislation that structured the Empire’s Atlantic commerce. That is, the produce of American forests, fisheries, farms, and plantations in exchange for British manufactured goods of all sorts.<sup>10</sup>

<sup>9</sup>“Henry Cruger’s Account with Aaron Lopez,” Aaron Lopez Ledger, 1766–1775, MS. 555, fol. 57, Aaron Lopez Papers, NHS; *Newport Mercury*, June 23, 1766; Stanley F. Chyet, *Lopez of Newport: Colonial American Merchant Prince* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1970); and Bruce M. Bigelow, “Aaron Lopez: Colonial Merchant of Newport,” *NEQ* 4 (1931): 757–76.

<sup>10</sup>Newport: “Merchandize shipt per the Brig Charlotte, Thomas Brown master & consigned to [Henry] Cruger for sale, viz.: 64 casks white oil 2,486 ½ gallons, 74 casks brown do. 2,954 do., 50 barrels turpentine, 8 barrels do., 6 hhds Jamaica sugar, 56 logs Cuba mahogany 3,500 feet, 83 New Providence mahogany plank 1,583½ feet, 4,2,0,8 tons &c. lignum vitae (large size), -,8,3,5 ½ cam wood, 2,250 feet 2 inch pine plank 1,150 feet 2 ½ inch do., 2,100 feet pine boards, 4,000 feet pine joist 3 by 3 inches, 1,000 feet do. 3 by 4 do., 7 cords bark sent to Ireland in the brig” (“Henry Cruger’s Account with Aaron Lopez,” Aaron Lopez Ledger, 1766–1775, MS. 555, fol. 57, Aaron Lopez Papers, NHS); Lawrence A. Harper, *The English Navigation Laws: A Seventeenth-Century Experiment in Social Engineering* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1939).



Lopez envisioned three possible scenarios for the brig *Charlotte* once it reached Bristol. In the first, the vessel would return directly to Newport with another cargo of British manufactured goods; in the second, *Charlotte* would call at Cork on the southern coast of Ireland to take in a lading of salted provisions as freight to the West Indies. The third scenario contemplated putting the brig up for sale in Bristol where there was a well-established market for American-built ships. “If so, and she goes off,” Lopez told his captain, “I will provide you another more suitable vessel for the trade upon your return.”<sup>11</sup>



Early in July 1766, after clearing customs at Newport, the brig *Charlotte* entered Narragansett Bay, moving through Rhode Island Sound into the Atlantic Ocean. Thus began her year-long, 12,000 mile odyssey. “With the westerlies pushing her and the North Atlantic Drift assisting,” the heavily laden brig set a course northeast along the coasts of New England to Newfoundland and then east across the North Atlantic. Five weeks later—nudged along by “light airs” in fair August weather—the American brig worked her way up the Bristol Channel to a mooring at King Road near the mouth of the River Avon where vessels doing business at Bristol “dropped anchor in sheltered waters.”<sup>12</sup>

Bristol, with a population of about 100,000, was “universally allowed to be the largest city in Great Britain, next after London,” wrote a visitor in the mid-1760s. The West Country city was the gateway to the Atlantic, with about eighty vessels a year entering from ports in North America (an eighth of them from

<sup>11</sup>“Sailing Orders of Captain Thomas Brown,” Newport, July 2, 1766, *Commerce of Rhode Island*, 1:162; Truxes, *Overseas Trade a British America*, 171.

<sup>12</sup>*Newport Mercury*, July 7, 1766; Ian K. Steele, *The English Atlantic, 1675–1740: An Exploration of Communication and Community* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), 4; HMS *Dispatch*, logbook, August 8 to 15, 1766, TNA, ADM 51/253 (quote on August 12, 1766); HMS *Folkestone*, logbook, August 8 to 15, 1766, TNA, ADM 51/3842; Ledger Book, 1763–1774, vol. 480, Aaron Lopez Papers, NHS, 192; and Kenneth Morgan, *Bristol and the Atlantic Trade in the Eighteenth Century* (Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 29.

New England), and another seventy-five from the West Indies. In spite of the setback brought on by the American Stamp Act crisis, the years from the end of the Seven Years' War to the British credit crisis of 1772 saw growth in Bristol's Atlantic trade. Most of this activity, however, was concentrated in the city's commerce with the Middle Colonies, the Lower South, and Jamaica, rather than New England, where it was more difficult to assemble cargoes suitable for the English market and the re-export trade.<sup>13</sup>

Aaron Lopez's correspondent in Bristol was a native of New York City where his uncle, John Cruger Sr., served as mayor in 1766. At twenty-seven years old, Henry Jr., was both a savvy merchant and an astute politician. As a commission agent in the service of Lopez, Cruger was responsible for entering the brig *Charlotte's* cargo at the Bristol Custom House, paying the appropriate duties and fees, facilitating the off-loading and warehousing of goods in cooperation with Captain Brown, finding buyers for the cargo, and remitting payment to North America, all the while assisting Brown to prepare the vessel for the next leg of her voyage.

