

Voyage of the Clipper Ship *Ringleader*

Excerpts from a Journal kept by nineteen-year-old Edward P. Sargent of Salem during a voyage from Boston to San Francisco, China, and London in 1855 and 1856.

EDITED BY QUENTIN L. COONS

PART III

CHINA TO LONDON

THURS. *Apr. 24th* A boat containing a pilot, comprador & crew, came alongside in the forenoon—made a bargain . . . to take us in for 8 dollars.

Port Journal—Hongkong

Saturday April 26th/56 . . . we anchored finally about a third of a mile from the shore; had no sooner anchored than a crowd of girls to perform washing came on board . . .

Going upon shore we noticed the low stone wall built all along the extent of the town with here & there stone steps where passengers can land. The store of Abr Nathaniel Crosby jr a ship chandler is the general resort of all American Captains at the Queen's Road, the principal street . . .

Behind the town a high hill rises to . . . 1800 ft. . . the bed of the island is granite . . . furnishing plenty of building material. The name Hongkong belongs properly to the island;—that of Victoria to the town. Its length is about two miles . . . extends up . . . the mountain a third of a mile . . . western end of Queen's Road . . . is bordered by barracks for English Troops, & store houses—the ground around, being laid out finely and adorned with flowers, tropical trees &c.

Capt Matthews left in the steamer at four o'clock for Canton & Whampoa. Canton is about an hundred miles up the river and Whampoa 15 miles less.

Sunday 4th Went on shore in the evening to walk with Mr. Morse, the second officer; . . . dissatisfied, . . . sorry to have him leave . . . no one will be obtained equal to him as a companion. . . . It much concerns a passenger as to who the first & second officers are, for with them he has more to do than any other person . . . the captain excepted; they alone have a right to occupy the poop deck.

Sun. 11th Went to the Union Chapel in the forenoon with Cpts. Crowell & Matthews; a Scotch clergyman preached; there were several Chinese present, including a number of little boys & girls; dined on board the "Edith Rose" (Captain Crowell).

Mon. 12th Visited the "Comet" . . . registers 1900 tons the same as the Black Warrior. Her poop deck extends to the main mast, affording a grand promenade. She has a Howes' rig & carries three skysails; she sailed from New York a day or two before we left Boston, arrived in San Francisco the evening before we sailed & made the passage in 40 days by way of Shanghae. The shortest

passage across is 35 days. The Comet brings dates from California.

Wed. 14th Went to Jardine, Matheson & Co's after dinner with Capt M. Their establishment . . . at the extreme eastern end of town consists of a very large granite building for the clerks & offices & a two story building on a hill . . . where Jardine himself lives, besides ware houses barracks for a negro guard and a ship yard.

Saw several cannon, placed in different parts of the grounds to protect the place, in case of an attack from the natives.

Hongkong May 14th/56 Jardine, Matheson & Co is the largest firm in China—they with Dent & Co have chartered the Ship & are determined to do all they can to have us arrive in London before any other vessel with new teas.

I should think that five hundred native vessels lay on the premises, large junks, lighters—bunk boats & “pull-away” boats—like shipping in a harbour. The grounds around are filled with flowers of all kinds; saw bananas growing, for the first time. The distance from the centre of the town is nearly a mile and a half.

From Hongkong to Foo Chou Foo

Thurs. May 15th At 4 o clk was awakened. . . . before . . . twenty fathoms of the chain was in, the ship began to drag; the topsails were set & jibs and the head sails filled causing the ship to swing around before the wind, but in doing so she acquired considerable headway & narrowly escaped running into two vessels.

Friday May 16th Passed a number of fishing junks, going in pairs & dragging a net between them. We were obliged to go between . . . these “pairs” three

times; whether we damaged the nets I do not know. Strong N E monsoon.

Wed. May 21st Have been able to make 50 miles on our course since yesterday noon; from the fore topsail yard this PM saw a crab a snake & several schules of fishes. . . . Passed a number of junks this forenoon; while on the passage down from Shanghae 130 junks were counted at one time, all the fire arms on board were loaded in case of an attack from pirates.

