

POWDER PROFITS & PRIVATEERS.

*A Documentary History of the Virgin Islands
During the Era of the American Revolution*

by

George F. Tyson, Jr.

Staff Historian

Island Resources Foundation

Occasional Papers I

*Bureau of Libraries Museums & Archaeological Services
Department of Conservation & Cultural Affairs*

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A DOCUMENTARY HISTORY OF THE VIRGIN ISLANDS
DURING THE ERA OF THE AMERICAN REVOLUTION

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Dedicated to Alton A. Adams, Sr., an inspiration to all who
care about the history and culture of the Virgin Islands.

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ISLAND RESOURCES FOUNDATION

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INTRODUCTION

The Virgin Islands are a chain of small islands in the Caribbean Sea located forty miles east of Puerto Rico. At the time of the American Revolution they were split into two distinct political units: the Danish West Indies belonging to Denmark and the Virgin Islands held by Great Britain.

St. Croix, with a total population of 21,089 in 1773, St. Thomas, with a population of 4,371 and St. John, with a population of 2,402 were the main islands in the Danish cluster. Tortola, Virgin Gorda, Peter and Jost Van Dyke were the largest of the British Virgin Islands, which had a combined population of 10,200 blacks and whites in 1774. Tortola, by far the most populous of these British islands, served as their administrative and mercantile capital.

All of the Virgin Islands were plantation colonies, growing tropical staples, chiefly sugar and cotton, for export to European metropolises. Because of their strategic geographic location at the center of the West Indian archipelago, by the time of the American Revolution the larger islands of St. Croix, St. Thomas and Tortola had also evolved thriving mercantile sectors which engaged in a brisk business with the European colonies in the Caribbean and North America.

Like all other West Indian plantation colonies the Virgin Islands had developed especially close commercial ties with the temperate British colonies of North America. American vessels provided the islanders with essential foodstuffs, lumber, manufactured goods, slaves and other necessities for slave plantations in exchange for tropical staples such as sugar, molasses, rum and coffee.

Although this complimentary commercial nexus had its origins in the late seventeenth century, it was not until the Seven Year's War (1756-1763) that it began to flourish and expand. During this war between the French and British, many North American merchants like John Hancock and Benedict Arnold, who were later to figure so significantly in the American Revolution, established prosperous mercantile empires by trading legally and clandestinely in Virgin Islands waters.

As trade between the islands and the mainland prospered and grew American mercantile firms began establishing trading concerns in the islands, particularly in the Danish island of St. Croix. In the years immediately preceding the Revolution, the Beekmans, Livingstons, Lawrences, Kortrights, Crugers, and Cuylers of New York and the Yards, Whites and Durants of Philadelphia were among those mercantile families who established residency in the islands for purposes of trade.

These commercial linkages naturally led to social and cultural interactions - interactions fostered by the fact that American mercantile firms were often headed by younger sons of prominent American families. Within a few years of establishing local residency, these ambitious young men had formed close connections with the leading planters and merchants, married their daughters, acquired, in one way or another, plantation holdings, and assumed a prominent role in local affairs, even gaining seats in the local Colonial Councils.

Typical of these enterprising Americans who settled in the Virgin Islands was David Beekman, a member of a prominent New York mercantile family. In 1763 David's half-brother Gerard had written to him advising that the best way to make his fortune was by "disposing of your Pintly /penis? to some clever girl and letting her have use of it for a good Sugar Plantation."¹ David heeded his brother's advice. By the time of the Revolution he had established a lucrative mercantile firm in St. Croix, married into a wealthy Cruzan family, acquired several sugar estates and been elected to the local Colonial Council.

At the same time fortune seeking continentals were settling in the islands, many islanders emigrated to the mainland, where not a few made significant contributions to the development of the new American nation. Alexander Hamilton, for example, the first Secretary of the Treasury and one of the Founding Fathers came to North America from St. Croix, where he received his education and worked at Nicholas Cruger's counting house. Abraham Markoe, a wealthy Cruzan planter who left the Caribbean in 1772 to pursue his fortune in Philadelphia, played an active role in the early stages of the Revolution. He helped to organize, and became Captain of, the First Troop Philadelphia City Calvary; and his design for the Calvary's flag, with its thirteen stripes symbolic of the union between the colonies, may well have influenced the design of the National standard of the newly independent nation. From Tortola came Dr. William Thornton, an amateur architect who designed the Capitol Building of the United States, the Philadelphia Library and many other colonial buildings. Thornton was a close personal friend of George Washington and served as Superintendent of the U.S. Patent Office.

Given these close commercial and cultural linkages with the mainland colonies it is hardly surprising that the Virgin Islands should have been engulfed in the conflict between Great Britain and her rebellious American colonists. American political principles found a receptive audience among the islanders, who, like other West Indians, chafed under the political and economic restraints imposed upon them by their respective mother countries. Every American ship brought fresh news about the ideas and events of the struggle for independence, and these stories were prominently featured in local newspapers.

¹Quoted in Philip L. White, The Beekmans of New York in Politics and Commerce, 1647-1877 (1956), p. 222.

As revolutionary principles and supporters circulated in their midst Danish and British colonials grew increasingly restless with colonial and mercantile restrictions, and, on occasion, became aggressively outspoken in their demands for more self government. The focal point of colonial grievances in the Danish West Indies were the Burgher or Colonial Councils of St. Croix and St. Thomas, whose journals for the years 1767-1780 provide, in the words of one scholar, "a fine source of evidence of democratic stirrings among a colonial people ruled by an eighteenth century absolute monarch."¹

In the British Virgin Islands, whose colonials had gained their own legislature in 1773, the demand for increased economic and political autonomy was particularly vehement. "I never met with such a chaos, such a mass of Confusion & Disorder as in the Virgin Islands - there is the bare shadow of Subordination & Government," reported Governor William M. Burt in 1777.² In their struggle with the Governor Assemblymen stubbornly refused to enact laws, pay royal officials or take the required oaths. Their unrest and defiance of authority sprang from a desire to secure their own government independent from that of the Leeward Islands and to be made a Free Port.³

While British and Danish Creoles reflected American influences in their demands for greater political and economic freedoms neither group ever seriously contemplated following the American example of permanently severing the colonial connection. Like other West Indians they found themselves too dependent on their respective mother countries for capital, markets, imports and military protection.

1

Jean Louise Willis, "The Trade Between North America and the Danish West Indies, 1756-1807, with Special Reference to St. Croix," unpublished Ph.D. Thesis, Columbia University, 1963, p. 22.

²PRO.CO. 152/33, Burt to Germain, 30 July 1777.

³PRO.CO. 152/57, Burt to Germain, 1 November 1777, and CO.152/58, Burt to Germain, 28 April 1778. Documents relating to constitutional problems in Tortola during the revolutionary era will be published in a forthcoming two-volume documentary history of the British West Indies during the American Revolution which is currently being edited by the author.

Nevertheless, islanders sympathized with the Americans in their struggle against arbitrary government from abroad. Several Virgin Islanders wrote letters to American friends, and even to the Continental Congress affirming their commitment to the American cause and pledging their assistance.¹

Pro-American sentiments among the Creoles, Danish neutrality and the quest for commercial profit by American and West Indian seafarers insured that throughout the revolutionary war Virgin Island waters seethed with maritime activity and conflict. American privateers and merchantmen frequented local waters in search of prizes, military supplies, markets for American exports and protection in the friendly ports of the neutral Danes. Enterprising Danish residents eagerly supplied American mariners and their French allies with gunpowder and arms (although the Danish King had declared the trade in military goods illegal), European manufactured goods, salt and provisions; they bought American prize vessels and provided Yankees with Danish ship's papers which allowed them to sail to French and Spanish ports as neutral traders. The Tortolians, precluded from trading with the Americans by British laws on trade and treason, enthusiastically took up privateering, and made considerable profits by preying upon American and Danish shipping. Legal and clandestine Danish assistance to the American rebels and their French allies, together with the indiscriminate depredations of the rapacious Tortolian privateers led to a series of diplomatic incidents between Great Britain and Denmark which had repercussions in the capitols of Europe.

The full story of Virgin Island involvement in the revolutionary conflict is unfolded in the documents collected herein. These documents, which have been assembled from a wide variety of sources, are arranged and edited in a manner calculated to acquaint the reader with the general outline of historical events as they occurred. The documents, which constitute the facts of history, are allowed to speak for themselves, in the belief that the story they tell is just as exciting and as informative as a work of historical interpretation.

Virgin Islanders seeking information about their past have had a very limited access to the records of that past, which are stored in overseas archives, and in the case of the U.S. Virgin Islands are recorded in a language (Gothic Danish) that is neither spoken or understood by the indigenous population. One consequence of this physical and linguistic separation from the historical record is that outsiders have traditionally written, and continue to write, the history of the region, thereby shaping historical perceptions, attitudes and knowledge. Under these circumstances there exists a pressing need to make the records of the past more available to the insular population; only then can a truly indigenous historiographical tradition be created and nurtured.

¹See Section II below.

It is hoped that this publication will make a modest contribution toward the development of a much needed locally generated history; a history based on fact, not fiction. Documentary sourcebooks, such as this one, can go far in dispelling the myths and biases which have too often shaped our local perceptions. Sourcebooks are valuable learning and research tools, that will not only enable students and laymen alike to come directly into contact with actual historical facts, but will equally help them develop an appreciation of the methodology of historical inquiry and evaluation.

The editorial method used in this sourcebook is as follows: The book is divided into four topical sections, each arranged chronologically. Each section contains a short introductory headnote, and frequently an additional headnote precedes an individual document or cluster of related documents. A source note follows immediately after the conclusion of every document, and a key to abbreviations in the source notes is provided immediately following this introduction. Explanatory footnotes appear after the source note. There is a key word index to facilitate cross referencing.

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KEY TO SOURCE ABBREVIATIONS

Ban. Lib.	Bancroft Library, Berkeley, California
BL	Baker Library, Cambridge, Massachusetts
HSP	Historical Society of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania
IRF	Island Resources Foundation, St. Thomas, Virgin Islands
JAJ	<u>Journals of the Assembly of Jamaica 1663-1826, 14 Vols. (Jamaica, 1803-1826)</u>
JCLB	John Carter Brown Library, Providence, R.I.
LC	LIBRARY OF CONGRESS, Washington, D.C.
MD. ARCH.	Maryland Archives, Annapolis, Maryland
PRO. CO.	Public Record Office, London, Colonial Office Series
PRO. ADM.	Public Record Office, London, Admiralty Papers
PRO. WO.	Public Record Office, London, War Office Papers
RG. #55, USNA	Record Group No. 55, U.S. National Archives
USNA	U.S. National Archives, Washington, D.C.
WLC	William L. Clements Library, Ann Arbor, Michigan
HAM. PAP.	<u>The Papers of Alexander Hamilton</u> , ed. Harold C. Syrett, Vol. I, (New York, 1961)

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SECTION I:

THE VIRGIN ISLANDS AND NORTH AMERICA
ON THE EVE OF THE AMERICAN REVOLUTION

On the eve of the American Revolution a symbiotic commercial connection had evolved between the Danish West Indies, particularly the plantation colony of St. Croix, and the British North American colonies. American merchants supplied the Danish islands with essential plantation stores, livestock, slaves and even some manufactured goods in exchange for sugar, rum and molasses. One of the most active principals in this growing trade was Nicholas Cruger, a member of a leading New York mercantile family who had established a residence on St. Croix. Sometime between 1766 and 1768 Cruger employed the young Alexander Hamilton as a clerk in his St. Croix business. Reflecting the entrepreneurial acumen that would make him America's first Secretary of the Treasury, Hamilton rose quickly within Cruger's firm to the point that Cruger placed him in charge of his affairs whenever he made one of his periodic visits to the mainland. Hamilton's letters (the earliest on record) to various members of the Cruger family between 1770 and 1772 (when he left St. Croix to attend school in New York) provides an interesting insight into the nature of pre-Revolutionary trade between the Danish and American colonies.

ALEXANDER HAMILTON TO NICHOLAS CRUGER ¹

ST. CROIX, 12 November 1771

I send you herewith Copies of my Letter's per Codwise & Cunningham, since which nothing has occurred worth writing. Markets are just the same excepting in the price of Butter which is now reduced to 15 & 16 per a firkin. Your Philadelphia flour is really very bad, being of a most swarthy complexion & withal very untractable; the Bakers complain that they cannot by any means get it to rise. Wherefore & in consideration of the quantity of flour at Market and the little demand for it I have some thought not to refuse 8½ from any good person that will give it, taking 40 to 50 Barrels. Upon opening several barrels I have observed a kind of Worm very common in flour about the surface, which is an indication of Age. It could not have been very new when t'was shipd and for all these reasons I conceive it highly necessary to lessen the price or probably I may be obliged in the end to sell it at a much greater disadvantage. At 8½ you will gain better than 10 rys² per bbl which is not so bad. New York flour of 1 cwt. 3 grs.³ is gladly sold by every body at 8 ps.⁴ at retail & a great part of your Philadelphia weighs but little more so that 8½ by the quantity is more than a proportionable price for the difference of weight.

There is still on hand about 290 barrels. All Lightborns is sold at 9 & near all your Fathers per Draper at 8 ps. As to bread I have sold very little. I dont know what to think of it.

The matter between Mr. Heyliger & Mr. Mahan is still unsettled. M Bastian French who was to have been arbitrator for the former is at portoricco and he pretends he can get no one else to supply his

place. Mr. French is minutely expected & it is to be hoped that when he arrives there will be a settlement....

SOURCE: HAM. PAP.

¹Nicholas Cruger, Hamilton's employer in St. Croix, was a member of a leading New York mercantile family and one of the foremost Americans living in and trading to the Virgin Islands. See Florence Lewisohn, "Alexander Hamilton's West Indian Boyhood" What So Proudly We Hail: The Danish West Indies and the American Revolution (St. Croix, 1975).

²Abbreviation for real, a former Spanish silver coin, the equivalent of the Spanish bit, an eighth of a piece of eight. In the 1770's it was the equivalent of about 7 pence.

³1 hundredweight and 3 quarter-hundredweight, the weight of one barrel of flour.

⁴A Spanish piece of eight. The piece of eight was the equivalent of the Spanish dollar, known also as a peso. On St. Croix its value was approximately 6 shillings, 6 pence. H students who have used these letters erroneously have interpreted ps. to mean pence.

⁵The situation alluded to arose from the fact that Nicholas Cruger owed money to Rapzot (or Rapsart) Heyliger, and Cruger, in turn, was owed money by Alexander Mahan of St. Croix. Cruger wished to have this affair straightened out by having Mahan pay the money to Heyliger, but Mahan refused. French was then appointed arbitrator of the dispute. From information in Harold C. Syrett, ed. The Papers of Alexander Hamilton, Vol. I. (N.Y., 1961) p. 12.

ALEXANDER HAMILTON TO TILEMAN CRUGER¹

ST. CROIX, 16 November 1771

In behalf of Mr. Nicholas Cruger (who by reason of a very ill state of health went from this to New York the 15th Ultimo) I have the pleasure to address you by the long expected Sloop Thunderbolt, Capt William Newton², Ownd by Mess/rs.⁷ Jacob Walton, John Harris & Nicholas Cruger, the latter of whom has written you fully concerning her destination - which I need not repeat.

She has on Board besides a parcel of Lumber for yourself, sundry Articles on Account of her Owners, as per Inclosed Bill Lading and when you have disposed of them you'll please to Credit each partie for 1/3 of the proceeds. Mr. N Cruger's proportion of this and the Ballance of your account hitherto will more than pay for his 1/3 Cost of her first Cargo up, and for the other two I shall endeavour to place value in your hands betimes. I only wait for a line from you to know what will best answer.

Reports here represent matters in a very disagreeable light with regard to the Guarda Costo's which are said to swarm upon the Coast, but as you will be the best Judge of what danger there might be, all is submitted to your prudent direction.