Cruger went to work immediately. "The joists will turn out to as great a profit," he wrote on August 24, "and expect £5 sterling per thousand feet." Mahogany, however, "continues very low and in vast plenty, but as you bought yours very cheap, I have no doubt but it will pay the *Charlotte* a good freight." The six hogsheads of Jamaican sugar carried aboard faced a glutted market: "They are pouring vast quantities upon us," he said. Naval stores were also in oversupply. "Such large quantities of turpentine have lately arrived the price is fallen from 15/ per Ct. to 7/. Indeed no buyers appear. I housed yours with about 2 or 300 more under my care," adding, "It will do better toward fall."

Cruger had miscalculated the market for spermaceti oil, a product of the fast-growing New England whaling industry. "As

<sup>13</sup>Adam Anderson, *An Historical and Chronological Deduction of the Origin of Commerce*, 4 vols. (London: Logographic Press, 1787), 3:324; Morgan, *Bristol and the Atlantic Trade*, 14, 22–23.



MAP 2.—*Charlotte's* voyage in ballast from Bristol in the west of England to Cork in southern Ireland in late August 1766 was interrupted by severe weather and urgent repairs at Milford Haven in Wales. Bill Nelson Cartography, Accomack, Virginia.

the demand for oil was very dull, the day the *Charlotte* arrived,” he told Lopez, “I sold all her brown oil at £16:10 per ton, in order to avoid the expense of warehouse waste, etc.” Two days later news surfaced of orders from abroad, and the price recovered, Cruger lamenting, “I then of course repented my having sold yours, but it was too late; if I cry my eyes out it can’t be helped. Trade will take such turns.”<sup>14</sup>

The prospects for trade with North America had dimmed considerably since the euphoria over repeal of the Stamp Act. “We have not yet quite got the better of the late stagnation in trade,” he wrote Lopez; “money is almost as scarce here as it is in America.” Sending more British manufactured goods to

<sup>14</sup>Alexander Starbuck, *History of the American Whale Fishery From Its Earliest Inception to the Year 1876* in United States Commission of Fish and Fisheries, *Report of the Commissioner for 1875–1876, Part IV* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1878), 38–52; Morgan, *Bristol and the Atlantic Trade*, 14; and Cruger Jr., Bristol, to Lopez, Newport, August 24, 1766, *Commerce of Rhode Island*, 1:170–71.

Newport was out of the question, he asserted. With Cruger for the time being unwilling to ship additional goods on credit—and with no buyers in Bristol for the American ship—there was little choice about what to do with Lopez’s vessel. “She sails tomorrow in ballast for Cork,” wrote Cruger on August 24, 1766. “To be obliged to go away in ballast, unable to procure a freight for love or money is the very devil,” he told a merchant in Boston, “the loss of time is what a ship cannot nowadays support.”<sup>15</sup>



In contrast to the fair weather she had enjoyed on her approach to Bristol, *Charlotte*’s departure less than a fortnight later came in the midst of driving rain and “strong gales.” “At the vernal and autumnal seasons of the year, especially in the autumnal,” wrote a traveler familiar with the Irish Sea, “the winds are frequently very high and tempestuous, and the channel . . . rough and dangerous.” Caught in a dangerous storm, the battered and bruised *Charlotte* ducked into Milford Haven, a port in southern Wales where Captain Brown signed on an additional sailor and supervised temporary repairs. Although the brig had sustained damage, Brown and his crew arrived “all well” at Cove in Cork’s lower harbor on Monday, September 22, 1766. The following day, as Brown made his way to Cork City, the busy harbor erupted in cannon fire from anchored British warships, “[it] being the anniversary of his Majesty’s coronation.”<sup>16</sup>

<sup>15</sup>Cruger Jr., Bristol, to Lopez, Newport, July 11, 1766, George P. Wetmore Collection on Rhode Island Commerce, 1706–1851 (hereafter cited as Wetmore Collection), NHS; Cruger Jr., Bristol, to Lopez, Newport, August 24, 1766, *Commerce of Rhode Island*, 1:170–71; and Cruger Jr., Bristol, to Palfrey, Boston, August 1, 1772, quoted in Morgan, *Bristol and the Atlantic Trade*, 70.

<sup>16</sup>HMS *Lord Howe*, logbook, August 26 to 30, 1766, TNA, ADM 51/3888 (quote on August 27); John Bush, *Hibernia Curiosa: A letter from a Gentleman in Dublin, to his Friend at Dover in Kent. Giving a General View of the Manners, Customs, Dispositions, &c. of the Inhabitants of Ireland* (London: W. Flexney, 1769), 2–3; Thomas Brown, master, Account Book of seamen’s wages carried aboard the brig *Charlotte* on a voyage to Dominica & Grenada, 1766–67, fol. 4, Papers of Aaron Lopez, Box 1, fol. 8, MS, in American Jewish Historical Society (hereafter cited as AJHS); *Cork Evening Post*, September 25, 1766; Brown, Cork, to Cruger Jr., Bristol, September 27, 1766,