Foo Chow Foo Saturday May 24th/56 . . . we advanced toward the mouth of the River Min . . . passage in is very difficult . . . shoals & rocks . . . mouth of the river grows narrow till you reach Kimpai Pass, where it is only about 300 ft, not more than twice the length of the ship.

. . . proof that . . . “all available places are cultivated in China” . . . country is . . . diversified and hilly; some of the mountains appear to be . . . 3000 ft high; granite rocks protrude . . . have a black and worn aspect. . . . Here and there a beautiful mountain stream . . . tumbling down the rocks, and many a tomb built . . . in some rural spot. . . .

At half past two we anchored close by Pagoda Rock . . . the “John Wade” . . . Barque “Water Witch”, Dent & Co's Opium Ship lay near us; . . . the English Clipper “Chrysolite” who will compete with us in carrying the new teas as the “Lord of the Isles” has not yet come down from Shanghae where she went to discharge cargo,—the Racehorse—an English Man of War,—the Schooner Maury & the Marona . . . I count 10 square rigged vessels.

Sunday May 25th Our anchorage is a lonely place . . . the Pagoda . . . natural beauty . . . cultivated hills & rice swamps.

Many junks pass at each tide, some

... very large; their sails are also of great size, the size of the vessel being considered; they have the yard at the top, and the foot is held taut by bamboos; some of them are made of mats sewed together and fastened to bamboo sticks, running horizontally, about 18 inches apart, others consist of bamboo strips and matting stuff braided; I have seen some with staysails and studding sails made of canvass; those of the small boats are nearly square and braided.

All the large ones and many of the small ones have eyes painted on either bow, which the Chinamen explain by saying "can see, can save—no can see, no can save". Some have painted sterns and their name painted in Chinese letters on either side; they are well armed, carrying 10 guns in the largest. English sailors are captains of many of them. . . . anchors are . . . of wood . . . heavy and solid . . . a windlass . . . to heave it up.

Pagoda Anchorage Monday May 26th/56 . . . the Pagoda . . . is . . . about 75 ft. high consisting of seven stories . . . smaller towards the top, where it is 10 ft in diameter . . . a solid mass of granite with passages . . . a terrace about three ft wide surrounds the tower and an entrance to another flight of steps opens on the side opposite . . . thus it continues to the top where the opening is so small that you can hardly crawl through . . . built in an octagonal form . . . a hundred and eighty ft above the . . . water.

An extensive rice swamp spreads out beyond the hill on which the tower is situated in the midst of which is a farming town. . . . women transplanting the rice . . . not so many women in the boats as at Hongkong . . . a hard life.

[*Inserted into the Journal with thread*]: "The Pagoda at Ning poa is ascended to the top by stairs inside. This

has seven stories, has twenty eight windows, is hexagonal in form, and one hundred and sixty ft. high, with a spiral course on the top.

As to the design of Pagodas, the Chinese say that the 'presence of such an edifice not only secures to the site the favors and protection of Heaven, if it already bears evidences of enjoying it, but represses any evil influences that may be native to the spot, and imparts to it, the most salutary and felicitous omens'."

The great "Porcelain Pagoda" at Nankin, has nine stories, is two hundred and sixty one ft high, and nearly a hundred feet in diameter at its base . . . one hundred & fifty two bells; one hundred and twenty eight lamps outside and twelve porcelain lamps inside . . . encased upon the outside with green porcelain in slates . . . & cost between three and four millions of dollars. In the top . . . for warding off evil influences were deposited . . . pearls . . . tea . . . silver . . . Gold . . . medicine, a hundred & thirty three and a half pounds of sacred books &c. A chinese account says, "The God Thunder, while expelling a strange monster, chased him to this place, when instantly three parts of the nine stories were demolished; but the influence of the Buddhistic doctrines was so boundless, that the whole building was not destroyed."