Capt Newton must Arm with you as he could not so conveniently do it here.

Give me leave to hint to you that you cannot be too particular in your Instructions to him. I think he seems rather to want experience in such Voyages.

Messrs. Walton & John H Cruger are to furnish you themselves with their respective proportions of the Cost of the several Cargoes.

The Staves on Board if by any means convenient I beg may be returned by the Sloop. They will command a good price here & I suppose little or nothing with you. Could they be got at I would not send them down, but they are stowd promiscuously among other things.

If convenient please to deliver the Hhds³ now Containing the Indian Meal to the Captain as Water Casks and others should he want them. I supplied him with 20 here. I must beg your reference to Mr. Crugers last Letter of the 2d Ultimo for other particulars....

Our Crops will be very early so that the utmost Dispatch is necessary to import three Cargoes of Mules in due time.

SOURCE: HAM. PAP.

¹A brother of Nicholas Cruger, who handled the Cruger's trading concerns on Curacao in the Dutch West Indies.

²William Newton, a resident of St. Croix, who later married the widow of Cornelius Kortright, who died in 1773.

³Abbreviation for hogsheads.

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ALEXANDER HAMILTON TO WALTON AND CRUGER

ST. CROIX, 27 November 1771

I have now the pleasure to acknowledge the receipt of your favour dated October the 19th. by Sloop Thunderbolt which arrived here on Wednesday Afternoon the 16th Instant, and on the saturday morning following I cleared her out and gave the Captain his dispatches for Curracoa, but he could not sail till the morning after. She landed here only

23 Hhds Indian Meal
6469 Staves
20 bbls Apples
300 Boards Inch & half
21 Kegs Bread
& 646 Ropes onions

All the rest of her Cargo (I think) must turn out better at Curracoa than here, or at any rate not worse. Could I have landed the superfine Flour conveniently and without detention I should have

done it, but the Captain told me it was stowed so promiscuously that to get at it, would require some time. Wherefore I have sent it down to take its chance with the rest of the Cargo, there being not a moment of time to spare, our Crops are so forward. As to the 2 Hhds Indian Meal, the kegs of Water Bread, the few Staves, and I may add the Boards that were sent down rather improperly; they could not be got at or I should have landed them.

The price of common NY flour here is 7½ & 8 ps. & I fancy it cant well be less at Curracoa. There has been large quantities of Rye Meal brought here lately from Copenhagen, barrels weighing 250 nt. have been sold at 3½ & 4 ps. Tis true the quality is somewhat inferior to that of New York, but the difference of Weight is adequate to the inferiority of Quality so that New York Rye Meal would not fetch above 4 ps. per barrel at most & must at least be worth as much below.

This is nearly the case with every other Article sent down, which youll observe per Inclosed price Current. I have desired Mr. Teleman Cruger to return the Staves by the Sloop if they will be no incumbrance to her and to give the 2 Hhds containing the Indian Meal to Capt Newton for Water Casks. I supplied him with 20 here but he thought he should want a few more. I am selling the Indian Meal at 23 ps. per Hhd & expect fl0 per thousand for the Staves (all for Crop pay). The Apples were in every respect very indifferent. The greatest part of them I sold at 20 rys & the rest at 12. Four Rys per piece is the price of the Boards and per 2 ps. of the kegs of Water Bread. As to the Onions I was glad to get rid of them altogether for 40 ps.

A large Sloop with 70 Mules from the Main arrivd two days ago. The terms of Sale - Joes down - which gives me high hopes that he will be obliged to go further, Cash of all kinds being very scarce here. Even Danish bits are not to be had much less Joes.

The Captain talks largely of Dangers & difficultys upon the Coast but no doubt exaggerates a good deal (by way of Stimulation).

Excepting this one circumstance (a little unfavourable) every thing has a very promising aspect with regard to the price of Mules this Season & I hope will continue so, but I imagine we are rather too late for 3 Cargoes. This I shall be better able to judge of by and by.

Concerning your Tea, you may depend I shall be stricly observant of your directions.

And conclusively I beg leave to assure you Gentlemen that I gave the Sloop Thunderbolt all the dispatch I could from here. The Articles landed from on Board of her tho triffling were very tedious and always take up more time than other things.

SOURCE: HAM. PAP.

¹Jacob Walton was the business partner and brother-in-law of Nicholas Cruger.

ALEXANDER HAMILTON TO TILEMAN CRUGER

ST. CROIX, 1 February 1772

Two days ago Capt Newton delivered me your favour without date & 41 Mules in such order that I have been obliged to send all of them to pasture, and of which I expect at least a third will die. The highest offer made me for 20 of the best was 70 ps., whereas if they had been in good order I could readily have obtained f40 round, which I all along entertained the most sanguine hopes of. Thus you see how unfortunate the Thunderbolts first Voyage has been. But we must try a second time. Accordingly I have put on Board her some Codfish, Rum & Bread as per Inclosed Bill Lading & wish them to a good Market.

Capt Newton is to supply himself with Grass on his way down & I must beg the favour of you by all means to buy or hire him a few Guns which is agreeable to Mr. Crugers directions to me. I should do it here if it were possible but there are none to be had upon any terms whatever & it would be undoubtedly a great pity that such a Vessel should be lost for the want of them. To hire would be preferable - which Capt Newton tells me may be done at 20 ps per Month for a p/ai/r.

It is thought by Judges that the Sloop Thunderbolt ought to carry 60 Mules. If you think so, please to desire the Capt to do it. I have mentioned it to him, but he insists that 48 are as many as she can conveniently hold. The more she brings the better. But I do not pretend to be a Judge of the matter & therefore leave it to you. But Without the utmost dispatch her second Voyage may miscarry like the first. Please to send by the Sloops return a full state of accounts between you & Mr. Cruger that I may enter all things properly.

SOURCE: HAM. PAP.

ALEXANDER HAMILTON TO HENRY CRUGER¹

ST. CROIX, 24 February 1772

The 9th Ultimo Capt Robert Gibb handed me your favour dated December 19th 1771 covering Invoice & Bill Lading for Sundrys which were landed in good order agreeable thereto. I sold all your Lumber off immediately at f16pm, luckkily enough, the price of that article being now reducd to f12*, as great quantitys have been lately imported from different parts of the Continent. Indeed, there must be a vast Consumption this Crop, which makes it probably the price will again rise unless the Crops at Windward should fall short, as is said to be the case, whereby we shall stand fair to be overstocked. The Oats & Cheese I have also sold, the former at 6 rys per

*Hereafter the lower case f before any number denotes British pounds Sterling.

Bushel & the latter at 9 Sti² per l³. Your Mahogany is of the very worst kind or I could readily have obtained 6 Sti per foot for it but as at present tis blown upon⁴, tis fit only for end work.

Capt Gibbs was ready to sail seven days after his arrival but was detained two days longer by strong contrary Winds which made it impossible to get out of the harbour. Believe me Sir Nothing was neglected on my part to give him the utmost dispatch & considering that his Cargo was stow'd very Hickledy-pickledy-the proceeding part of it being rather uppermost-I think he was dispatched as soon as could be expected.

Inclosed you have Invoice of Rum & Sugar shipt in the Sloop agreeable to your orders. I could not by any means get your Casks filled by any of the planters but shall dispose of the Hhds, out of which the Rum was started, for your account from which however will proceed a small loss. Also you have account of Sloop's Port-charges etc. which I hope & doubt not you'll find right. You'll be a little surpriz'd when I tell you Capt Gibb was oblig'd to leave his freight money behind. The reason is this. Mr. Burling⁵ could by no means raise his part. Tis true he might have been compeld by Law but that would have been altogether imprudent, for to have enforced payment & to have converted that payment into Joes⁶, which were extremely scarce, would have been attended with a detention of at least 10 to 12 days & the other freights were very triffling, so that the whole now rests with me, and God knows when I shall be able to receive Mr. Burlings part who is long Winded enough, Mr. Beckman⁷ begs to present his best Respects....

SOURCE: HAM. PAP.

¹Father of Nicholas Cruger and a prominent New York merchant active in trade between New York, Bristol and the West Indies.

²Abbreviation for stivers, a Dutch coin, the equivalent of about one penny.

³Pound.

⁴I.e., waterlogged.

⁵Thomas Burling, a St. Croix merchant and member of the firm of Burling and Van Wyck.

⁶Abbreviation of Johannes, a Portuguese coin worth about f5 at that time.

⁷David Beckman, a St. Croix merchant who had formerly been Nicholas Cruger's partner, was a member of an influential New York mercantile family.

ALEXANDER HAMILTON TO NICHOLAS CRUGER

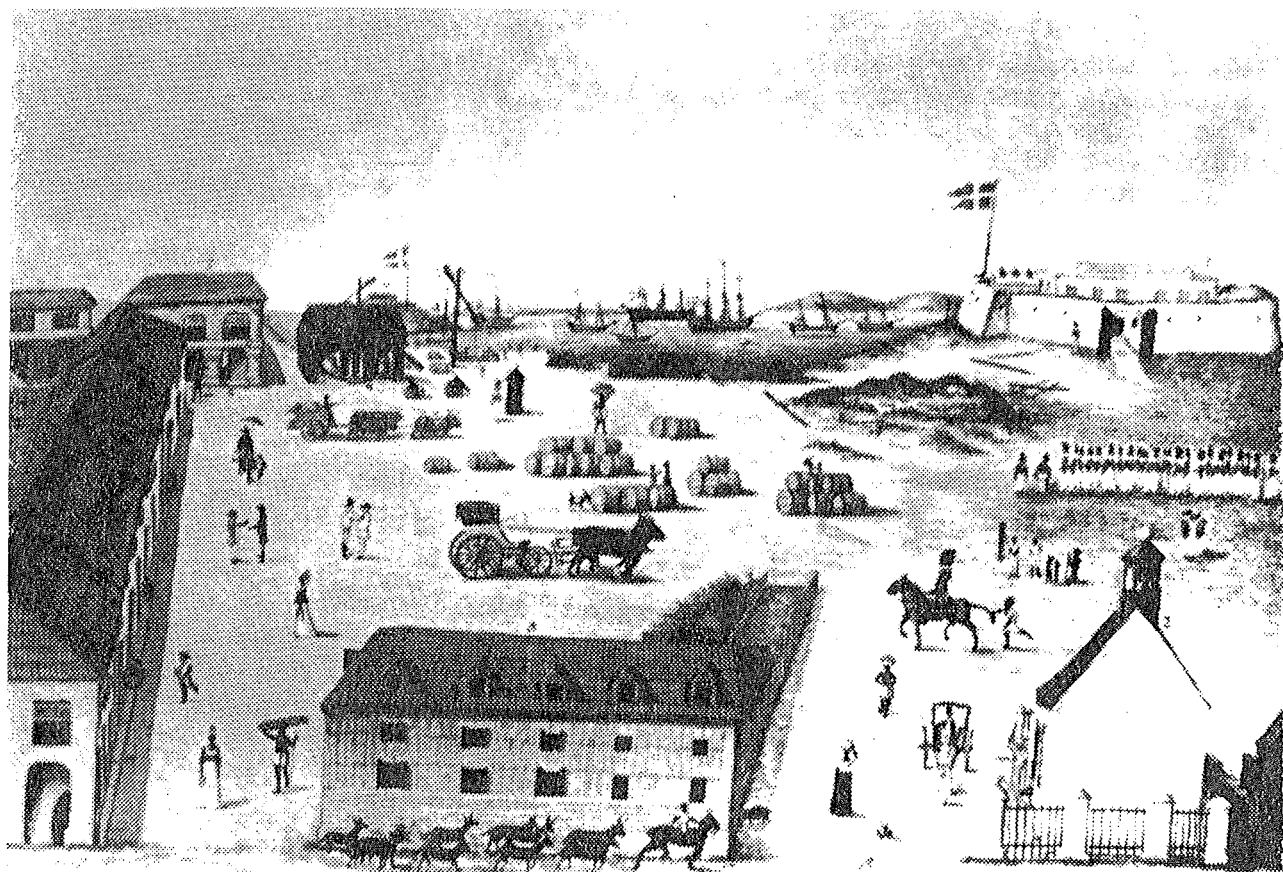
ST CROIX, 24 February 1772

....I now congratulate myself upon the pleasure of addressing you again, but am sorry I shall be oblig'd to communicate some dissatisfactory occurrences.

Your Sloop Thunderbolt arrivd here the 29th of the preceding Month with 41 More Skeletons. A worse parcel of Mules never was seen; she took in at first 48 & lost 7 on the passage. I sent all that were able to walk to pasture, in Number 33. The other 8 could hardly stand for 2 Minutes together & in spite of the greatest care 4 of them are now in Limbo. The Surviving 4 I think are out of Danger, and shall likewise be shortly sent to pasture. I refusd two great offers made me upon their first landing to Wit 70 ps. a head for the Choice of 20, and 15 ps. a Head for the abovementiond Invalids, which may give you a proper idea of the condition they were in. Taking this along with it-that if they had been such as we had reason to hope they would be-I could with pleasure have had f40 round so unfortunate has the Voyage been. However by sending them to pasture I expect to get f100 round for those now alive. 17 are already gone at that price and as they recruit fast the rest I hope will soon go at the same. I pay 2 ps. a Head Montly for pasturage. The Sloop was 27 days on her passage from the Main-not for want of swiftness, for tis now known she Sails well, but from continual Calms & the little wind she had was quite against her. Capt Newton seemd to be much concern'd at his Ill luck tho I believe he had done all in his power to make the voyage Successful. But no Man can command the Winds. The Mules were pretty well chosen & had been once a good parcel. I receivd only a few lines from your Brother: no Sales nor anything else; he excusd himself being Sick. I desird him as directed to furnish the Sloop with a few Guns but she went intirely defenceless to the Main; notwithstanding several Vessels had been oblig'd to put back to get out of the way of the Launches with which the Coast swarms. When Capt Newton urgd him to hire a few Guns for the Sloop He replied to this effect-that I only had mentioned the matter to him but that you had never said a word about it. This last time I mentioned it again & begd the Captain to hire 4 Guns himself if your Brother did not which he has promis'd to do. The Expence will not be above 15. or 20 ps., and one escape may not be followd by a second, neither do I see any reason to run the risque of it. I sent down on your account 10 Hhds Codfish, 8 Hhds Rum, 40 Philad. barrels & 8 Teirces Bread. The Rum Cost 2/7½ & is worth 5 bits a Gallon at Curacoa. I believe those Articles will answer pretty well.

Upon application to Mr Heyns I found I had been misinformd & that Mr. Hunter had no Attorney here; whereupon I wrote him a Letter to St. Thomas & have sent him three Copys of the Same without receiving any answer. Mr. Ringger¹ is here and is going over in a day or two. I intend to give him a Letter & beg he'll ask for an answer and send it over. I am a good deal surprisd at Capt. Hunters Silence.

Brig Nancys Accounts are inclosd. The Tea is arrivd; it Cost 20½ Sti, but there is a discount of 4 per Ct. for prompt payment. I shall send Copy of the Invoice & c. to Mess/rs. Walton & Cruger.



Christiansted Wharf 1815

The Lumber you contracted for is arrivd & I am a good deal puzzled to fulfil your engagements; it is rather early you know to receivd & Cash is scarce. Mr. Beekman would Ship on Freight which would ease the matter but he can receive none yet. However I must manage some how or other. It would be a pity to pay dead freight.

As to introducing Wine, it depends upon Circumstances. There is none here at present and if yours could be brought while the scarcity continues, it would not be difficult to obtain permission to land it. Other-wise it will be impracticable, unless our General² who is momentarily expected should bring any new indulgence concerning that article. But the whole is a chance.

Many changes of Officers are talkd of; in particular tis said Judge Sevel³ will be superceded by Jeger⁴ the informer & the Collector by the present Comptroler, which is all that occurs to me now.
...