“Cork is very nearly, or altogether, as large as Bristol in the west of England, but infinitely better situated as to its navigation at the bottom of a large, capacious and well sheltered bay or cove.” The prosperity at Cork—“judged to be the richest city in Ireland, except Dublin”—was based on its role as Europe’s leading exporter of salted beef, pork, and butter. Specialization, low wages, and advanced techniques of processing and packaging combined to allow more efficient production at Cork than in any other Atlantic port. “‘Tis amazing the quantity of beef that is killed here from Michaelmas to Christmas,” observed a visitor in the mid-1760s.<sup>17</sup>

Lopez had a long-standing relationship with the Cork firm of Lane, Bensons, and Vaughan, one of the city’s best known provisioning houses. At his shop in Newport, Lopez sold their “choice Rose Butter [and] best Irish beef,” and negotiated contacts for Irish indentured servants, “many of whom are able tradesmen.” The Cork firm was primarily a commission house serving clients in the West Indies and North America. “Messrs. Lane & Co. of Cork have repeatedly advised me that freight from Cork can always be obtained for the West Indies from the month of October until December,” Lopez told Cruger in August. But all markets are subject to change.<sup>18</sup>

Just days before *Charlotte* dropped anchor, “five French ships [were at Cork] loading with fresh provisions for Martinique and Guadeloupe.” Such peacetime visits to take in Irish “cow beef” for enslaved African laborers in the French Islands were commonplace. It was a trade fostered by the dietary requirements enshrined in the French “Code Noir” of 1685, a legacy of the reign of Louis XIV. But the effect on local

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Wetmore Collection, NHS; Lane Bensons & Vaughans, Cork, to Cruger Jr., Bristol, September 23, 1766, *Commerce of Rhode Island*, 1:173; and HMS *Hussar*, logbook, September 23, 1766, TNA, ADM 51/3872.

<sup>17</sup>Malachy Postlethwayt, *The Universal Dictionary of Trade and Commerce*, 2 vols. (London: John and Paul Knapton, 1751–55), 1:1000; Bush, *Hibernia Curiosa*, 42, 52; Thomas M. Truxes, *Irish-American Trade, 1660–1783* (Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 150–57.

<sup>18</sup>*Newport Mercury*, May 19 and June 16, 1766; Lopez, Newport, to Cruger Jr., Bristol, August 1766, quoted in Cruger Jr., Bristol, to Lane & Co., Cork, August 26, 1766, Wetmore Collection, NHS.

inventories was severe. “We are sorry to tell you that freights for the West Indies were never so scarce,” Lane, Bensons & Vaughan told Cruger. “It is a doubt with us whether we shall be able to get anything worth while for the vessel.” “If there is no prospect of a freight,” Cruger told Brown, “my advice to you is to sail without loss of time in ballast for Savannah La Mar.” Then Brown’s luck changed. “For your vessel Charlotte,” the Cork firm told Lopez, “with much difficulty we procured within about 80 barrels of a full loading for Grenada and Dominica.”<sup>19</sup>

It was a typical Irish cargo. The rich pasturelands of Munster in the southwest of Ireland, the largest of the kingdom’s four provinces, provided loadings for hundreds of such Caribbean-bound ships. The skillfully preserved foodstuffs they carried—Irish beef, butter, pork, herrings, salmon, and tongues, together with lesser quantities of candles, soap, cheese, and potatoes—found legal markets in every British West Indian seaport. They found, as well, receptive markets in the Caribbean ports of France, the Netherlands, Denmark, and Spain in clear violations of the British Navigation Acts, exactly the kind of commerce Parliament had intended to block. Both the legal and illegal dimensions of this trade were initiated by individual merchant firms roughly similar to those of Lopez in Newport, Cruger in Bristol, and the Bensons in Cork. Though the Irish provisions trade catered to local conditions in the West Indies, it was driven by a single powerful imperative: the dependence of the slave-based sugar-producing economies of the Caribbean for supplies of food, building materials, and manufactured goods from abroad.<sup>20</sup>



<sup>19</sup>*Felix Farley’s Bristol Journal*, September 13, 1766; Lane Bensons & Vaughans, Cork, to Cruger Jr., Bristol, September 23, 1766, *Commerce of Rhode Island*, 1:173; Cruger Jr., Bristol, to Brown, Cork, October 9, 1766, Wetmore Collection, NHS; Lane, Bensons & Vaughan, Cork, to Lopez, Newport, April 3, 1767, Mercantile Correspondence (International), Aaron Lopez Papers, NHS; and Bertie Mandelblatt, “A Transatlantic Commodity: Irish Salt Beef in the French Atlantic World,” *History Workshop Journal* 63 (2007): 18–47.

<sup>20</sup>Truxes, *Irish-American Trade*, 89–105, 147–69.