In the Temple of Confucius at Ningpoo are no idols as the followers of the sage do not admit them in their tenets. They use instead tablets, inscribed with their ancestral objects of worship. I endeavored to obtain one of these tablets in Foh Chow . . . Mr. Hartwell promised to get me one, but we sailed a day or two after . . . small pieces of wood about 6 inches by 2—painted black and stamped with chinese characters in bronze—hav-

ing a small piece for a standard, in which they are mortised.

Foo Chow Foo Thursday May 29th
On awaking this morning found a young man, named Symonds, a native of Salem, in the cabin. He is Store Keeper for Richards & Co's Ship Chandlery in the city; the store in Shanghae has failed, & the goods have been seized, so that he is now thrown out of employment. In the afternoon went up to the city with Capt. M. & Mr Symonds . . . showers . . . rain filled the river above the tidal influence . . . ebb tide all the way . . . over three hours rowing up . . . water of the river . . . muddy and is rendered fit for use by being settled, sometimes with alum,—the foreigners make it cool by placing it in wells. Many of them have springs on their premises.

Just before you reach the suburbs of the city where the . . . Consulates are located, on the "hill", as well as most of the houses of the merchants, you pass several ship yards, where . . . handsome junks are building . . . sterns are very high & the commander & helmsman are placed some 10 ft above their inferiors. In most the sterns are painted red & adorned with an eagle or some animal. All have two eyes painted on the bows. The tide runs very swiftly . . . we could hardly stem it; we were obliged to find our way amidst junks & bumb boats; there is great danger of being capsized on their enormous cables made of rattan braided or bamboo.

At last we landed, to find our way through narrow streets crowded with Chinamen, filled with filth & so narrow that I could touch the houses on either side by extending my arms. It was, to be sure, the same as Shanghae city within the walls but very unlike Shanghae city without the walls.

. . . one street leading across the island . . . is quite small; turning into a narrow alley, a short distance brought us to a door covered with sheet iron which . . . a coolie opened; this was Mr. S's house. We came into an open court . . . paved with stones with three rooms partitioned off on the first floor . . . second story . . . galleries leading to the different rooms; the second story is the one generally occupied by the white people, the servants living below. The partitions . . . consist of glass sashes, for the upper half, for those that are on the outside, or that open on the court & beside, there are blinds to keep out the sun.

Foo Chow Foo Sat. May 31st Took tea at Mr Gibson's, at 8 o'clock. Such an entire change in one's habits of living produce a bad effect . . . some merchants take breakfast at 11 o'clock and dine at 5 o'clock; the missionaries breakfast at 8 or 9 & dine at two, & take tea again at 6 or 7. Felt quite unwell . . . so much tea & ale . . . residents here drink ale, if not anything stronger, and not a few use it to excess.

Foo Chow Foo Thurs. June 5th
. . . started at one o'clock, the Capt. & Mr Gibson in light bamboo chairs, and myself in a covered sedan chair, each having three coolies for bearers, to take a ride within the celebrated city of Foo Chow.

The island on which Mr. Gibson lives is connected with the banks of the river . . . by bridges, that on the north having 40 arches formed of immense granite slabs thrown across stone piers, while the one on the south has only 9 arches . . . called the "Wan-shou-keana" or "bridge of ten thousand ages" . . . the longer one about 800 ft . . . constantly crowded . . . lined on the clipper side with a row of shops; those on the north-

ern bridge are occupied chiefly by makers of bamboo pipes, trimming the rough sticks and smoking part to give a black color to them.

A long suburb two miles in length, called "Nantai" . . . leads from the bridge to the South gate . . . filled with shops . . . and thronged with people, jostling along some scowling, some laughing at you, some calling you "fan-yan," foreign devil, foreign dog & foreign monkey. You pass shops filled with fans, pillows, paper lanterns, pictures, clothing, images &cc; cook shops abound . . . burning coals, placed in a pan upon the counter. You can see smiths striking on an anvil, four at a time, tea and wine shops reminding you of an eating house at home; . . . sipping their tea & talking about the news of the day. In one locality . . . several rods of fish are spread in the street, leaving hardly three feet of room for pedestrians . . . watch makers, who by examining specimens of foreign manufacture, have themselves learned to repair clocks & watches.