SOURCE: HAM. PAP.

¹John Rengger, St. Croix merchant and husband of Nicholas Cruger's sister-in-law.

²Ulrich Wilhelm Roepstorff, Governor General of St. Croix from June 8, 1771, to April 5, 1773.

³Evan H. Sevel (or Sevil), judge of the St. Croix Upper Court.

⁴Hans Jeger, who was a resident and property owner in St. Croix until 1775, when he sailed for Copenhagen.

The Danish islands, like all other New World colonies, were subject to a mercantilistic system designed to regulate their commerce to the advantage of the Mother Country. Most tropical products had to be sent directly to Denmark in Danish vessels. However, in recognition of the islands' great dependency upon the mainland colonies for foodstuffs and plantation supplies, exceptions were made in the regulations to permit a percentage of locally produced rum, molasses and sugar to be shipped to North America in American ships. During the revolutionary era North American - Danish West India trade relations were governed by the Danish Ordinance of April 9, 1764, which made St. Thomas and St. John free-ports, allowed North Americans to import provisions, plantation stores and slaves on payment of a 5 percent duty, and permitted islanders to sell cotton and sugar to North American merchants up to one-half the price of their imported cargo, while the remaining one-half could be in

molasses and rum. Partly because of this and other liberalized regulations the trade of the Danish islands with the mainland expanded appreciably in the revolutionary era. Nevertheless, as the following letter makes clear, American merchants trading with St. Croix faced some imposing obstacles. The letter sets forth some of the conditions confronting American merchants who traded with St. Croix.¹

CHARLES READ, JR. TO JAMES PEMBERTON ²

ST. CROIX, 8 March 1774.

...In answer to your request relative to this Island and its trade, I am to acquaint you that the King of Denmark ... bought this Island from the King of France for 140 thousand pounds, who granted it to a Company [the Danish West Indian Company] to settle and grant the lands subject to such regulations as his Danish Majesty and his Council of Commerce should from time to time make; and that the produce of it should be shipped in Danish bottoms to Copenhagen. It imposed no duties of imports. After sometime they imposed 5% on all imports but salt meat, which was 25% from No/rth/ America. That they should have liberty to export sugars to half the value. Thus it continued until January last, when the duty of 25% was lowered to 5% with like liberty, but a prohibition to butter and cheese. In January the King's Ordinance for weighing all goods and selling by Danish weight, and for Stamping all Books ... was proclaimed. This made a great stirr among the people, but they have been obliged to submit, as no ... account or receipt is valid unless Stamped. But as to the goods tho' weighed, they put their price upon the casks. In order to put a final stop to the trade for English goods a placard was published ten days ago that all dry goods then in the Island should be Stamped, but that in 12 days thereafter if any were found in the shops, stores or Negro baskets, they should be forfeited and owners fined. These Negro baskets are in the nature of our foot pedlars and the best families in the Island have several of them. It has been known here that on petition of the Danish ship masters ... the liberty of exporting sugar under the faith of which cargoes have been landed, has been suspended till the Danish ships are loaded, and tis feared something like it will be done this year; if it should it will involve many people in great distress; but the Government is despotic and the General and his Council can banish any person from the Island and confiscate his estate. There are many Courts here and some of them might be useful, but the fees are very exorbitant and such a shocking venality reigns thro' the whole that an Englishman cannot bear the thought of. Tis no uncommon thing for a Judge to set his price on his Judgement, which if you don't readily pay you are either delayed til your patience is worn out, or, if the matter is not clear as the day ... he may bring a Judgement against you. All the Judges buy, or rather form, the offices from the Crown and it has been known that a subscription has been handed about to enable a judge to live and pay rent.

But to return to the trade. At present the Island is overstocked and Sugars now on board the Brigs cost 48/ and some additional expense, plus 3% for permission, if you have not all due to you that you want to take, you must buy from those who have ... There is a large credit given here, you cannot expect your pay until the Crop, and you are often obliged to wait a second. Rum is here generally lower than in the English Islands ... and quite as good, but then tis non-importable with you. N^{ew} Englandmen will venture at it. The landed estates in the Island are generally dipt in a mortgage called the Dutch Loan, where they took bills for 3.6 9 months, and a year ... and the mortgages were seconded and sent home and all but the first bills protested and the mortgages had failed. This will greatly affect more than one half of the Island and render credit very precarious. The Port charges of a Brigatine are about 25 to 30 pence, besides her duties, which are so much and in a month ... a Chamber of Commerce may make these double. This trade cannot be carried on without much smuggling....

SOURCE: PEMBERTON PAPERS, HSP .

¹For a concise discussion of the famous Ordinance of 1764 and Danish West India - North America trade generally see Jean L. Willis' excellent study "The Trade Between North America and the Danish West Indies 1756-1807, With Special Reference to St. Croix," Columbia University, Ph.D., 1963.

²A prominent Philadelphia merchant with an extensive West India trade, Pemberton was apparently discouraged by Read's letter from trading with St. Croix, for there are no further letters from or to that island in his correspondence.

The trade of the Danish islands with British North America suffered a setback when Great Britain enacted the Sugar Act of 1764, which prohibited the importation of all foreign produced rum into her continental colonies. In an unsuccessful effort to counteract the threat which this pernicious decree posed to St. Croix' lucrative rum trade, the British inhabitants of that island sent a petition to the House of Commons praying that St. Croix be exempted from the Sugar Act. This petition, reproduced below not only provides some idea of the importance of St. Croix' trade with North America, but underscores the prominent economic, social and cultural influence of Englishmen in the historical development of that Island.

PETITION OF THE BRITISH RESIDENTS OF ST. CROIX, 1765.

To the Honourable the Commons of Great Britain, the Parliament assembled:



ST. CROIX 1767

The Case Of a considerable Number of
British and American Merchants, and of
the British Inhabitants and Proprietors
of the Island of Santa Cruz:

SHEWETH,

That the Island of Santa Cruz is situate in Lat. $17^{\circ} 10'$, and Long. $313^{\circ} 20'$; and belongs to the King of Denmark.

In the Year 1741¹, the Danes entered upon a Plan of settling it; but the Undertaking was attended with so little Success, that they soon had Recourse to the Invitation and Encouragement of Foreigners, but the Establishment of every Regulation which could tend to render their Introduction pleasing to themselves and advantageous to the Island.

The Example of Mr. Tuite², an English Gentleman, who made a very large Purchase in Santa Cruz, in 1749, and the considerable Profit which he reaped from it, induced many others, English, Irish, and Scotch, to become Proprietors; insomuch, that it was computed, that at least One-half of the Island was, in 1760, the actual Property of British Subjects. At this Time, it is believed, there are 1200 Families in Santa Cruz; and that, if these, 700 are British.

The Course of Trade, which took Place in Consequence of these Settlements, was this: The American Merchant supplied the British and Danish Planter of Santa Cruz with Negroes and every Utensil employed in Cultivation, Provisions, Lumber, Stock, and all Sorts of British Manufactures for Apparel and Furniture; in Return for which, the British American Merchant received the Rum, Sugar, and Cotton of the Island.

EVERY STAGE OF THE FREIGHT WAS PERFORMED IN BRITISH BOTTOMS.

It is believed, that this Trade has been so far extended, that, for several Years preceding 1764, the annual Amount of the Value of the Produce, which Great Britain drew from the Island of Santa Cruz, was, at least $\text{f}120,000$.

The Importance and national Advantage of this Commerce is easily collected, both from the Nature of the Exports which the Island takes, and of the Produce in which it pays for them.

As to the Exports to the Island; the Island of Santa Cruz is supposed to have a resident Stock of Negroes, to the Number of 16,000; 12,000 of which are computed to have been bought, within Seven Years past, of the British Merchants: 1100 is the annual Supply required to repair and keep up the original Stock: each Negro should be calculated at $\text{f}30$ and therefore it is evident, that, besides $\text{f}360,000$ received by the British Merchant, for the Introduction of 12,000 of the original Stock, the Island of Santa Cruz, as

long as the Commerce continues upon the Footing on which it stood from 1749 to 1764, and the British Merchant continues to furnish it with Negroes, will annually pay to Great Britain £60,000 for Slaves only. To this should be added, upon a moderate Estimate, for Lumber, Provisions, Utensils, Manufactures, etc. the Sum of £60,000; which together made £120,000.

As to the Nature of the Produce of the Island, and the commercial Application and Benefit of that, it will hardly be denied, that the British West India Islands are not able to serve the North Americans with the Rum which their Consumption and Commerce require; and therefore it is hoped, they will not object to the Importation of such a Quantity of it, as Santa Cruz is now known to make, upon Conditions which leave a clear and ample Preference to their own Produce, and which will only not leave the British Trade with an Island, so near British in all real Benefits of Commerce, upon the same Footing, and under the same Hardships and Prohibition, with the French Sugar Settlements.

As to the Sugar grown in the Island, it is not wished on the one hand, to consider it any otherwise than as all other Foreign Sugars; and on the other, it is presumed, that the Freight of these, like all other Foreign Sugars, will be permitted in British Bottoms.

With respect to Cotton, it is needless to observe, how much our extensive improving Cotton Manufacture suffers, for want of an Increase of this Material; but it is essential to observe, that unless the British Merchant be enabled to buy the Santa Cruz Rum, by being admitted to have a Market for it, it is now become impossible for him to depend either upon the Freight of the Sugars, or the Purchase of the Cotton.

For since the Act of Parliament passed in 1764³, prohibiting the Importation of all Foreign Rum into the Plantations, the Court of Denmark has issued an Edict, by which its Inhabitants are forbid, in the Purchase of any foreign Commodities, to pay more than One-half of the whole Value in Sugars; Denmark proposing thereby, to counter-act the Operation of our Statute of Prohibition, by making the Sale of Rum necessary to the Purchase of Sugar at Santa Cruz. This Regulation, with the Act of Prohibition, as Things now stand, must soon destroy the whole British Trade with Santa Cruz; for without Rum, the British Merchant cannot vest his entire Cargo, the Growth of COTTON being not more than enough to make 25 per Cent. on the Value of the remaining Half of the Cargoes; the Island yielding no other material Produce, and the current Money being a base Coin, not to be got at its real Value, and not capable of a Foreign Currency.

The British Proprietors of this Island, having thus ventured humbly to represent the real Situation of it, the Nature, Extent, and Articles of the Trade carried on there, from the Several Parts of His Majesty's Dominions, and the final Balance of it to the Great reasonable Favour of the Parliament, not expecting to be put upon the same Footing with the British West Indian Islands; but,

on the Contrary, solliciting only that, being British Subjects, and in so large a Proportion Proprietors of an Island, titularly Danish, but to almost every Purpose of Commerce actually British, it may be thought not unreasonable to give them, in the Admission of so small a Quantity as 7000 Hogsheads of Rum, a middle Situation between our own West India Islands, and the Foreign Settlements in general: and that, not merely for the Sake of the Sale of this Quantity of Rum, but to prevent the Loss of the several Branches of Trade, and the Exportation of the several British Manufactures, which the Edict beforementioned has now rendered dependent upon it⁴.

SOURCE: WEST INDIA MANUSCRIPTS, IRF.

¹Actually, Denmark purchased St. Croix from France in 1734 and settlement commenced immediately.

²Nicholas Tuite, formerly of Montserrat, who owned several plantations on St. Croix.

³The Sugar Act of 1764.

⁴It would appear that the effects of the Sugar Act were not as disastrous as anticipated. An active smuggling network, chiefly through Connecticut, was soon in operation, and at the start of the American Revolution St. Croix was providing 13 percent of all rum imported into the thirteen colonies. See John J. McCusker, Jr., "The Rum Trade and the Balance of Payments of the Thirteen Continental Colonies, 1650-1775," University of Pittsburgh, Ph.D., 1970, p. 351.

On the eve of the American Revolution the Danish West Indies were governed by an authoritarian political system which vested absolute power in the hands of the Danish King and his representatives. The British referred to the system as despotic, and indeed, in contrast to the British colonial system which accorded powerful colonial assemblies with considerable control over local affairs, this assessment rings true. In the Danish colonies all decisions respecting local government were made in Denmark. Local assemblies, known as Burgher Councils, did exist in both St. Thomas and St. Croix, but their role was advisory and administrative, and subordinate to the Governor-General. For the most part the islanders suffered silently under authoritarian rule. Occasionally, however, a particularly onerous regulation would galvanize them into action, leading to demands for a more responsive colonial administration and increased self-government. One such incident occurred on the eve of the American Revolution, when in 1773 the King of Denmark imposed a Stamp Act on his colonial subjects. This act, so similar to the infamous Stamp Act which had first sparked American resistance to despotic rule eight years

earlier, required that stamps had to be purchased for most public and private transactions. News of this exacting regulation provoked immediate discontent in the islands, as is illustrated by the first two documents reproduced below. Perhaps inspired by events in America, one hundred and forty Cruzan merchants and planters petitioned Denmark in January 1774, to repeal the act. When their plea fell on deaf ears, the St. Croix Burgher Council sent a follow-up memorial, part of which is reproduced in the third selection below. Characteristically, Denmark ignored the Cruzan remonstrances and the despised Stamp Act remained in force.

PETER MARKOE TO ABRAHAM MARKOE¹

ST. CROIX, 4 March, 1774

...The Stamp Act² was put in Force about a week ago. It is looked upon as the greatest Grievance This Island has ever known. The Money arising from this Tax, though very considerable, is the smallest Part of the Grievance. The cruel Restraint it lays upon Trade, the Embarrassment it occasions to many (and indeed to almost all the) Inhabitants, who are ignorant of the Laws and Language of Denmark, and the numberless Opportunities it affords to Government of punishing those, who transgress thro' Ignorance and not thro' Design, will be severely felt by all Ranks. The Inhabitants have petitioned the Burgher-Council and the Burgher-Council³ have petitioned or intend petitioning the King to have it repealed³.

I have been informed that it is your Intention I should go to England this Spring to take Orders. But as I have heard nothing of it immediately from yourself, I should be glad if you would signify your Pleasure to me on that Subject by the first Opportunity. As I have Reason to believe you never concurred heartily in my Desire of being a Clergyman, I am willing to think no more of that Way of Life; nevertheless if I find that you heartily approve of it I will abide by my first and most prevailing Inclination.

Several Friends have of late hinted to me the Advantages and Emoluments I might acquire by being acquainted with the Danish Laws and Language they have assured me that the present set of Lawyers are of the lowest Class, both with Respect to Character and abilities; that if a Man respectable in Character and Connection were to practise the Law in these Islands he would most assuredly make his Fortune, be of infinite Service to his Friends, and afford Protection to the greater Part of the Inhabitants, who are certainly very much harrassed by a Parcel of Petti-foggers. It is too well known that a Man of broken Fortune and Broken Character

in Copenhagen has immediate recourse to St. Croix to reestablish both. It is very certain that they often retrieve their Fortunes. As for their Characters, they may be esteemed by their own Party; but it is a lamentable Truth that any of his Majesty's Subjects born an Englishman who has a Dane for his Competitor stands a very poor Chance at Law....

SOURCE: ABRAHAM MARKOE JR. LETTERS, MARKOE PAPERS, HSP.

¹Abraham Markoe was a wealthy Cruzan planter and merchant, who had recently taken up residence in Philadelphia. His fascinating story is well told by Florence Lewisohn in Chapter I of her pamphlet, "What So Proudly We Hail" The Danish West Indies and the American Revolution, (1975). Peter Markoe, Abraham's son, remained on St. Croix to manage the family's affairs.

²Decreed in Denmark in 1773, this Act required stamps to be purchased for most public and private transactions. It particularly hurt merchants, who were required to fill out so many papers.

³In January, 1774, one hundred and forty Cruzan merchants and planters petitioned the King of Denmark for the repeal of this exacting regulation, but to no effect.