Near the end of October 1766, the brig began the long passage from Cork to the West Indies. Leaving Ireland behind, the vessel dropped south through the Celtic Sea into the open waters of the Atlantic where the captain took advantage of the prevailing westerlies to reach the dominant Northeast Trades. Off the Cape Verde Islands, following a route well known to eighteenth-century mariners, Brown picked up the North Equatorial Current which moved *Charlotte* steadily west toward the Windward Islands in the sprawling archipelago that defined the eastern perimeter of the Caribbean Sea.<sup>21</sup>

Situated between Guadeloupe and Martinique, Dominica (along with Grenada, St. Vincent, and Tobago) had been ceded by France to Great Britain in the Treaty of Paris that ended the Seven Years' War in 1763. "The island, properly speaking, has no harbours," according to a contemporary description, "but there is safe and convenient anchorage in the bays and coves, which indent the whole coast." Dominica's principal ports (Roseau, on the southwestern coast, and Prince Rupert's Bay to the north—along with selected ports in Jamaica) had been granted freeport status by an act of the British Parliament in 1766.<sup>22</sup>

*Charlotte* arrived at Roseau the third week of December. So many "English vessels have arrived there since its being made a free port" that "provisions and lumber of all kinds were become exceeding plenty, and mere drugs." Shippers in Great Britain, Ireland, and the American colonies had expected the island's free-port status to bring a flood of orders from the French. However, "few foreign vessels" called at Dominica, complained an American newspaper; "the French in particular

<sup>21</sup>Steele, *The English Atlantic*, 3–18.

<sup>22</sup>For details on these islands, see David Macpherson, *Annals of Commerce, Manufactures, Fisheries, and Navigation, with Brief Notices of the Arts and Sciences Connected with Them*, 4 vols. (London: Nichols and Son, 1805), 3:393–94; Thomas Jefferys, *The West-Indian Atlas; or, A Compendious Description of the West-Indies* (London: R. Sayer & J. Bennett, 1775), 21; 6 George III, c. 49 (British); *The London Magazine*, March 1767, 107; and Frances Armytage, *The Free Port System in the British West Indies: A Study in Commercial Policy, 1766–1822* (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1953), 42–43.



MAP 3.—Arriving in the Ceded Islands (Dominica, St. Vincent, and Grenada) in December 1766 with salted provisions from Ireland, *Charlotte* encountered overstocked markets, a slave rebellion, and crisis aboard ship before sailing west to Jamaica. Bill Nelson Cartography, Accomack, Virginia.

doing all they can to prevent their vessels from going to that island.”<sup>23</sup>

In frustration, the brig *Charlotte* moved on to Grenada, 224 miles to the south, arriving at its most frequented port, St. George’s, on Monday, December 29, 1766. The American ship was in a sorry state, with the crew much reduced by fever and the captain disabled by illness. “I Labour under a poor Estate of Health,” wrote Brown, “the Climate not agreeing with me.” At St. George’s, Brown delivered his cargo of “35 barrels herrings, 200 barrels beef, 10 half barrels pork, 40 half barrels beef, [and] 66 firkins butter” to Philip Beaver, a resident

<sup>23</sup>Thomas Brown, master, Account Book of seamen’s wages carried aboard the brig *Charlotte* on a voyage to Dominica and Grenada, 1766–67, fols. 2–5, Papers of Aaron Lopez, Box 1, fol. 8, MS. in AJHS; Memorandum & Ship Accounts, 1764–1767, vol. 590, Aaron Lopez Papers, NHS, 52; and *Newport Mercury*, February 2, 1767. The French “often seize ships of their own nation resorting thither to trade” (*Georgia Gazette*, March 25, 1767).



merchant, and collected £176:3:6 (St. Christopher currency) in freight charges “paid upon the delivery of said goods.”<sup>24</sup>

*Charlotte*'s appearance coincided with a violent slave uprising and its brutal suppression. In late December 1766, according to a contemporary, “the new British colony of Grenada was threatened with total destruction by a formidable insurrection of the Negroes.” Following the French departure at the end of the Seven Years' War, hundreds of enslaved Africans fled to the mountains of Grenada where they lived as maroons in isolated communities. The maroons, together with enslaved Africans remaining in subjugation—“to the number of six or seven hundred”—rose up, committing “terrible devastations upon their masters, many of whom they had killed.” The insurgents took “possession of some inaccessible mountains, from whence they made frequent sallies,” according to the *New-York Gazette*.

The response of the governor-general of the Ceded Islands, Robert Melville, was a mixture of harsh repression and conciliation. Troops under Melville's command rounded up leaders of the uprising. The “most notorious” were beheaded, and their heads “placed in different parts” of the island. Others were made an example in vicious public whippings and mutilations. In the end, Melville succeeded in persuading the rebels “to accept the pardon he offered them, and to return to their work.” But the maroon communities of the interior mountains remained steadfast.<sup>25</sup>

<sup>24</sup>Naval Office Shipping List of Grenada, December 29, 1766, TNA, CO 106/1, fol. 20; Thomas Brown, master, Account Book of seamen's wages carried aboard the brig *Charlotte*, on a voyage to Dominica and Grenada, 1766–67, fol. 5, Papers of Aaron Lopez, Box 1, fol. 8, MS. in AJHS; Capt. Thomas Brown, Grenada, to Abraham Lopez, Savannah-la-Mar, Jamaica, January 14, 1767, Aaron Lopez Papers, Rhode Island Historical Society (hereafter cited as RIHS); Jonathan Wheeler, Savannah-la-Mar, to Aaron Lopez, Newport, March 12, 1767, Shipping Records of brig *Charlotte*, Aaron Lopez Papers, NHS.