Outside of the suburb through which we had passed, extensive paddy fields spread out . . . plants are now 6 to 10 inches . . . transplanted into rows six inches apart. A half mile further brought us to the south gate . . . surmounted by a massive tower . . . ; another, at right angles to it, much smaller, through which you first pass . . . ; the archway in the larger one is a hundred feet long & 20 feet wide.

After entering the city we proceeded to . . . Curio St, on which are . . . articles of bronze, banyan root, bamboo, porcelain . . . ; we stopped on our way at a broad cloth store, where a small cup of tea was given to each of us. On your left as you enter the city is . . . Woo-shinshan or Black Stone Hill on which the

British Consulate was first located . . . finely wooded . . . five hundred feet high and has . . . old temples near its summit a part of which are occupied by three missionaries of the London Society and the rest by a theatre. Towards the western gate you see the mass of several granaries used to deposit provisions . . . to provide against famine or war, and the tumult . . . of the crowd below strikes your ear. At the foot of the hill on the south is the wall which is eight miles in circumference and broad enough for a horse and carriage to pass; numerous ports for guns . . . I should judge its height to be about forty feet.

. . . population . . . within the walls is estimated at 600,000; the suburb "Nantai" . . . 30,000 many of whom are boatmen sailors and natives of other ports who come here to trade. Very many of the women have small feet . . . practice not so universal as in the northern cities—no classes are exempt from it except boatwomen, Tarter ladies & the lower classes of laboring women, the feet of some are not more than four inches long; they walk slowly with the aid of others or with a cane . . . missionaries told me they had heard the children crying . . . as the bandages were drawn tighter by their parents. They sometimes walk considerable distances, though evidently with much pain.

One half of the population eat Opium, of which \$2,000,000 worth is annually imported; how much misery is occasioned by it and how many lives it annually destroys cannot be calculated!

Returned to Mr Gibson's at 5 o'clock and spent the night there.

Tues. 17th/56 Capt. Matthews with Messrs. Larkin & Cunningham came down at 3 o'clock. having engaged the steamer to tow us out tomorrow morning.

From Foo Chow to London

Friday June 20th . . . good run thus far; owing to want of ballast the ship is very crank, causing her to careen over much when sailing on the wind with a stiff breeze.

Fri. July 4th Will squalls never cease! . . . The crew have celebrated the day by lying still, except as there was occasion to tack ship or prepare for squalls. In the cabin we celebrated the day by firing India crackers, pistols and guns, & having an unusually good dinner of Mock Turtle Soup, Roast Goose, Tongue, & Rhubarb Pie.

At the conclusion the following toasts were proposed by the Capt. & myself,
By the Capt.—

1st Our Revolutionary Fathers: we resemble them in this—that having reached the *4th* of July we have no disposition to turn back, but are waiting to go on and meet the British.

2d Our Families: A happy *4th* to them all; may the male members prove themselves worthy successors of the Heroes of '76.

3d The Old Hive: when she swarms again may it be done in that peaceable way which leaves no sting behind.

By myself—

The *4th* of July 1776—the birthday of our country:—may the spirit and never-flinching courage of the men of that period ever continue to exist in their posterity.

2d The Commerce of our Country: one of its brightest ornaments and a proper index of the National prosperity; as now, may it ever continue to be the foremost on the face of the earth.

3d The Union of the States: cemented as it was by the blood of our ancestors; the stars may quit their orbits and rush madly through the heavens without

destroying the universe, as well as the United States be separated, and yet no convulsion ensue.

Monday 28th At daybreak the high land of Bouro Island appeared in sight all along the port bow, and the flat table-land island called Xulla Bessey on the starboard bow.