FROM A CORRESPONDENT IN ST. CROIX 1774

When heaven, indulgent blessed this land
with peace and plenty crown'd
Like heavenly dew von Prock's* hand
dispens'd his kindness round.

But base ingratitude soon took place
In these polluted times
Heaven sent a scourage to all our race
to expiate our crimes.

It pity our deplored state
Heaven changed the mighty woe
Till seeing what was wrapt in fate
Might prove our overthrow.

But what repentence have we shewn
To Heaven's indulgent care
Tho' storms and hurricanes we have known
When Roegstorp* governed here.

O! be that name forever dear
While age to age shall roll
When storms and plagues and famine near
Think on his generous soul.

In vain we weep, in vain we sigh

His loss lament in vain
No friendly aid, no help is nigh
Nought best despair and pain.

For now behold an impious hand
To curse our wretched race
Has dealt destruction round the land
And made the Stamps take place.

May Heaven appeased reverse our fate
While horrors haunt his bed
And sleepless vengeance ever wait
To blast his guilty head. Amen.

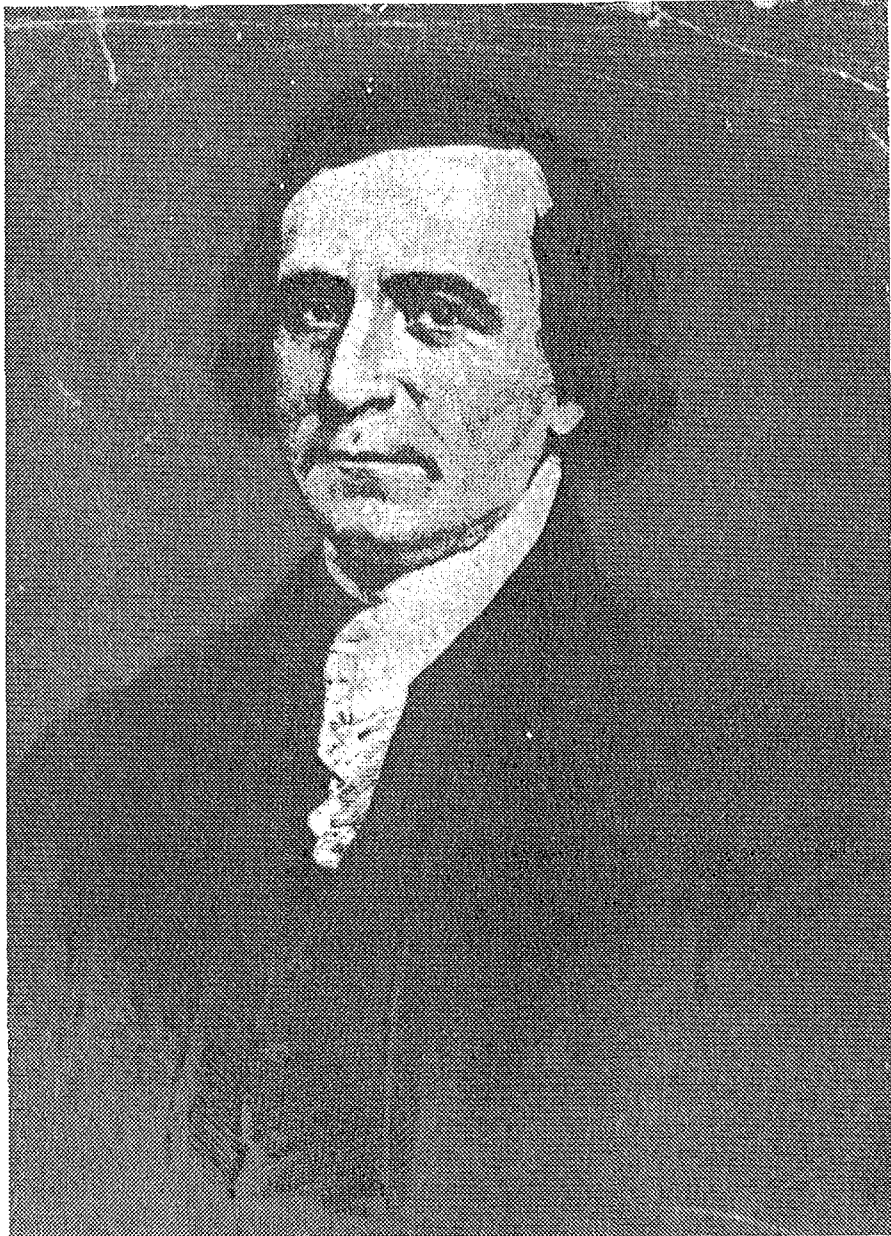
*These gentlemen when they governed St. Croix made the happiness of the people the rule of their conduct, but the present governor /Peter Clausen/ has levied a tax by way of a Stamp on the inhabitants of that Island, which greatly distresses them, especially those born in the British Dominions, who forget they live in an arbitrary Government.

SOURCE: THE CARIBBEAN AND GENERAL GAZETTE, 5 FEBRUARY, 1774.

PETITION OF THE ST. CROIX BURGHER COUNCIL TO THE KING OF DENMARK, 1774

...your Majesty's as well as other Colonies in the West Indies cannot subsist without the assistance of North America as from thence we are continually furnished with all kinds of Provisions and Lumber which no State or Power in Europe can by any means do; for it's well-known, that North America has for some years past even saved great parts of Europe from famine by her assistance of corn wheat and flour. We for that reason have always enjoyed the privilege of that trade to this colony through the Indulgence of your most gracious Majesty's Royal Predecessors, but under such restrictions as made provisions amount to us almost double of what was ordinarily paid by other colonies. Now that the stamp paper is enforced we must expect that the North Americans will entirely forsake us as the very name of stamp paper is obnoxious to them and will operate to us a prohibition, should this be the case, the Planters here will be obliged to turn a considerable part of their sugar plantations into provisions. This will greatly distress the planters/ however necessary for the support of Life/ and lessen your Majesty's revenues, and also put a stop to the advantage our Mother Country reaps from the Sugar Colonies....

SOURCE: QUOTED FROM JEAN LOUISE WILLIS, "THE TRADE BETWEEN NORTH AMERICA AND THE DANISH WEST INDIES, 1756-1807, WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO ST. CROIX," PH.D. THESIS, COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY. 1963, p. 81.



PHILIP FRENEAN

During the revolutionary era most North Americans viewed the Danish West Indies as valuable trading partners; a source of personal profit, or, during the war, as an arsenal of democracy. But at least one American, the poet Philip Freneau, who lived on St. Croix in the years 1776-1777, perceived them in a different light. Seeking a sanctuary from the pressures and demands of the revolutionary struggle in which he had been an active participant, Freneau, similar to today's tourist, regarded St. Croix as a tropical paradise in which man could reestablish contact with luxuriant nature. Freneau's prose "Account of the Island of Santa Cruz" and his poem "the Beauties of Santa Cruz" written in 1776, provide us with a unique glimpse of that island at the outbreak of the struggle for American independence as seen through the sensitive eyes of the "poet of the revolution". The reader's attention is particularly drawn to Freneau's anti-slavery sentiments, which were an early expression of America's anti-slavery movement.

PHILIP FRENEAU: ACCOUNT OF THE ISLAND OF SANTA CRUZ: CONTAINING AN ORIGINAL POEM ON THE BEAUTIES OF THAT ISLAND. IN A LETTER TO A.P. ESQ.

As I resided a considerable time on the island of Santa Cruz, it is but natural I should say something concerning it. The appearance of this island as you approach it from the ocean, is inexpressibly beautiful. The whole isle is divided into square plantations cutting each other every way at right angles. The verdure of the canes, which are of a most lively green, afford a pleasure to the eye which is not so striking in any northern country. Santa Cruz is about 28 or 30 miles in length from east to west; and at most is not more than 4 miles broad, and in general much less.

...There are two towns on St. Cruz, Bassend or Bassin, so called formerly by the French, i.e. Bason, in respect to the harbour, and a smaller town at the west end called by the Danes Frederickstadt, at the other is Christianstadt. Bassend is situate upon a pretty level spot at the foot of a mountain close to the water side; it may contain 5 or 600 houses, some of them very handsome buildings of stone, but in general of wood. The harbour is defended from the sea by a continued reef of rocks upon which the sea breaks with a continual roar. There are only two narrow passages through this reef into the harbour, one for ships the other for sloops and vessels of a moderate draught of water. This harbour will contain 2 or 300 sail of vessels, and is always as smooth as a mill-pond, with excellent anchoring ground in one, two, three, or four fathoms, but not much more I believe. Within the harbour is a small island containing three or four acres of ground, upon which is built an elegant edifice for the use of the king's pilot who keeps his look-out from hence for all vessels that heave in sight. The pilot is here a man of consequence, being ranked as a king's officer, and keeps

only one small sloop-rigged boat with a deputy, who, with three or four Negroes, conducts all the business: There is a town wharf here but not water enough for any thing but boats to come alongside; all the shipping are obliged to lie at anchor. Within a stone throw of this wharf to the eastward stands a handsome fort, called Christian-swaern, which commands the whole harbour. Bassend is twelve miles from the most eastwardly part of the island, and as well as Frederickstadt, is situated upon the north side. From this town up to the east end of the island is generally laid out in plantations of cotton, or else pasture lands for keeping mules, sheep, neat cattle and the like: But when you travel from Bassend down towards the west, the scene is inexpressibly charming, and even those that have no taste to admire the beauties of nature, would at the view be forced to confess that the vales of Paradise were now displayed to the eye in their primeaval beauty. From the summits of the hills which rise with an easy ascent, you look forward as far as the eye can reach over the most enchanting plains and little vallies. On the right hand towards the north are high mountains bordering on the sea covered with wood. To use the words of Milton,

"Mountains on whose barren breast,
The labouring clouds do often rest."

Towards the south the land sloped away with a gentle descent towards the sea, which you have in sight all the way. The square plantations of sugar cane with their regular intervals; the tall cocoa-nut trees, with the planter's habitations surrounded with orange and other fruit trees; the exact straightness of the road and the charming mildness of the climate, give one the idea of an enchanted island, or such as we read of in romance. Too much cannot be said of the happy climate of this and the neighbouring islands. The sky is ever serene and unclouded in comparison to that of the northern countries; there are never any heavy continued rains, the land is watered by gentle showers, and it is the rarest thing in the world to lose sight of the sun for two hours together after he is above the horizon. The days and nights are pretty equally divided, each never being much more or less than twelve hours. From ten o'clock in the morning til four in the afternoon the heat is somewhat troublesome, but even then you are fanned with a brisk dry wind always from the eastward, which renders it as least tolerable. The evenings and nights are cool and refreshing. The moon and stars shine with an extraordinary brightness, owing I suppose to their reflection on the water of the ocean, which surrounds these happy lands. The town at the west end is but mean and ordinary, consisting of a fort, and perhaps 80 or 90 wooden houses. The harbour is nothing but an open road, where however ships lie in the utmost security at their moorings, the bottom being good for anchorage, and the wind always offshore. About two miles to the eastward of this town along the seashore, is the estate of capt. Hanson, into which the sea has formed a beautiful little bay, called Buttler's Bay, about 100 yards across; it has a sandy shore and an excellent landing, though all the rest of the shore is sharp craggy rocks. My agreeable residence at this place for above two years off and on during the wars in America, renders the idea of it but too pleasing, and makes me feel much the same anxiety at the distance from it as Adam did after he was banished from

the bowers of Eden.

The only disagreeable circumstance attending this island, which it has in common with the rest, is the cruel and detestable slavery of the negroes. "If you have tears prepare to shed them now." A description of the slavery they endure would be too irksome and unpleasant to me; and to those who have not beheld it, would be incredible. Sufficient be it to say, that no class of mankind in the known world undergo so complete a servitude as the common negroes in the West-Indies. It casts a shade over the native charms of the country; it blots out the beauties of the eternal spring which Providence has there ordained to reign, and amidst all the profusion of bounties which nature has feattered, the brightness of the heaven, the mildness of the air, and the luxuriancy of the vegetable kingdom, it leaves me melancholy and disconsolate, convinced that there is no pleasure in this world without its share of pain. And thus the earth, which were it not for the lust of pride and dominion, might be an earthly paradise, is, by the ambition and overbearing nature of mankind, rendered an eternal scene of desolation, woe, and horror; the weak goes to the wall, while the strong prevails; and after our ambitious phrenzy had turned the world upside down, we are contented with a narrow spot, and leave our follies and cruelties to be acted over again, by every succeeding generation. But to return: the only natural failing I know of here, is, the hurricanes, which are storms of wind that blow with an inconceivable fury, and often carry away all before them. They are so much the more dangerous, as they do not blow steadily from one point, but often go round the compass in less than half an hour. There are melancholy remains in Santa Cruz, of the havoc they made in 1772. There was also one on Sept. 7. 1776, while I was on the island. It exceeded any thing I had ever seen before; but however did not do much damage, the strongest of it not lasting above six hours.

I believe the best thing I can do with the rest of this paper is to transcribe a few dull heavy lines which I composed near two years ago on the spot.

Sick of thy northern glooms, come shepherd seek
less rigorous climes, and a more friendly sky:
Why shouldst thou toil amidst that frozen ground,
Where half year snows a barren prospect lie?

When thou mayst go where never frost was seen,
Or north-west winds with cutting fury blow;
Where never ice congeal'd the limpid stream,
Where never mountain crown'd its head with snow.

Two weeks, with prosperous gales, thy barque shall bear
To isles that flourish in perpetual green,
Where richest herbage glads each shady vale,
And ever-verdant plants on every hill are seen.

Nor dread the dangers of the billowy deep:
Autumnal gales shall safely waft thee o'er:

Put off the timid heart, or man unblest,
Ne'er shalt thou reach this gay enchanting shore.

So some dull minds, in spite of age and care,
Are grown so wedded to this globe below,
They never wish to cross death's dusky main
That parting them and happiness, doth flow.

Tho' reason's voice must whisper to the fowl
That Nobler climes for man the Gods design.
Come shepherd haste the rising breezes blow:
No more the slumbering winds thy barque confine.

From the vast caverns of old Ocean's bed,
St. Cruz arising laves her humed waist:
The threatening waters roar on every side;
For every side by ocean is embrac'd.

Sharp craggy rocks repel the surging brine,
Whose cavern'd sides by restless ocean wore,
Resemblance claim to that remoter isle,
Where once the prince of winds the sceptre bore.

Betwixt the Tropick and the Midway Line,
In happiest climate lies this envy'd isle;
Trees bloom throughout the year, flowers ever blow,
And fragrant Flora wears a lasting smile.

No lowering skies are here; the neighbouring sun,
Clear and unveil'd his brilliant journey goes;
Each morn emerging from the azure main,
And sinking there each evening to repose.

In June's fair month, the spangled traveller gains
The utmost limits of his northern way,
And blesses with his beams cold lands remote,
Sad Greenland's coast and Hudson's frozen bay.

The shivering swains of those unhappy climes
Behold the mid-way monarch thro' the trees:
We feel his friendly heat, his zenith beams
Temper'd with cooling showers and trade-wind breeze.

No threatening tides upon our island rise:
Gay Cynthia scarce disturbs the ocean here:
No waves approach her orb, and she as kind
Attracts no water to her silver sphere.

The happy waters boast, of various kinds,
Unnumber'd myriads of the scaly race:
Sportive they play above the delug'd sand,
(Gay as their clime) in ocean's ample vase.

Some streak'd with burnish'd gold resplendent glare;
Some cleave the limpid deep all silver'd o'er;
Some clad in living green delight the eye;
Some red, some blue, of mingled colours more.

Here glides the spangled dolphin through the deep;
The Bulky, spouting whales more distant stray;
The huge green turtles wallow through the wave,
Well pleas'd alike with land or water they.