<sup>25</sup>Macpherson, *Annals of Commerce*, 3:456; *Boston Post-Boy*, March 16, 1767; *Pennsylvania Chronicle*, and *Universal Advertiser*, March 9, 1767; *Pennsylvania Gazette*, March 5, 1767; *New-York Gazette*, March 5, 1767; and Donald Polson, “The Tolerated, the Indulged and the Contented: Ethnic Alliances and Rivalries in Grenadian Plantation Society 1763–1800” (unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, University of Warwick, 2011), 176–83.

Trouble of another kind was brewing aboard the brig *Charlotte*. With no prospects of an outward cargo, Brown attempted to sell the vessel at Grenada. He was prevented from doing so by the intervention of the first mate, Jonathan Wheeler, who informed “the gentlemen there he was under some apprehensions [that] Captain Brown from his behavior had no intentions of accounting to his owner for either the freight, money of the cargo or the vessel.” Weeks earlier, Brown had drawn heavily against Aaron Lopez both at Bristol and Cork and, according to Wheeler, appeared intent on pocketing cash that had been provided to cover ship-related expenses.<sup>26</sup>

On Saturday, January 10, with her business complete but tensions running high, *Charlotte* cleared customs at St. George’s and sailed northwest in the direction of Jamaica. But the following Friday, January 16, Captain Brown interrupted the voyage and put in to Kingstown, St. Vincent. Two days earlier, he had written to Abraham Lopez in Savannah-la-Mar, Jamaica, revealing his intention to leave the ship and “make the best of my way for Rhode Island,” having “sent my mate in my stead to you with the brig Charlotte.” Then the conflict aboard the *Charlotte* boiled over. Perhaps there was more to the captain’s departure than the state of his health and a disagreeable climate. Brown, Wheeler told Aaron Lopez, “left your brigantine Charlotte [on] January 16<sup>th</sup> at St. Vincent’s” accompanied by a woman who had joined the ship at Cork, as well as “the freight money and every thing else he could lay his hands on.” Blame rested, he asserted, with the Irish woman—“the sole instigation of all his late behavior.”<sup>27</sup>

<sup>26</sup>Abraham Lopez, Savannah-la-Mar, Jamaica, to Aaron Lopez, Newport, February 1, 1767, Aaron Lopez Papers, RIHS; Jonathan Wheeler, Savannah-la-Mar, to Aaron Lopez, Newport, March 12, 1767, Shipping Records of brig *Charlotte*, Aaron Lopez Papers, NHS. Aaron Lopez was already concerned about Brown’s behavior: “[I] find Brown had drawn on you and the said gentlemen [Lane, Bensons & Vaughan] for £101:18:6 sterling at 90 days sight for my account. I can’t conceive what emergency leaded [sic] Brown to trouble you with such a large draft unless bad weather had put the brig out of repair on her passage to Cork” (Lopez, Newport, to Cruger Jr., Bristol, February 17, 1767, Letterbook, vol. 72, Aaron Lopez Papers, NHS).

<sup>27</sup>Naval Office Shipping List of Grenada, January 10, 1767, TNA, CO 106/1; Jonathan Wheeler, Savannah-la-Mar, to Aaron Lopez, Newport, March 12, 1767, Shipping Records of brig *Charlotte*, Aaron Lopez Papers, NHS; and Abraham Lopez,

Perhaps. Perhaps not. But as every merchant and mariner knew, a trading voyage in the mid-eighteenth century Atlantic was a relentless succession of challenges and incipient crises. What may look from a distance like the orderly movement of ships, men, and goods from one port to another, or one island to another, was instead a carefully balanced high-wire act. One miscalculation, one navigational error, one false step (apart from the ever-present dangers of injury, disease, and death; sudden and violent storms; and piracy) might usher-in a disastrous end to a promising trading voyage. Or they might, and often did, set the stage for resourceful action and recovery.



As the brig *Charlotte's* fate teetered on the edge of collapse, Jonathan Wheeler—now in command—steered 1,200 miles westward across the Caribbean Sea to Savannah-la-Mar on Jamaica's far southwestern coast. Jamaica was the largest, most populous, and most productive of Great Britain's sugar islands, the very model of the slave-driven West Indian plantation economy. In 1673, the population stood at just over 18,000, with roughly equal numbers of whites and blacks. "In 1768, they reckoned 17,949 whites, and 166,904 blacks," wrote the geographer Thomas Jefferys, with about 6,000 enslaved Africans arriving annually compared to a tiny number of whites.<sup>28</sup>

At the time of *Charlotte's* visit, Savannah-la-Mar was the site of "a very flourishing trade," in spite of its many inconveniences. "The water is shoal," wrote Edward Long, a British official on the island, "and against the assaults of the sea it is defended only by reefs and sunken rocks, and a few sand banks, which are apt to shift." Yet sixty to seventy vessels entered the port and cleared customs each year. The roadstead, for there was no proper harbor, was a gathering place for the produce of a wide region: "Here most of the sugars, rum, mahogany-plank,

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Savannah-la-Mar, Jamaica, to Aaron Lopez, Newport, February 1, 1767, Aaron Lopez Papers, RIHS.