An enormous whale has been spouting about the ship since noon, the first opportunity I have had of seeing their manœuvres, he would spout a half dozen times, at the interval of half a minute, throwing the water apparently 30 ft high with a noise like distant thunder, moving slowly just under the water, between the spoutings, & then descend throwing his monstrous flukes clear out of the water in a very graceful manner.

Sat. Aug 9th Passed Java Head during the forenoon and are again out to sea . . . Indian Ocean . . . surrounded by . . . heaving . . . ocean and not by the contracted swell of a narrow sea.

Sun. 10th Rain came in torrents filling the decks; the watch were employed . . . in replenishing the water casks. The stock will be sufficient—160 fowls, 9 geese, 6 pigs, 2 pigeons & the dog. With plenty of eggs and other good things we shall feast for a long while. The crew share in the good things.

. . . no place in a ship where her speed . . . great size of her hull . . . wind . . . manner in which she sails . . . seen as well as upon the bows . . . as the monster moves along her course . . . a mile in four minutes. . . upon the former passage of the ship from Anjier for . . . 10 days in this ocean she averaged 235 miles. . .

Sun. Aug 24th . . . a large . . . Ship . . . showed the Amer. flag and Boston numbers for 3321—the Abaellino probably from Calcutta for Boston . . . has dropped far astern.

Mon. 15th Went aloft for the first time in the night; it was a novel sight to look down and see the ship rushing through the water at the rate of 10 knots, the moon shining on the sails with a fine effect.

Wed. 17th Shall pass St. Helena tonight—a great disappointment—for I had hoped to have a good view of Napoleon's prison rock.

Thurs. 9th . . . everything about ship has been scraped and varnished or painted and the ship though nearly four yrs. old, looks as good as new.

Tues. 14th The main royal and fore top mast studding sail were split, from head to foot, at 3 o'clock. this morning . . . what sailors call "dirty weather" . . . very dismal and lonesome—there is a melancholy attending the high combing waves, chasing one another with loud murmurings, the incessant roar and howling of the wind in the rigging,—. . . In times like these we especially feel our dependence upon God, our own helplessness, how entirely dependent we are upon his care and the necessity of a *good hope* in Christ Jesus. Then, and then only, can we see the elements at war and remain in peace and confidence ourselves.

Wed. 15th I wish that I could picture our situation last night but no painter can delineate or poet describe the awful grandeur of a storm at sea.

Imagine the good ship "Ringleader" with only a single sail aloft and that of contracted dimensions, yet forced over on her side—the wind whistling and howling through the rigging with a much louder noise, by far, than at home in a N. Easterly storm, the heavy combing seas rolling before the wind, tossing their high crest, white with foam into the air, and then subsiding, their former

presence marked only by the bright green water;—as they near the ship, rushing apparently with irresistible force, you admire the buoyancy of the vessel as she rises majestically above it, and then suddenly falls into the chasm below you, to surmount another, and yet another.

Fri. 24th Touched soundings in the chops of the channel of Old England at 8 o'clock in the evening, the main topsail being hove aback for the purpose; had soundings in 85 F . . . displayed our flag to two large ships in the morning and to another in the P.M. all outward bound.

Fri. 31st . . . crossed our bows and proved to be a barque making signals for a pilot—began to fire guns—in about an hour a North Sea pilot hailed us . . . quite a fleet of these German & Dutch pilots in the Channel . . . a London pilot soon boarded us . . .

At 2 o'clock we had run through the Str. of Dover and the anchor was "let go" off the Downs . . . North Folkestone Light House . . . and the high chalky cliffs of Margate and Folkestone in plain view. . . . About 80 sail of vessels were in sight at the time . . . while at breakfast the tow boat Caledonia came alongside—agreed with him to follow us up to Gravesend for £25—\$125.00 . . . It seemed as if all the commerce of the world was crowded here together and we with difficulty made our way among them. For the last 15 miles were towed by the steamer . . . let go anchor off Gravesend . . . numerous agents of ship brokers &c came on board—among a package of letters found one from Henry P.—how eagerly I seized it. . . . but where is mother's letter—and Alfred's—hear that there is another package for us . . . *Finis*.