The rainbow cuts the deep of varied green;
The well fed grouper lurks remote below;
The swift bonetta swims and flies by turns;
The diamond coated angels kindle as they go.

Delicious to the taste, salubrious food,
Which might some frugal Samian sage allure,
To curse the fare of his abstemious school,
And turn for once a cheerful Epicure!

Hail, verdant isle! through they dark woods I rove,
And learn the nature of each native tree-
The fustic hard, the poisonous manchineal,
Which for its fragrant apple pleaseth thee.

Enticing to the small, fair to the eye,
But deadly poison in the taste is found:
O shun the dangerous fruit, nor taste, like Eve,
This interdicted fruit in Eden's ground.

The lowly mangrove fond of wat'ry soil;
The white bark'd gregory rising high in air;
The mastic in the woods you may descry;
Tamarinds and lofty plumb trees flourish there.

Sweet orange groves in lonely vallies rise,
And drop their fruits unnoticed and unknown:
The cooling acid limes in hedges grow;
The juicy lemons swell in shades their own.

Sweet spongy plumbs on trees wide spreading hang;
The happy flavour'd pine grows crested from the ground.
Plump grenadillo's and guava's small,
With melons in each wood and lawn abound.

The conic form'd cashew, of juicy kind,
Which bears at once an apple and a nut;
Whose poison coat indignant to the lips,
Doth in its cell a wholesome kernel shut.

The plaintain and banana flourish here,
Of hasty growth, and love to fix their root,
Where some soft stream of ambling water goes,
To give full moisture to their clustered fruit.

No other trees so vast a leaf can boast,
So broad, so long --- through these refresh'd I stray;
And tho' fierce Sol his beams directly shed,
Those friendly leaves shall shade me all the way,

And tempt the cooling breeze to hasten there,
With its sweet odorous breath to charm the grove,
High shades and cooling air, while underneath,
A little stream by mossy banks doth rove.

Where once the indian dames enchanted slept,
Or fondly kiss'd the moon light eyes away:
The lovers fled, the tearful stream remains,
And only I console it with my lay.

Pomegranates grace yon vale, and sweet-sops there
Ready to fall, require thy helping hand;
Nor yet neglect the papaw nor mammee,
Whose slighted trees with fruit unheeded stand.

Those shaddocks juicy shall thy taste delight;
And yon high fruits that over-top the wood,
And cling in clusters to the mother tree--
The cocoa nut, rich milky healthful food.

Cassada shrubs abound, whose poison root,
Supplies the want of snow-white northern flour:
This grated fine, and steep'd in water fair,
Forsakes each particle of noxious power.

But chief, the glory of these Indian isles,
Springs from the sweet uncloying sugar cane:
Hence comes the planter's wealth: Hence commerce sends
Such floating piles beyond the western main.

Whoe'er thou art, that leav'st thy native shore,
And shalt to fair West-India climates come,
Taste not the enchanting plant -- to taste forbear,
If ever thou would'st reach thy much-lov'd home.

Ne'er through the isle permit they feet to rove,
Or if thou dost, let prudence lead the way;
Forbear to taste the magic sugar-cane;
Forbear to taste what will complete thy stay.

Whoever sips of this enchanting juice--
Delicious nectar, fit for Jove's own hall,
Returns no more from his lov'd Santa Cruz,
But quits his friends, his country, and his all,

And thinks no more of home --- Ulysses so
Dragg'd off by force, his sailors from the shore,
Where Lotos grew; and had not force prevailed,
They never would have sought their country more.

No annual toil inters this juicy plant,
The stalks lopp'd off, the fresh'ning show'rs prolong,
To future years, unfading and secure,
The root so vig'rous, and the juice so strong.

On yonder peaked hill fresh harvests rise,
Where wretched he --- the Ethiopian swain,
Oft o'er the ocean turns his wishful eyes,
To isles remote high luming o'er the main.

He pants a land of freedom and repose,
Where cruel slavery never sought to reign.
O quit thee them, my muse, and tell my why
Yon abject trees lie scatter'd o'er the plain?

These climes, lest nature should have been too kind,
And man have sought his happiest heaven below,
Are torn with mighty winds, fierce hurricanes,
Nature convuls'd in every form of woe.

Scorn not yon lonely vale of trees so rest:
There plaintain groves late grew of lovely green---
The orange Flourish'd and the lemon bore---
The genius of the isle dwelt there unseen.

Wild were the skies, affrighted nature groan'd,
As though approach'd the last decisive day---
Skies blaz'd around, and bellowing winds had nigh
Dislodg'd those cliffs and tore those hills away.

And how, alas! could these fair trees withstand,
The killing fury of so fierce a blast,
That storm'd along the plain, seiz'd every grove,
And delug'd with a sea yon mournful waste?

But now the winds are past, the storm subsides,
All nature smiles again serenely gay,
The beauteous groves renew'd--how shall I leave
My green retreat at Butler's verdant bay.

Sain would I view my native climes again,
But murder marks the cruel Briton there---
Contented here I rest, in spite of pain,
And quaff the enlivning juice in spite of care.

Winter and winter's gloom are far remov'd,
Eternal spring with smiling summer join'd.
Absence and death, or heart corroding care,
Why should they cloud the sunshine of the mind?

The drowsy pelican wings home his way,
The misty night fits heavy on the sea,
Yon lagging sail drags slowly o'er the main.
Night and its kindred glooms are nought to me.

To-morrow's sun new paints the faded scene;
Though deep in ocean sink his western beams,
His spangled chariot shall arise more clear,
More radiant from the drowsy land of dreams.

Then shepherd haste, and leave behind thee far,
The bloody plains and iron glooms above,
Quit thy cold northern star, and here enjoy,
Beneath the smiling skies this land of love.

Soon shall the genius of the fertile soil,
A new creation to thy view unfold,
Admire the works of nature's liberal hand,
And scorn the vulgar bait, all-potent gold.

Yet if persuaded by no lay of mine,
You still admire your climes of frost and snow,
And pleas'd prefer above our southern groves,
The darksome forests that around thee grow,---

Still there remain---thy native air enjoy,
Repel the tyrant who thy peace invades,
While pleas'd I trace the vales of Santa Cruz,
And sing with rapture her inspiring shades.

SOURCE: THE UNITED STATES MAGAZINE, VOL. I. NO. 2 (FEB. 1779) pp. 81-8.

¹A longer version of this poem, and a biographical sketch can be found in Poems of Freneau, ed. Harry H. Clark, (New York, 1929).

SECTION II:

AN ARSENAL OF DEMOCRACY:

THE VIRGIN ISLANDS AND THE WINNING OF AMERICAN INDEPENDENCE

A shared colonial experience, together with the myriad social, economic and cultural bonds that linked the inhabitants of the Danish islands with those of the continent helped generate considerable sympathy among the islanders for the Americans in their struggle for independence. Influenced by visiting American merchant seamen, resident patriots like Philip Freneau, and local newspaper accounts of the revolutionary contest many Danish and British islanders endorsed the democratic tenets which animated the American rebels.

The first three letters reproduced below clearly illustrate that philosophical commitment as well as economic self-interest induced many Danish West Indian residents to actively aid, and even fight for, the rebel cause. The letters of John Smith and Daniel Roberdeau show that at least some British Virgin Islanders also sympathized with the rebels, but that in their case any overt assistance similar to that practiced by the Danish islanders could result in confiscation of property and social ostracism.

JOHN HEYLIGER¹ TO THE CONTINENTAL CONGRESS

ST. CROIX, September 1776

My Attachment to your Continent by the tenderest & most endearing Connexions of Affinity & Friendship, the Zeal and Ardor I feel for the glorious Cause of Liberty & Justice in which you are embarked, and my ardent Wishes for your Prosperity and Success in your present laudable Struggle against Tyranny & Oppression, and that your happy Country (happy indeed, if it can under your Sage & prudent Counsels, inspired and directed by unerring Providences, vindicate and ascertain the sacred Rights which it claims, & hand them down to a remote Posterity) may be in all futures Ages an Asylum & Sanctuary for the Sons of Want & Oppression of all Nations: incline me to render you every Assistance within the narrow Sphere of my Ability & Influence. It is with this View that I have taken the Liberty to recommend to your Attention and Friendship the Bearer Lieutenant von Hederick, by Birth a German, who has from his Infancy been trained up in the military Life, and is esteemed an Experienced well disciplined Officer, and to be endured with every Accomplishment which can adorn the Character of a good Soldier. Hearing that you were raising and embodying four battalions of his Countrymen, who were to be commanded only by German Officers, altho' in much honour and actual Service on this Island, where during Eight Years Residence he has supported a very unexceptionable good Character, He immediately proposed himself for the Continental Service, provided he could be properly recommended to your Honourable Body, and might expect Promotion adequate to his Merit.

And altho' I have the Honour of being personally acquainted but with few Gentlemen of your very respectable Body, I gladly undertook this Office, & it gives me particular Pleasure in assuring you that it's highly probable that several other very respectable Officers in this Island may be inclinable to follow his Example, provided they cou'd meet with due Encouragement.

You well know the Nature of our Government; Lieutenant Hederick's ostensible Motive therefore for going to your Continent is the Recovery of his Health. And if he is well received, I make no

Doubt, others of our best Officers will in a short time find themselves indisposed also; for I have the honour to assure you that most of the Danes of this Island, and the Germans almost to a Man, are warmly attached to your glorious Cause.

I can only add, that if in any Thing I can serve you while here, you may lay your Commands on him who is with the most perfect Esteem.

SOURCE: CONTINENTAL CONGRESS PAPERS, USNA.

¹The head of a prominent Cruzan family which had come from St. Eustatius, Heyliger was perhaps the richest planter in St. Croix at the time, as well as a leading merchant with considerable commercial connections in North America.

CORNELIUS HAIGHTZ¹ TO THE CONTINENTAL CONGRESS

ST. CROIX, 3 September 1776

I take the Liberty to recomend Lieutenant Hederick to you being a gentlemen in the king of Denmark's service. His brother is Capt. of the fort in this Island. He has been in the army since a child and he comes to serve you and America in general with a good heart. He gives up his commission here on purpose to serve in America in the grand struggle for Liberty. He has many Letters of recommendation, and I hope he will meet with Encouragement from the honorable Congress.

SOURCE: CONTINENTAL CONGRESS PAPERS, USNA.

¹A St. Croix merchant.

JOHN HANSON¹ TO JOHN HANCOCK

ST. CROIX, 14 August 1776

To Say any thing in Recommendation of myself will be presumptuous, to promise much will be idle; for events depend on the Almighty. I foresee an Independency must of Necessity be declared. I am a friend & Ever have been to the Righteous Cause of America, & as such, I offer you my heart & hand, if I can be of Service at this Critical Moment. If my Service is accepted, please to inform me time enough to Settle my affairs here & to find a fast Sailing frigate to Conduct myself & family to America - if she is of force, I may probably bring you one of King Georgey's frigates with me.

I am with Hearty wishes for your Success.

SOURCE: CONTINENTAL CONGRESS PAPERS, USNA.

¹An American merchant and plantation owner in St. Croix, Hanson's sympathy with the American cause probably owed much to Philip Freneau, who worked as his secretary. See Florence Lewisohn The American Revolution's Second Front: Persons & Places Involved in the Danish West Indies & Some Other West Indian Islands (1976), pp. 22-3.

JOHN SMITH TO TENCH COXE¹

TORTOLA, 22 October 1774

I was in St. Croix my dear Tench at the Time of Duncan's Arrival. It is impossible for you to conceive the pleasure which the Sight of a Philadelphia Vessel gave me. No one can have an Idea of it, but he who like me is separated from so agreeable a circle of Friends & Acquaintances.

You could not have shown a greater Mark of your Friendship than in sending me good Tidings concerning my dear Connexions in Philada. Their Welfare & happiness is so essential to my own that you must need think I am very anxious to hear often from them....

I am highly pleased with the Bishop of St. Aspath's Speech². No one can read it without glowing with the Zeal of the Patriot. The Perseverance of the Americans in opposing the Measures of Administration gives me the greatest Pleasure, & I am induced to think from their Unanimity that we shall extricate ourselves out of our present Difficulties & entirely frustrate the Wicked Designs of him who proudly said that he would lay all America at his feet. I shall be obliged to you for any News you can collect, for being hearty in the Cause of America I am desirous of being acquainted with every Step that her Patriots take in Defence of Liberty....

SOURCE: TENCH COXE PAPERS, HSP.

¹John Smith was a resident of Tortola. Tench Coxe was a young Philadelphia merchant, whose commercial ventures in the West Indies and elsewhere during the American Revolution helped launch him on an extremely successful career as a businessman and statesman in the new American Republic.

²A speech in favor of the American colonists in their dispute with the British government.

DANIEL ROBERDEAU TO THE CONTINENTAL CONGRESS

PHILADELPHIA, 9 July 1781

To the Honorable the Delegates of the United States of North America
in Congress Assembled--

The remonstrance of Danl. Roberdeau, Citizen of Pennsylvania.
Most respectfully sheweth,

That among other cruelties of the British Nation in carrying on
their offensive operations against these United States, he indiv-
idually sustains a species of Barbarism contrary to the known max-
ims of war among civilized Nations.

That he has no possible means of redress but by claiming the
protection of the Supreme authority of these States, which pro-
bably may also reach the cases of others, the leige Subjects thereof.

That the aggrivance complained of is a law of the Island of
Tortola, under the Jurisdiction of Great Britain, whereby your Re-
monstrant is deprived of a very considerable part of his Estate, in
particular of the benefit of a Bond from a certain John Purcell an
Inhabitant and Possessour of a large landed Estate, and other Ef-
fects in the Island aforesaid, or was so possessed when, by an Ini-
quitous law of said Island, your Remonstrant's Interest was confis-
cated on Account of his well known attachment ot the American cause.

That even if no other such case should occur, your Remonstrant
prays he may be allowed to depend Individually for protection on
your Honorable House, that, in any treaty of peace that may happen,
restitution of his property so as aforesaid violated may be stip-
ulated; or that so much of British property may be also confiscated
as to make good to your Remonstrant the principal and Interest of
said bond, as also his claim of just Debts due from other Inhabit-
ants of said Island, whereby the Honor of the United States may be
vindicated, as well as the property of your Remonstrant secured.

SOURCE: CONTINENTAL CONGRESS PAPERS, USNA.

Throughout the revolution Danish West Indians supplied Americans with a wide
assortment of European goods particularly, gunpowder and other war material.
Technically, much of this trade was illegal, for in May, 1775, Governor Clausen
prohibited islanders from exporting arms and powder to the Rebellious colonies.
A few months later King Christian IV issued an edict specifically forbidding the
exportation of any war material into the Danish islands and prohibited Danish
subjects to engage in any trade involving such goods¹. The character of this
commerce at the outbreak of the revolution is indicated by the following four
documents.

G.C. TO ADMIRAL PARRY²

ST. CROIX, 10 May 1775

By this opportunity I take leave to communicate that a combination is between this place & the Brittish Collonies of America. I am informed this day that they have Shipped from this place to Norfolk in Virginia 42 Barrells of Gun Power & several pieces of Cannon.... They have 36 Barrells more ready to Ship & 8 pieces of Cannon. I have wrote to Lord North relative to this matter. Lest my letter wou'd be opened & being under an arbitrary Government, I am apprehensive to sign my Name. I live in Charles Town, South Carolina, where I wou'd be glad to execute any of your commands /and/ from whence I will sign my name in full. A line directed to G.C. at the Coffee house, Charles Town, South Carolina will come to hand.

SOURCE: PRO. ADM. 1/309.

¹For these prohibitions see Aage Rasch, "Forbudet at 4 oktober 1775 mod eksport af vaaben til de amerikanske oprørere," Historik Tidsskrift, IV, (4 Hefte, 1961), pp. 467-82.

²Commander-in-Chief of the British Leeward and Windward Squadron.