<sup>28</sup>Jefferys, *West-Indian Atlas*, 19

and other commodities of the neighboring estates, are put into boats, or lighters, to be carried on board such ships as are to export them.”<sup>29</sup>

*Charlotte*'s arrival on Wednesday evening, January 28, 1767, presented a challenge for Abraham Lopez (Aaron's half-brother). Captain Brown “sent me the empty vessel by his mate Mr. Jonathan Wheeler,” complained Abraham. In the Atlantic trades, it was ruinous for a merchant to outfit and maintain a vessel, pay wages to a captain and crew, and cover the cost of marine insurance without the means to generate income. But Abraham was resourceful and well-connected, and from his counting house at Savannah-la-Mar, he worked closely with his family network in Kingston and elsewhere in Jamaica, as well as in ports on the North American mainland.<sup>30</sup>

Abraham Lopez set to work to rescue the voyage. He attended to “the distressed situation the brig has arrived in” and appealed to his Sephardic kinsmen in Kingston for a cargo of molasses for the return voyage to Newport. It was *Charlotte*'s misfortune to arrive in Jamaica at a time of severe economic malaise. The scarcity of sugar, rum, and molasses was the consequence of a poor harvest, tight credit, and the opening of a few selected Jamaican free ports to ships “of all nations” searching for bargains. “This [is] the dullest place at present I ever was in,” wrote another North American ship captain in February 1767, “and [there is] a perpetual cry for money.”<sup>31</sup>

The brig *Charlotte* had neither a cargo nor a captain. Success in the Atlantic trades—and all seaborne commerce—depended upon the skill, integrity, and resourcefulness of a ship's master and his relationship with a vessel's owners and their agents.

<sup>29</sup>Edward Long, *The History of Jamaica*, 3 vols. (London: T. Lowndes, 1774), 2:193, 200.

<sup>30</sup>TNA, CO 142/17, fol. 76; Abraham Lopez, Savannah-la-Mar, Jamaica, to Aaron Lopez, Newport, February 1, 1767, Aaron Lopez Papers, RIHS; and Memorandum & Ship Accounts, 1764–1767, vol. 590, Aaron Lopez Papers, NHS, 52.

<sup>31</sup>Abraham Lopez, Savannah La Mar, Jamaica, to Aaron Lopez, Newport, February 1, 1767, Aaron Lopez Papers, RIHS; *New-York Gazette*, March 16, 1767; Isaac Pereira Mendes, Kingston, Jamaica, to Aaron Lopez, Newport, October 15, 1767, *Commerce of Rhode Island*, 1:183; and Israel Brayton, Kingston, to Christopher and George Champlin, Newport, February 8, 1767, in *ibid.*, 1:178–79.



MAP 4.—To salvage the voyage, in March 1767, *Charlotte* loaded supplies and twenty enslaved Africans at Savanna-la-Mar, Jamaica, destined for logwood cutting camps in the Bay of Honduras. From there, the brig made her way home to Rhode Island, arriving in July 1767. Bill Nelson Cartography, Accomack, Virginia.

“Mr. Wheeler in my opinion,” Abraham told Aaron in Rhode Island, “does not seem altogether a man calculated to have charge of so much of your interest as the brig when loaded (which I hope will be the case).” Although recommended by Thomas Brown on the eve of his departure for his “frugality & care,” Wheeler failed to gain Abraham’s confidence. Retaining him as captain presented too many risks. “I shall therefore endeavor to procure some prudent man of good character to put on her,” he said. Providentially, such a man—John Newdigate, master of another of Aaron Lopez’s ships, the brig *Little Hart*—appeared at Savannah-la-Mar on March 2, 1767.<sup>32</sup>

<sup>32</sup>Thomas Brown, Grenada, to Abraham Lopez, Savannah-la-Mar, Jamaica, January 14, 1767, Aaron Lopez Papers, RIHS; Abraham Lopez, Savannah La Mar, Jamaica, to Aaron Lopez, Newport, February 1, 1767, in *ibid.*; Jonathan Wheeler, Savannah La Mar, to Aaron Lopez, Newport, 1767, Shipping Records of brig *Charlotte*, Aaron Lopez Papers, NHS; and Mendes, Kingston, Jamaica, to Lopez, Newport, February 26, 1767, *Commerce of Rhode Island*, 1:192.