WILLIAM NEIL TO CHARLES CARROLL¹

BALTIMORE, 12 February, 1776

Before this no doubt you have heard of ill fate of the schooner Nancy at St Eustatia, I have as yet no letters from my Capt or supercargo I daily expect to hear from them-as soon as I do shall advise you - as to the vessels being taken that account is confirmed different ways which I am sorry for - I have provided a Cargo of flour some time ago expecting the Schooner in and had no doubt of her bringing ammunition which would have got me a permission to have loaded her out on my own acct - I have a good deal of money due me from St Croix a Dannish Island near St Statia. if your honourable Council would give me liberty to send a Schooner I now have here, to that place where I have a number of Correspondence which I know to be true friends to our cause and will go 3 or 4 m Red Oakstaves some flour and Indian meal and corn and send her immediately to St Croix, purchase such goods as I wanted order powder etc. if to be got and take it to St Croix in a small craft where it might with great safety be put on board my vessel - the money that is due me there and the Cargo I would send out would I think buy near 2000f value of a back Cargo - so eligible is this plan to me that I have laid before you that if you give me permission I will risque it all on my own acct and will give all the arms, ammunition, etc. I may get in, the first offer of all to the Council of Safety - should you

be afraid that by granting me this premission you would be troubled with many other applications it need not be known to any but that she goes on acct of the province....

SOURCE: CORRESPONDENCE OF COUNCIL OF SAFETY, MD. ARCH.

¹A prominent Maryland businessman and member of the Maryland Council of Safety.

NICHOLAS BROWN¹ TO CAPTAIN REMEMBRANCE SIMMONS

PROVIDENCE, April 17, 1776

You being Master of the Sloop Sally and Ready for the Seas, My orders & Directions are that you Imbrace every Good Oppoty to Gain your Passage in the Most safest way you Can According to the Best of Your Judgement, To St. Croix & There Dispose of your Cargo to the Best Advantage & take a few hhds of the very best Sugar not to Exceed 10 hhds and fill up your Vessel with Good Rum, which you will Indeavour to purchase without the White Oak Shaken hhds you have on bord and the remainder of your Cargo you Will lay out in 3/4 Cannon & 1/4 pistle Powder If to be had Cheep enough to Ansr. which you Will not Exceed 1/2 pr 8 P lb - but expect it will be for much less if So you Will layout all the Money you have more than to purchas the Sugar & Rum as Aforesaid In Powder, and Small Arms, which you are to pick up wherever you Can & May buy any part of a Gun locks or Barrels or any Parts You Can get, if Reasonable, If yu find the Island in Grait Want of any thing you have, you Must Demand Power & arms for it - You must Take Grait Care to Imploy the very best of Coopers who will be Carefull to make your Cask Tight, If the Powder & arms is not to be had reasonabbly You have Liberty to lay out the remdr. Your Money in Any Sorts of Goods which you May think will Answer best - According to the best You Judge as Steel, Course Linen, (but not fine Linen) Checks, Hankerchiefs, pins, paper, pepers, nutmegs, Cotton, Ravens, Duck etc. You are to be exceeding Cautious About getting home & fall in to the Back of Nantucket or Vinyard, & after you get in to Some Safe Harbor to give Me Notice if you find you Cant Come with Safety into this Colony - Your Commissions for doing the Buissness is to be 5 pCt for Sales & 2 1/2 for Returns, be sure to make no bad Debts, or leave none behind - Your Priveledge Out is to be 2m. of Hoops which you are to take the Chance of with All on Deck as well as those in your hold & to loose a proportion as yours: Bears to the Whole if any loss & 8 hhds of the Common size with Cargo If Anything Shod happen with you to Render you Incapable of doing the Buisness Your Mate is to take the Command & follow these My Orders - If your Vessel wont Load with Rum & Sugar As Aforsd you'l take Some Smaller, as Beer Casks etc. filled with Rum to fill up - Wishing a Good Voyage & safe Return....

SOURCE: NICHOLAS BROWN PAPERS, JCBL.

¹A prominent Rhode Island merchant with an extensive trade in the West Indies.

INTELLIGENCE FROM ST. CROIX

ST. CROIX, 27 October, 1776

Tho' I have not the honor of being known to you, I trust that this letter will not be considered either officious or intrusive.

To give an account of oneself is certainly awkward; nor would I attempt it on any except the present occasion. I must therefore beg leave to inform you that I left London, the place of my residence, last June & there had the honour of being known to several high in office. Before I left England I took leave to mention to Lord George Germaine¹ that I was confident the Americans carried on a Trade with the Danish Islands, & that I should endeavour to find out when here what Vessels had & were trading to those Islands, & that I would transmit any intelligence I might collect to such a quarter as I thought might produce good effects. His Lordship did me the favor to approve of what I mentioned. I have brought an introduction.... to the Governor of the Danish Islands, and shall reside some Months in them to dispose of or to put two Plantations I have at St. Thomas on a better footing. These Circumstances I could wish to avoid mentioning, but I think every person is bound when he gives any intelligence to convey some Acct. of himself. I must confess however that whatever intelligence I may give arises in some degree from interested motives, for I have property both real & personal on the continent, which I am persuaded cannot be beneficial to me unless Great Britain reduces the American insurgents to a proper obedience to its Legislative authority....

It has given me pleasure to hear of the number of Captures made by His Majesty's Ships under your Command; but notwithstanding their vigilance several Vessels (generally small) have got in here. I have been but 16 days here, & six Schooners have arrived from the Provinces of North Carolina, Maryland, & Pennsylvania. As to what they bring it is of no consequence, but they all return with a few Articles (& those much wanted by the deluded people on the continent) such as oznaburgs² a little powder, Sugar & Rum. As to Powder, it is fortunately very scarce, or they would not have met with so scanty a supply. Two days since, one of the above Schooners (Packer Master) sailed for America, & amongst other Articles did with some difficulty procure ten small Casks of Powder; but my astonishment was great to find such a Commerce countenanced by Government here. The Vessel went out under American Colours, saluted the Fort, & had the Complement returned, the same as if She had been an English or a Danish Ship. I take it for granted that a similar conduct is observed in the Islands of St. Thomas & St. John belonging to the Crown of Denmark. This Island is now unquestionably well supplied with Provisions, so that the favourable reception of American Vessels cannot arise from necessity. Two of the six Vessels I have mentioned are at West-end³ harbour, the other three at Basse-end⁴, & will all sail in the course of a fortnight....

SOURCE: ADM. 1/309.

¹The leading Secretary of State in the British Ministry during the War of American Independence.

²Linen clothing, usually for slaves.

³Fredericksted.

⁴Christiansted.

The British Navy made every effort to suppress the pernicious commerce that had developed between the American rebels and their allies in the Danish islands. Ships of war were placed on constant patrol off St. Thomas and St. Croix with instructions to intercept all illegal commerce. However, this blockade placed a heavy burden on the undermanned British fleet and it wasn't until the end of 1776, when the Navy was reinforced by swarms of privately commissioned privateers operating out of Tortola in the British Virgin Islands, that the British managed to achieve any degree of success in their preventative efforts.

VICE-ADMIRAL JAMES YOUNG¹ TO PHILIP STEPHENS²

ANTIGUA, 30 August, 1775

In Consequence of the Letter I received from Captain Bryne of the Pomona Sloop the 4th, Instant,.... setting forth that a Schooner from North America arrived at the Island St. Croix in order to procure Gunpowder for America and offering any Money for the Purchase etc.; and it having since then been intimated to me by Persons of Credit at this place that it is believed the North American Traders do procure Gunpowder and other Warlike Stores from this Island and His Majesty's other Charibbee Islands in these Seas, as well as from the French, Dutch, and Danish Islands. I have therefore, in Order to prevent (as far as I may be able) a practice so pernicious and dangerous to His Majesty's Service wrote to the Governors and the Commanders in Chief of all His Majesty's Charibbee Islands to acquaint them with my having received the above information, and requested they may immediately direct proclamations to be issued through the different Islands in their respective Governments to forbid the Exportation of Gunpowder and other Warlike Stores from any of them for the Space of Six Months. And I have given Orders to the Captains of his Majesty's Ships Lynx, Pomona, and Argo to search all Vessels they may fall in with that are bound to America and strictly to examine whether they have on board any Gunpowder or other Warlike Stores, and should they find any such, to Seize said Vessels and bring them forthwith to me....

I must further desire you will represent to their Lordships /of the Admiralty/ that should the present troubles in America Continue the Squadron under my Command is much too small to prevent effectually the Exportation of Ammunition, etc. from all the Islands within the Extent of my Command; and that I intreat their Lordships will be pleased to increase the Number of Ships to be employed in

these Seas and thereby enable me to put an End to a Trade so very pernicious, and prevent for the future any Supply of Ammunition and Warlike Stores to be carried from hence to the North Americans during their present unnatural Hostilities.

SOURCE: PRO. ADM. 1/309.

¹James Young, Commander-in-Chief of the British squadron in the Eastern Caribbean from 1775 to 1777.

²Secretary to the Admiralty.

VICE ADMIRAL JAMES YOUNG TO PHILIP STEPHENS

ANTIGUA, 7 April 1776

I must again beg leave to renew my Application to their Lordships to send out some Ships to reinforce the Squadron under my Command, as with the few now here, it is impossible for me to carry on the King's Service in the manner I could wish, or effectually to put a stop to the Trade which the Americans carry on to the French, Dutch and Danish Islands; and prevent the returns being made to them in Warlike Stores, for notwithstanding the Assurances given me by the French Governors to the Contrary, I am well convinced by other authentic Information, it is done openly. - The Powder goes by small Quantities at a time, in such like Vessels as Virginia Pilot Boats, that steal out in the night, and by fast Sailing escape our Cruizers.

....The Prizes taken by the King's Ships under my Command, have been of great Service to these Islands by bringing in Supplies of Provisions to the, that were destined to other places (none can now be Shipped from America, to the English Islands, the Runners must therefore all be intended for the French, Dutch and Danish Islands), and had the Squadron employed in these Seas, consisted of a sufficient number of Ships, they would certainly have taken much greater number of American Vessels and thereby have prevented considerable Supply of Gunpowder being sent to the Rebels; which Article they pay for in Provisions etc. at the enormous price of a Dollar pr pound. - The French Governors complain about our Ships Cruizing off their Ports, and taking Supplies of Provisions etc. coming to them; however I flatter myself, their Lordships will be of opinion that the strong necessity of the present times, makes this step absolutely necessary: The French have at present three Frigates of Thirty six Guns in these Seas, and between four & five Thousand Troops at the Islands Guadalupe, and Martinica.

I must also observe to their Lordships that there are great numbers of the disaffected Americans, in all the French, Dutch and Danish Islands, and even in our own Islands, from whence they can easily

get away to the others; and it is believed here, they have on foot a design to Arm and fitt out Vessels from the Foreign Islands, (where they can readily be supplied with what Stores are wanting for that purpose,) and Cruize for our Trade in these Seas; which were they to do, would greatly distress the English Islands: The Planters and Traders here, are very apprehensive of this, and talk of applying to me for Convoy to their homeward bound Ships: this I am sure at present I cannot comply with, 'tho they assert they have intelligence from America, that Ships of Force are arming there, which are said to be intended to intercept the homeward bound West-India Ships both from these Islands and Jamaica (an account of this Intelligence I intend sending Rear Admiral Gayton¹ by the first Packet that goes from hence to Jamaica,) as there may be some cause for their Fears....

SOURCE: PRO, ADMIRALTY 1/309.

¹ Clark Gayton, Commander-in-Chief of the British squadron based at Jamaica.

VICE ADMIRAL JAMES YOUNG TO PHILIP STEPHENS

ANTIGUA, 9 March, 1777

...I have likewise received their Lordship's /of the Admiralty/ Order of the 19th Oct. last with Copies of the Danish Edict and Dutch Proclamation to prevent carrying any Military or Naval Stores from their West India Islands to any of the Rebellious Colonies in America. I beg to inform their Lordships that well knowing such an illicit Traffick was Constantly carried on, both from the Dutch and Danish Islands (notwithstanding the orders and Directions of their Respective Masters to the Contrary, as well as my repeated representations to their Governors to put a Stop thereto) I have always kept, and shall still continue to do so, some of His Majesty's Ships Cruizing off the Islands /of St. Eustatia, St. Martins, St. Bartholomew, St. Croix and St. Thomas, where they have taken (and afterwards condemned as Prize) a great Number of Vessels Trading with produce to and from the American Colonies; but they have not hitherto been able to take any with Military Stores - they being carried in small Armed Vessels like... Virginia Pilot Boats, which Sail much too fast to be catched by any of His Majesty's Ships under my Command....

SOURCE: PRO. ADM. 1/309.

NICHOLAS CRUGER TO COXE, TRUMAN & COXE

ST. CROIX, 15 March, 1777

...We have a Number of Armed Vessels out of the English Islands, Particularly out of Tortola, So that it would be advisable in yr. Recomending to any one you Ship wth. on my Accot. to avoid Coming Near that Island, the Safest way I Can Recommend is to get well to the Southward and make the South Side of this Island. There is also a Frigate Stationed to Leeward of Porto-rico. Of Late there has been a Number of Vessels Taking & Carried into Tortola, amongst wch. is a Brig. of our friend J.W. from Philada. to this Port Taking Near that Island by one of their Pickeroons, who Carry from 4 to 6 & 8 Small guns & about 20 to 30 Men. For the Present I must Decline your offer of a Farther Concern, But when a Proper Occasion offers I will Chearfully embrace it....

SOURCE: TENCH COXE PAPERS, HSP.

H.K. TO LORD GEORGE MACARTNEY¹

ST. THOMAS, 11 April, 1777

Having obtained leave from the Governor of the Danish Islands to ship some Negros to Tobago and the time that the Vessel is allowed to remain here being expired, I have but a few moments to spare to inform your Lordship that the report of letters of reprisals being granted has already greatly discouraged the trade to America. Even this little Island is well guarded by Tortola privateers which are of infinite Service.

...Many Vessels are expected here in the Course of two or three weeks. They have established Societies of Insurance in America on Vessels from the Islands to the provinces. The usual Insurance is 20 percent; when they heard privateers were fitted out, it rose 5 percent. When I have more time, I shall trouble your Lordship with many particulars. Next week I set off with the Commandant of this Island for Porto Rico. The Court of Madrid have at last Changed their miserable policy with respect to that Island and have granted a noble Domain to a French Duke whose title I think is Crillon, who is very high in the Service of Spain. Since that grant some particular persons are permitted to visit the Island. This Island I hope will one day be ours; if so, it will merit the appellation of Britania minor.

SOURCE: PRO. C.O. 101/20.

¹Governor General of Grenada, the Grenadines and Tobago.

After 1776, British diplomatic and naval initiatives managed to effectively halt the munitions trade between the Danish islands and the rebellious colonies, and to curtail generally the overall commerce between the two regions. Nevertheless, commerce between the two trading partners did not cease altogether. Islanders continued to aid the American rebels by supplying their venturesome merchants with essential European goods like woolens in exchange for American staples such as tobacco and indigo. This commerce was encouraged by American diplomatic representatives and the Continental Congress. Moreover, the Danes indirectly aided the American cause by carrying on an extensive trade with the French islands, thus effectively neutralizing efforts by the British to starve them into submission. The Danish islands became particularly important to the achievement of American independence following the British seizure of St. Eustatius in March 1781, when many American and European mercantile houses from that Dutch entrepot re-established themselves in St. Thomas transforming that island into the commercial center of the Caribbean during the closing years of the war.

FRANCIS LEWIS TO STEPHEN SAYRE¹

PHILADELPHIA, 10 August, 1779

Your letter, together with that from Mr. Fabritius² (whose high character I was well acquainted with when at Copenhagen,) was laid before Congress, who are very sensible of the advantages that would accrue in a commercial intercourse with Copenhagen, as several supplies of Russian manufactures might be obtained through that channel; but we are at the same time apprehensive the Danish Court are too much influenced by that of G/reat B/ritain to wink at such a commerce, though it may be advantageous to the subject....

Your scheme of sending out goods in Danish bottoms, to St. Croix or St. Thomas, is feasible, and where we could lodge tobacco, indigo, etc., to be returned in said ships for payment; but the risque of captures between this and the islands is full as great; however, I shall urge Congress to make an attempt in one or the other mode; it will be therefore necessary that you and Mr. Fabritius inform me, with the names of agents in both islands, who may be appointed by you to receive such effects....

SOURCE: EDMUND C. BURNETT, ED. LETTERS OF MEMBERS OF THE CONTINENTAL CONGRESS, VOL. IV (WASHINGTON, D.C., 1923) p. 362.

¹Lewis was a member of the Continental Congress. Stephen Sayre was in Denmark trying unsuccessfully to negotiate a commercial treaty. For a survey of Danish-American relations during the American Revolution, see Soren Fogdall, Danish-American Diplomacy 1776-1920 (1929).

²C.A. Fabritius, who was then seeking to obtain a loan for America in Europe.

CHARLES BIDDLE¹: ACCOUNT OF A VOYAGE TO ST. THOMAS 1779

...In July Mr. Hodge concluded to send the Eclipse to the West Indies on freight. Some of my friends soon loaded her with tobacco for St. Thomas, and I agreed to join her....

We sailed from Beaufort the 10th of August, 1779. The sloop drawing a great deal of water we struck hard upon the Bar, and I expected, as she was very weak in her bottom, she would have been stove. However, we got off without receiving any injury. We had the prize brig and some small vessels under our convoy. Near St. Thomas we fell in, at different times, with two or three small privateers, but none sufficiently strong to engage us. We arrived at St. Thomas without any accident. I sold my cargo to the Royal Danish Company, which at that time was just established. When I came to discharge it, to my great mortification, I found that a good deal of the tobacco was very much damaged, which could not have happened on board the sloop, for she did not leak. The company sent me word that as the tobacco was not merchantable they must return it. I waited on, and told them I was very sorry to find the tobacco not so good as it should be, but that it would be very bad policy in them, as I was the first American from whom they had purchased, to dispute about the cargo, that the Americans would then be afraid to deal with them, whereas if they behaved generously and friendly it would induce them always to give the company a preference. After some consultation they agreed to take it. I never went on the wharf when they were examining the cargo, but it made me ashamed to think what trash I had brought, and if the company had not purchased, it would not have been sold. They behaved extremely well.

While lying here Mr. Bull, an inhabitant of Tortola, a native of New England, who appeared warmly attached to his country, came down to see if any of his countrymen would engage to go upon an expedition against Tortola. He complained of being ill-treated there because he was an American and wished well to their cause. I inquired if he had never given any occasion for being ill-treated. He declared he had not, but that he did say there and everywhere that he wished well to the American cause. He reminded me of a German servant woman of my mother's, who complained of being beaten by her husband. My mother, knowing her violent temper, said to her, "And, well, Katy, did you say nothing to provoke your husband?" "No, Mistress, indeed I did not. The worst words I said to him were that he was a good-for-nothing scoundrel." Mr. Bull was of a warm temper, and probably his ill-treatment was brought on him by his imprudence. Mine being the strongest American vessel in the port, Bull was very desirous of my going. He said there was hardly any person in the fort, that we could land a few men and get possession of it, and then should command the shipping. When I considered that Tortola was a place of rendezvous for privateers, and as I believed it could be very easily taken, I had a great inclination to go, and for two or three nights could not sleep for thinking of it. My officers were all eager to go. However, when I reflected it would be exceeding my instructions, and if any accident happened it would be a great injury to my friend Hodge; and that setting such a crew as I should be obliged to take ashore, would probably occasion the ruin

and perhaps murder of some innocent people, I determined not to go.

The day before I sailed two of my gaol birds getting drunk, deserted, and enlisted in the garrison. As we had rather too few for our guns before, and there was a privateer off the west end of the island said to be waiting for us, I waited on the Governor, who had treated me with great politeness upon a former occasion, to endeavor to get the men back; but when he knew my errand he told me they should not be delivered up, that they were not my countrymen, and they had a right to enlist. It was in vain to argue with him. I therefore shipped two others. When cleared out and ready for sea I dropped down abreast of the fort and hoisted American colors. This was what they had refused to allow us, and we were obliged to hoist a white flag. They soon hailed me from the fort, "Haul down them colors." Upon my refusing they threatened to sink me; but I knew their guns were out of powder, and therefore disregarded all they said, keeping my colors up and drum a-beating until the afternoon, when we weighed and stood out of the harbor. When almost clear of it a black Curacao man, whom I had shipped in the room of one of the men who had deserted, jumped overboard and swam on shore. I made some of the marines fire ahead of him to frighten him, but he dived, and seemed to regard their firing as little as I did the threats of the officers in the fort. Off the west end of the island we discovered the privateer said to be waiting for us. She was close in with the land, and did now show any inclination to come out, with which I was full as well pleased as I should have been to see her bear down upon us....

SOURCE: CHARLES BIDDLE, AUTOBIOGRAPHY OF CHARLES BIDDLE 1745-1821 (Philadelphia, 1883), pp. 121-125.

¹Charles Biddle was an American merchant seaman from Philadelphia.

BENJAMIN YARD¹ TO TENCH COXE

ST. CROIX, October-November 1780

...Mr. Markoe's² affairs bore so bad an appearance at his death that it was very doubtfull whether any of his running Accounts would be paid or not. The Executors, however, consented to Act under the Dealing Court which prevents their being liable for any thing more than comes into their hands - their Friendship and regard for Mr. Markoe's Family has been the means of preventing his Estates from being sold, and the favorable Crops made since with the high Price produce has bore will, I hope, enable them to pay off all his Debts, and reserve something handsome for the Family. They have as yet refused to pay any Interest on open or indeed any Accounts which is agreeable to our laws. He owed me about f130 which I have not yet been able to get. The Interest amounts to near f40 which I shall loose unless Major Heyliger, who is an Heir as well as an acting

Executor, will consent to allow it. He arrived here from Copenhagen a few Weeks ago. I shall take an opportunity of addressing him on the Subject and hope to be able to receive your money early next spring.

The Surrender of Charles Town with the very capital defeat of General Gates have given American affairs a very unfavorable turn; should the British Fleet be successful against the French at Road Island, the consequence may be fatal....

We have had a most violent Gale of wind lately which lasted from Wednesday the 11th until Monday following - longer than I ever knew a Gale to last. It was by no means as Severe as the Hurricane in 1772, and has done but little damage to our Island (except in the Canes), not a Vessel in our Port the least Injured owing to the great Security of our Harbour. But in the Harbours of the Windward Island/s more damage has been done than was ever known. The English Fleet lay ready at St. Kitts to sail in a few days. They are all drove to Sea and numbers must be lost. 50 Sail of Vessels arrived the Evening before at Martinico, every one of which put out, and at least one half of them must be lost. We have two or three of them wrecked on our Coast: part of their Cargos will be saved. The number of wrecks seen about our Island is incredible. A number of dead Bodys have been thrown up in our Bays. The damage Statia has received must exceed every thing you can conceive: near three hundred Sail of Vessels lay there, many of which foundered at their Anchors; not a Single one, even the Admiral, a 64, was able to ride it out. I saw a Mate of a Vessel that put in here since the Gale who assured me that before he left the Road, the Sea broke over the tops of the lower Houses and Stores on the Bay and this was only the beginning of the Gale. The Quantity of Tobacco provisions and dry Goods that must have perished from its continuing so long is immense. We have had no Vessel from there since all our Accounts are from Captains who put out. Tortola, St. Thomas and I believe every Island in the West Indies must have suffered greatly. The two Americans being chased in here has proved very fortunate; neither Vessels or Cargoes has received the least injury, when, had they arrived at their destined Port (St. Eustatius) in all probability they would have lost both. I was very near loosing a fine droging Sloop that cost me f1200: She slip her Cable as West end and luckily got into a Safe bay at St. Johns. I had no accounts of her until this Morning when a Vessel who had Sheltered in the same bay arrived and informed of her safty. I fear I shall yet be a considerable Sufferer since I had f1000 worth of Tobacco on board a Ship in Tortola who was only waiting for the fleet. She was drove on Shore, but all her Cargo will be Saved I expect. I am insured, but the disapointment of its not getting to Market with the loss of the use of the money is very considerable. I have as much more at St. Kitts which I have as yet no Account of and anxiously wait Accounts from there....

SOURCE: TENCH COXE PAPERS, HSP.

¹A Philadelphia merchant who resided in St. Croix during most of the American Revolution. Yard was appointed the first U.S. Counsel to the Danish islands in 1791.

²Abraham Markoe.

UNSIGNED LETTER TO GENERAL JOHN VAUGHAN¹

ST. EUSTATIUS, 1781

...The Capture of the Island of St. Eustatius effectually deprives the Rebels on the Continent of America of every external resource excepting what they may hereafter find in the Danish Islands and a Trade with Europe. The Danish Islands may in some time hence make up in some degree the inconveniences that both must experience in the loss of this Colony to the Dutch. I submit to your Excellency's wisdom the means of preventing it. In the meantime, the Danish Merchants established there have neither the Merchandize to supply their immediate wants, nor Ships to carry away such Articles of produce as may be sent to the Islands for Sale....

The Danes at St. Croix and St. Thomas, at which last Island a royal Company on a liberal Establishment and with very extensive privileges, has lately opened a large Field of Commerce, sends Holstein Beef, Pork, and Butter to the French Markets in large Quantities, and at a price much below the first Cost of Irish Provisions. The Danish Agents have power to send the King's Ships as Convoy for the Vessels he dispatches. /St. Thomas/ will very soon become a powerful Rival to this Island, whose Trade receives no protection, and is burthened with excess of Expençe....

SOURCE: PRO. W.O. 1/51.

¹Commander-in-Chief of the British Army in the Eastern Caribbean. Vaughan and Admiral George B. Rodney had captured the Dutch island of St. Eustatius in March, 1781.

ADMIRAL GEORGE BRYDGES RODNEY¹ TO PHILIP STEPHENS

SAINT EUSTATIUS, 25 April 1781.

...I must desire you will please to acquaint their Lordships, that till this Day, by the Arrival of the Acteon, with his Convoy at Barbadoes, I did not receive his Majesty's Instructions relative to the Explanatory Article of the Treaty of 1670, with Denmark, which I shall instantly distribute to every Ship under my Command, and take particular Care that it is strictly complied with.

However, I must beg that you will represent to their Lordships, that ever since I have had the Honour to command his Majesty's Ships in these Seas, every Respect has been paid to the Danish Flag, nor

has any of my Cruizers taken any Danish Vessels, except one that was taken in the Dutch Convoy, loaded by Dutch Merchants at St. Eustatius, bound to Amsterdam; and the Captain of which Danish Ship voluntarily declared, that the whole was Dutch Property, and agreed to carry it to England, upon being paid his proper Freight and all Expences.

The Island of Martinique being in the utmost Distress for Want of Provisions, and at this Time closely blockaded by the greatest Part of his Majesty's Fleet, under my Command, I signified the same to his Danish Majesty's Governor of St. Croix, and acquainted him, that should there be the least Insult offered to the Danish Flag, upon his Excellency's signifying the same to me, the Persons offending should be called to the strictest Account, as I should take Care to keep up that Harmony that so happily subsisted between our Courts, by shewing every Respect to his Danish Majesty's Flag; but my Duty obliges me to acquaint their Lordships, that the Produce of the French Islands, particularly Guadaloupe, is transported in Danish Bottoms; Danish Frigates, and Merchant Ships under their Convoy, frequently going to that Island, and returning loaded with its Produce.

I have suffered none of his Majesty's Ships under my Command, to stop or detain them, being fully convinced of the numerous and unjust Enemies his Majesty has already to contend with, and unwilling to give any cause or Pretence for their Increase, however glaring the Conduct of a neutral State might appear, by transporting, in Time of War, the Produce of an Enemy's Island, which, in Peace, they were not allowed even to approach under Pain of Confiscation.

Their Lordships may be assured that every Altercation shall be avoided as much as possible, and no just Cause of Complaint given....

SOURCE: PRO. ADM. 1/314.

¹Commander of the British Navy in the Eastern Caribbean.

CHARLES BIDDLE: ACCOUNT OF A VOYAGE TO ST. THOMAS AND ST. JOHN

1781

...I engaged to go from Philadelphia in a Letter of Marque brig, called the Active, to St. Thomas. We had eight four pounders; the crew consisted of ten men and four boys, besides the two mates and myself, with Dr. Valentine Standley, a passenger. We left the Capes in company with a large fleet the 15th of November, 1781....

We had a good passage, and fell in with nothing until we made St. Thomas, when we saw off the harbor a brig, which we found was a British cruiser. It was early in the morning when we first discovered her; she was beating up, and we were going before the wind.

Finding as she drew near that we could have no chance by fighting her, I determined to go into St. Johns, if we could get there. We were both becalmed off the west end of the island, and we got oars and rowed for the harbor. They got out their boats and towed their vessel to cut us off. I had been in this harbor with the Eclipse, and knew they had a single fort. They got within gunshot of us several times, and would have taken us, if they had not been too eager. When within shot, they pulled around to give us a broadside, by which means we got a considerable way ahead. They did this without doing us any injury whatever. Had they continued rowing without firing a shot, they would have been alongside before we could have reached the harbor. They kept firing (and many of their shot reached the shore), until I hailed the fort to know why they did not fire. They then fired a shot which struck the water under her boltsprit. She then hauled off. We learned afterwards that she was a King's Brig. The master of her deserved to be broken for not taking us. My crew behaved very well, except one man whom I thought before this day, was afraid of nothing. He, however, endeavored to get down the fore scuttle. Whenever the brig pulled round to fire, my crew gave them three cheers, and were anxious to return the fire, but I knew if we broke off any of the men from the oars, we must be taken, and therefore would not suffer it. I went from St. Johns the same day in my boat to St. Thomas. Mr. Mitchell, an old friend, settled here, told me to be careful of the Governor; if he knew it was me who had insulted their fort he did not know what would be the consequence. I found here my friend Falvey. He was in partnership with a Thomas Reilly, under the firm of Falvey and Reilly. I sold my cargo, which consisted of flour and tobacco, to Mr. Lisle, a native of Philadelphia, who was married and settled in Tortola. Mr. Mitchell was his surety. After delivering the cargo, he was to have returned and paid me in four days. He was gone ten. I was very uneasy, and Mitchell more so, fearing he would not return. However, he came the tenth day, and paid me honestly. He had been detained collecting the money, which was in new half Johannes, which I at first thought he had been coining at Tortola. I purchased some rum at St. Johns, and having procured what dry goods I wanted, sailed from St. Johns the 13th of December. Just before we sailed, Standley applied to me to take him back, but he had behaved ill on the passage out, and during the time we were at St. Thomas, and as I thought he would plague his good mother in Philadelphia, I would not take him. There were several privateers off the harbor; however we escaped them all....

SOURCE: CHARLES BIDDLE, AUTOBIOGRAPHY OF CHARLES BIDDLE 1745 - 1821 (Philadelphia, 1883), pp. 152-155.

THE COMMERCE OF ST. THOMAS, 1782

An article in the Amsterdam Gazette, of the 11th ult. mentions, that several of the Dutch merchants from St. Eustatia had retired to the Danish island of St. Thomas, where they had met with every encouragement they could desire, insomuch that it was thought this island would in a short time carry on as much trade as St. Eustatia. Private letters from St Kitts, by the last vessels, confirm this account, and say, that the cultivation of St. Thomas is so much increased, as to produce upwards of 4000 hogsheads of sugar annually; and that the trade with the North Americans, though not publicly licensed, is winked at; in consequence of which, great quantities of flour, shingles, and lumber, were daily landing there, and reshipping for the French islands in Danish bottoms, or rather in Dutch ones under Danish colours.