Aaron Lopez had expected *Charlotte* to take on a cargo of molasses at Savannah-la-Mar, part of it to be acquired through illicit channels from the French on Saint-Domingue (modern-day Haiti). That is, “provided you can do it with safety.” Then, if all went well, the brig would sail for home. But with a wait of at least six weeks before he could load a vessel that was hemorrhaging money every day it sat idle, the resourceful Abraham Lopez revised his plan. Applying “every method prudence and reason shall suggest to me,” he “determined the brig *Charlotte* for the Bay”—that is, the Bay of Honduras. Abraham transferred part of *Little Hart’s* cargo onto the forty-ton brig and, on March 10, placed John Newdigate in command. On Thursday, March 12, *Charlotte* departed Savannah-la-Mar carrying a cargo of provisions and “20 Negroes.”<sup>33</sup>

Commenting on Brown’s bewildering behavior, Aaron later told Abraham, it “greatly surprised me as he was a man that sustained a good character amongst us and was recommended to me by several of his former employers in this town as a person of sobriety and integrity.” The episode underscores the challenge faced by every merchant taking on the risks and uncertainties of long-distance trade so dependent on the judgment of a ship’s captain: “his hidid villainy only evinces us how difficult it is to discern an honest man from a dishonest man.”<sup>34</sup>



Savannah-la-Mar was a convenient jumping-off point in one of Great Britain’s most important Atlantic activities, the

<sup>33</sup>Aaron Lopez, Newport, to Abraham Lopez Parra, Jamaica, February 13, 1767, Letterbook, vol. 72, Aaron Lopez Papers, NHS; Jonathan Wheeler, Savannah La Mar, to Aaron Lopez, Newport, March 12, 1767, Shipping Records of brig *Charlotte*, in *ibid.*; Abraham Lopez, Jamaica, to Aaron Lopez, Newport, April 7, 1767, *Commerce of Rhode Island*, 1:195–96; Isaac Pereira Mendes, Kingston, Jamaica, to Aaron Lopez, Newport, October 15, 1767, in *ibid.*, 1:183; Abraham Lopez, Savannah La Mar, Jamaica, to Aaron Lopez, Newport, February 1, 1767, Aaron Lopez Papers, RIHS; Aaron Lopez in Account Current with John Newdigate, August 20, 1767, Papers of Aaron Lopez, Box 8, fol. 21, MS. in AJHS; and TNA, CO 142/17, fol. 78.

<sup>34</sup>Aaron Lopez, Newport, to Abraham Lopez, Savannah La Mar, Jamaica, August 20, 1767, Letterbook, vol. 72, Aaron Lopez Papers, NHS.

logwood trade in the Bay of Honduras. “The trade wind serves both in going and returning,” wrote Edward Long, making the 700-mile passage “short and speedy.” As did others traveling from Savannah-la-Mar to the Bay, Captain Newdigate likely set a course that passed in the vicinity of the *Islas Santanilla* (Swan Islands), three tiny islands in the northwestern Caribbean Sea about half-way between the western tip of Jamaica and the logwood cutting grounds in the Yucatan, modern-day Belize. Newdigate was cautious as he approached the Bay, “besprinkled with an infinity of shoals, rocks, and heaps of drowned islands.”<sup>35</sup>

Found in abundance in swampy marshes just a few miles inland, the logwood tree yielded one of the most important dyestuffs native to the New World. The source of rich blues, purples, grays, greens, and blacks, logwood was “the fundamental fixing dye to almost every other color,” according to a British official. Working “in the unwholesome swamps of Honduras” under the most extreme conditions, large gangs of logwood cutters, including many Africans, harvested the trees and prepared the wood for shipping. “The logwood trade to the Bay of Honduras is very considerable,” wrote a New Yorker in the 1760s, “and was pushed by our merchants with great boldness.”<sup>36</sup>

Under the terms of the 1763 Treaty of Paris, following decades of bitter contention, British logwood cutters were to be allowed to work unmolested in the Bay of Honduras, territory still claimed by Spain. But without a British warship on station, peace between the logwood cutters and Spanish authorities was unenforceable in this Atlantic no-man’s-land. At the time of *Charlotte’s* visit, the Spaniards “began to disturb

<sup>35</sup>Long, *History of Jamaica*, 1:frontispiece of map, 2:200; and Jefferys, *West-Indian Atlas*, 16–17.

<sup>36</sup>Geoffrey L. Rossano, “Down to the Bay: New York Shippers and the Central American Logwood Trade, 1748–1761,” *New York History* 70 (1989): 230; *New-York Journal, or, the General Advertiser*, August 6, 1767; and William Smith, *History of the Province of New-York* (Philadelphia: Mathew Carey, 1792), 232. “The air is unhealthy, infested with that species of gnats called mosketoes; the water swarms every where with alligators, &c., but English Yucatan produces a prodigious abundance of logwood, a quantity of mahogany, fustic, and other woods for dying” (Jefferys, *West-Indian Atlas*, 16).

the logwood cutters” once again. “They burned buildings, killed cattle, and carried off slaves. As no man of war was there, [they] might possibly produce some further disturbances,” editorialized a Philadelphia newspaper, “the English sailors being extremely exasperated.”<sup>37</sup>

In the midst of this uncertainty, the brig *Charlotte* rode at anchor in the Rio Honde, waiting to deliver its cargo and take in logwood. As many as one hundred British vessels were in the Bay at the time of *Charlotte*’s visit, many belonging to New York, the North American center in the logwood trade, with “most of the rest to Philadelphia, Boston, Rhode-Island, &c.” Ships like the *Charlotte* brought small cargoes of provisions, rum, British manufactures, and slaves. In the spring of 1767, enslaved Africans were much in demand following large-scale desertions “from the English logwood cutters” working in the harsh environment along the coast of Honduras. The carriage of African captives from one part of the West Indies or North America to another was a common feature of British-American trade. At some point during his ten weeks at the Bay, Captain Newdigate exchanged his twenty slaves and cargo of provisions and manufactured goods for 113 tons of logwood.<sup>38</sup>

It was early June before the forty-ton brig began her 2,100-mile voyage home. The homeward journey took the *Charlotte* into the Yucatan Channel, around the west end of Cuba, and through the Florida Straights. Just out of sight along the route home sat a string of bustling British-American ports: Savannah in Georgia, Charleston in South Carolina, Newport News in Virginia, Annapolis in Maryland, Philadelphia far up the Delaware River in Pennsylvania, followed by New York City,

<sup>37</sup>Rossano, “Down to the Bay,” 248–49; *Pennsylvania Chronicle*, May 11, 1767; and *New-York Mercury*, June 1, 1767.

<sup>38</sup>*New-York Mercury*, April 6, April 27, and June 1, 1767; *Pennsylvania Chronicle*, May 11, 1767; *Newport Mercury*, January 12, 1767; Ledger Book, 1763–1774, vol. 480, Aaron Lopez Papers, NHS, 32; Abraham Lopez, Jamaica, to Aaron Lopez, Newport, April 7, 1767, *Commerce of Rhode Island*, 1:195–96. On May 1, 1767, Aaron Lopez purchased insurance on the *Charlotte*’s Bay voyage (£400 on the vessel and £250 on the cargo) through underwriters in New York City (Day Book, Aaron Lopez, 1767–1770, MS. Book 558, Aaron Lopez Account Books, NHS, 591; Ledger Book, 1763–1774, vol. 480, Aaron Lopez Papers, NHS, 32).



New London, and just a few miles further, *Charlotte's* destination: Newport, Rhode Island.<sup>39</sup>



On July 9, 1767, a Thursday, a small, battered trading vessel cleared Block Island and began the final leg of her long voyage. Within a few hours, the brig *Charlotte* had traversed Rhode Island Sound, entered Newport harbor, and found a berth at the Long Wharf on the city's busy waterfront. Except for Aaron Lopez and his counting house clerks, together with the families of the returning Rhode Island mariners, *Charlotte's* arrival would have been barely noticed above the din of cranes offloading ships and clattering of wagons hauling barrels of produce along cobblestone streets. Just a week earlier, Captain Jonathan Wheeler—having at last earned the confidence of Abraham Lopez—entered Newport harbor in command of the brig *Little Hart*.<sup>40</sup>

Almost immediately Lopez and Captain Newdigate began preparing *Charlotte* for a return voyage to Jamaica and the Bay, and on August 24, the forty-ton brig was again at sea carrying provisions and spermaceti candles, a Rhode Island specialty. On September 28, *Charlotte* was anchored at the roadstead at Savannah-la-Mar, and a month later was on its way to the Bay “with coffee, provisions, and 3 Negroes.” The following February, the brig was in Jamaica preparing for yet another trip to the Bay of Honduras. Through the remainder of 1768 and into 1769, with logwood fetching high prices in Europe, Lopez mounted another two voyages.<sup>41</sup>

In October 1769, the brig was back in Bristol, having delivered logwood and a mixed cargo of New England goods

<sup>39</sup>Rossano, “Down to the Bay,” 238–39.

<sup>40</sup>Aaron Lopez in Account Current with John Newdigate, August 20, 1767, Papers of Aaron Lopez, Box 8, fol. 21, MS. in AJHS; Memorandum & Ship Accounts, 1764–1767, vol. 590, Aaron Lopez Papers, NHS, 52; *Newport Mercury*, July 6 and 13, 1767.

<sup>41</sup>TNA, CO 142/17, fol. 45; Lynne Withey, *Urban Growth in Colonial Rhode Island: Newport and Providence in the Eighteenth Century* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1984), 31–32.

to Henry Cruger, Jr., Lopez's long-time correspondent. Once again, political strife—this time in the form of American outrage over the Townsend Duties—disrupted colonial imports of British cargoes. Ever resourceful, Cruger found a satisfactory workaround. “Ambitious to advance your interest,” he told Lopez, “I was happy in procuring the *Charlotte* freight to Ireland.” He dispatched the vessel to Dublin where it was to load freight for the Madeira Islands and West Indies. Ahead lay the unforeseeable twists and turns of another long and difficult Atlantic voyage—and beyond that would come a string of political crises culminating in the American Revolution. This was all in the future. “If the spirit of prophesy be ever given to any man,” Cruger asked his American friend, Lopez, “who stands more in need of that advantage than a merchant?”<sup>42</sup>

<sup>42</sup>Henry Cruger Jr., Bristol, to Aaron Lopez, Newport, November 1, 1769, *Commerce of Rhode Island*, 1:295; Henry Cruger Jr., Bristol, to Aaron Lopez, Newport, March 7, 1770, in *ibid.*, 1:316.

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