SOURCE: THE SCOT'S MAGAZINE, VOL. 44, 1782, p. 93.

PLUNKETT & STERRETT TO JOHN H. NORTON¹

ST. THOMAS, 17 January, 1782

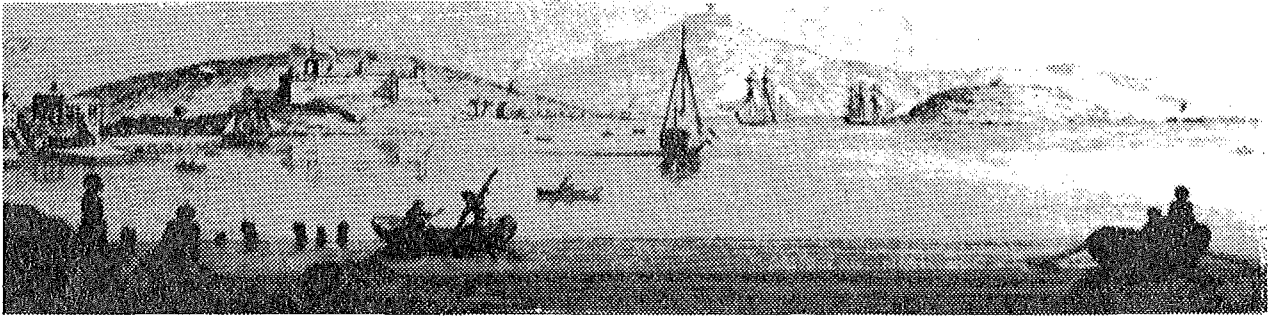
We have just received duplicate of your favour of 13th Novr. & we acknowledge ourselves much indebted to our worthy friend Mr. Young for his recommendation of our house to your notice; we hope in the course of our correspondence to convince you that we are not unworthy of it.

Your letter to, & order on Messrs. Thos. Webb & Co. of Curracoa shall be imm.y transmitted, & we expect they will very speedily furnish us with the means of carrying your orders into execution. Rum at present cannot be procured without paying the exorbitant price of 7 bitts p Gallon. We expect in the course of a few weeks it may be purchased @ 3 to 4 bitts, & then we hope circumstances will allow us to make you some shipmts. We shall advise you regularly of our proceedings & we are respectfully....

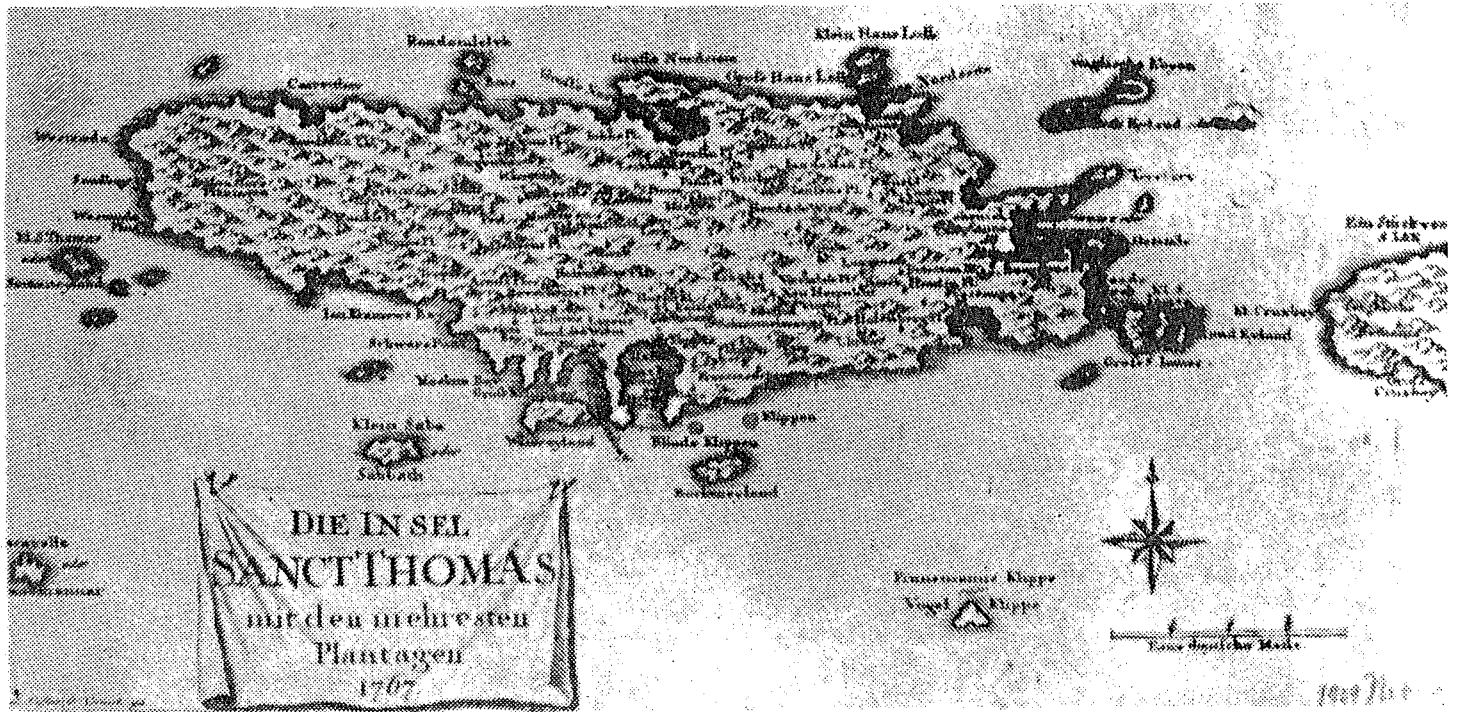
Tobacco 12½ @ 25P H.s as in Quality
Flour 15 @ 16 dollars p bble
Salt 9 @ 10 bar. Rum 62 @ 7 p Gn.

SOURCE: FRANCES NORTON MASON, ED. JOHN NORTON AND SONS, MERCHANTS OF LONDON AND VIRGINIA (N.Y. 1968), p. 446-7.

¹ A Virginia merchant with commercial and family connections in the West Indies during the revolutionary era.



Picture of Boats



ST. THOMAS 1767

THOMAS REEVE TO JOHN H. NORTON & CO.

ST. THOMAS, 7 March 1782

Since the fatal 3d feby 81, (soon after wch unlucky epoche, I was compelled to abandon S. Eustatia) our correspondence seems to have expired - 'tis my wish to revive it if agreeable to you - I flattered myself after the Navigation of your state became free- I should have been favoured with a line from you, but to my very great mortification have hitherto been deprived that pleasure - I am at length informed by a friend from Richmond in Virginia that have removed to Philadelphia & that the conjunctive Tobacco Adventure has not become a total loss, as I had feared - divested as I was at the sacking of Statia, of every shilling of earthly property; the Rapacious invaders could lay their hands on - it woud have been pleasing intelligence to have learnt from you, the little I had under your direction was still safe - you will very much oblige me by giving me the earliest information - of the present State of that transaction -&if there be the whole or any part of it preserved; where or to whom I am to apply for it-should you direct any of your Business to Curacoa the House of Areson & Reeve will be happy to execute your commands-if to this Island or St. Croix you may rely on the strictest attention being paid your Interest by....

Prices Current

J.R. Tobacco.....	25		pC
Maryland.....	12	at 15	do
Pork.....	30	at 35	p bbl
Beef.....	25	at 30	do
flour Phila.....	23	at 25	do
W.O. Staves & headg.	10	at 12	p M
Musco. Sugar.....	9	at 10½	p,c.
Rum	5	at 5½	p Gall falling
Excha. on London	87½	p. ct.	- equal to 65 windward

SOURCE: FRANCES NORTON MASON, ED. JOHN NORTON AND SONS, MERCHANTS OF LONDON AND VIRGINIA (N.Y. 1968), p. 446-7.

JAMES BLAIR TO WILLIAM ECCLES¹

ST. THOMAS, 23 May 1782

I flatter myself that this will find you safe returned to the Aux-Cayes from Jamaica; although, from the account I have had by a letter from Kennedy, and the inquiries I have been making, you must have had a disagreeable time of it coming up; and I still shall feel unhappy until I am informed of your safe arrival: I sincerely wish that I may soon get that very agreeable information, as I could not get the brig insured, as you desired, from Jamaica, owing to the underwriters asking such a monstrous permium; however, I hope it is so

much saved.

This will be handed you by Ca Rea, in the schooner Daphne (formerly our Rover); which vessel has on board two hundred and fifty barrels of English flour, and twenty barrels of best heavy cargo beef, which please dispose of; and the proceeds invest in brown sugar and cotton, and dispatch her as soon as possible for this place; She is still owned in the former concern of Joseph Searight and company and us; and the captain, in case of your absence, has directions to call upon Mr. Wethered.

By the last vessel from Aux Cays I am informed Kennedy was again going to Jamaica, and that Mr. Wethered was going to load the sloop you purchased in Jamaica for this place; if so, hope shall see her soon.

The only news I have to inform you, of any consequence now is, that there is a total change in the ministry of Great-Britain; and the new ones, who consist of the principal speakers of the minority in both houses, seem determined to make peace with America upon any terms. No commissions would be granted to some vessels, which have arrived lately, against the Americans. We, honest Danes, now enjoy every liberty of commerce, as far as consistent with treaties; and, if you had property sufficient to load the brig up with the most valuable cargo, we need to be under no apprehension of capture....

SOURCE: JAJ. VOL. VII, p. 546.

1

An Irish merchant at Aux Cayes, Sainte-Dominique. Eccles was in fact based in St. John, Danish West Indies. As a neutral trader, he would send ships to purchase sugar and rum in the French Islands, which he would then ship, as Danish produce, to his agents in Great Britain where the price was highest.

BALL, JENNINGS & WOODRUP TO MESSRS. TRIEL, RARY & CO.¹

ST. THOMAS, 15 June 1782

Referring to what we had the pleasure of writing you the 1st current, by our brig, Neptune, captain Hill, we have now the pleasure to inclose you invoice and bill lading for two hundred barrels best new heavy cargo beef, and one thousand one hundred and ninety barrels superfine flour, to your address, by our brig Phoenix, captain March.

As we have favourable accounts of the prices of provisions at your port, and, as both the beef and flour are very good, and have not been more than ten days in this port, we flatter ourselves they will not only command a ready sale, but one that will be pleasing also:

We wish you to give captain March all possible dispatch; and, as we presume, produce will be much cheaper at Port-au-Prince than at the Cape, that you will as soon as possible send him there, with sufficient funds to load his vessel: Mr. Plunket will give orders to messieurs Barrere and company to furnish captain March with about ninety thousand lbs. coffee; which he had ordered them to purchase for the former owners of the Nancy. So that we apprehend it will not take near the proceeds of the cargo we now send you by the Phoenix, to purchase the remainder of her return cargo: We wish her to be loaded with white sugar of the second quality, and with coffee and cotton: As to the quantity of either of these three articles to be put in the brig, we can only observe, that we wish it to be regulated by the rise or fall of them at the port she loads at; for, at late prices in Port-au-Prince, the profits here would be nearly equal on either, considering all circumstances.

As so considerable a proportion of the cargo is to be furnished by messieurs Barrere and company, we would wish you to employ them in this instance to furnish the whole cargo, and to press them to give dispatch; consulting captain March as to the quantity of either sugar, coffee, or cotton, he wishes to take for cargo; because he knows what either article will sell for here, and can best judge how to load his vessel properly.

The approach of the hurricane season makes us particularly anxious for dispatch in this voyage, that we may be enabled to send the brig to you again before it comes: And we therefore hope, that, on receipt hereof, you will give orders to have fifty or sixty hogsheads sugar bought against she arrives at Port-au-Prince; and, if you are sure she will have dispatch at that port, it might be best for captain March to clean her at the Cape before he takes in ballast; but this we leave to you and him.

We rely fully in your attention to our interest in all respects, and we shall always be happy in occasions to shew with how much truth and respect we are, gentlemen, your most obedient humble servants,

SOURCE: JAJ. VOL. VII, P. 547.

¹A merchant firm at Cap Francois, Sainte-Dominique.

CODMAN & SMITH¹ TO JAMES RUSSELL

BOSTON, 21 October 1782

Referring you to what our J.C. [John Codman] writes you by this conveyance, I have now to advise you that the Bearer hereof is Capt. Ephraim Lombard in our Schooner Adventure, who now goes out to the French Islands with a Load of Fish, from whence we have ordered him

with a Cargo of Coffee & Cotton to St. Thomas to you/r/ address. Should he be so fortunate as to arrive safe you will be pleased to dispose of his cargo to the best advantage & improve the Vessel as you may judge most for our Interest, during the Winter, as the risque is too great on this coast at that season for so small a Vessel.

If Capt. Lombard should come to good sales of his Cargo at Marie Galante, a Small Island near Martinico, where he is now bound, it may probably answer to return there with another suitable Cargo from St. Thomas; but you must be so much better acquainted with these Circumstances than we possibly can that we leave the future conducting of the Voyage to you. We Should wish to have the Vessel return here next spring with a Load of Coffee from some of the French Islands where it may come cheapest.

There is a prospect of good fish being high a/t/ Havanna about Jany, which is the time of Lent, but that Island being so far to Leeward the Vessel could no return to St. Thomas but might go to Virginia & from thence either to you or Havana again & from Havana home.

We wish to have the Vessel appear as Danish Property, notwithstanding we have the greatest opinion of her being a very fast Sailor. If this can be done & you find employ may be had to advantage, you may keep her untill you can advise us & receive an Answer. We have given Capt. Lombard the name of our Correspondants at the different Islands. If he goes any where & is not sufficient to transact the business, let him go consigned; this is the case more at the leeward Islands than at Windward....

SOURCE: CODMAN AND SMITH LETTERBOOK, BL.

¹
A Boston mercantile firm trading with the West Indies and Europe during the Revolution.

Americans weren't the only people to take advantage of Danish neutrality. Taking advantage of a 1765 Danish decree allowing the establishment of the Roman Catholic Church, Spanish Catholics used the islands as a base of operations to facilitate trade between Europe and the Spanish Caribbean. In 1778 the Danes established their own commerical company, The Royal Danish West India Trading Company, in an effort to capitalize on the war between France and Britain. A branch office of this Company was opened in St. Thomas, and company ships, escorted by Danish Naval vessels traded heavily with the French islands, supplying them with essential foodstuffs and European goods in exchange for coffee and other tropical products¹. Even the British occasionally found it expedient to trade with the Danish islands during these years of food shortages.

JOHN DRUMMOND TO LORD GEORGE GERMAIN²

30 June 1779

...The channel of coming to all this my Lord, originates in the Danish islands of St. Croix and St. Thomas, where there are settled large colonies of Roman Catholic Irish to whom a number of priests and gens religieuse constantly resort who are members of different convents and communities settled in the Spanish places and colonies. By their means then is a prominent contraband trade carried between the Danish neutrals and all the Spanish islands at the head of which are generally the chiefs of the different holy orders - and under whose management a constant intercourse by flags of truce are carried on upon various pretences set forth to the Spanish governors. By these trading fathers who are in truth and monopolizers of all lucrative commerce in the Spanish settlement acting at libtum these gentry my Lord, will soon furnish a pretext for a flag of truce that shall be freely admitted into any of the Spanish ports, and anywhere without any restriction provided they are bulk paid - all that is necessary is that every person on board may be deemed neutral subjects which is a brief easily procured to of Danish brokership, in this manner my friend can personally safely undertake this kind of voyages and depend only upon his own observations and judgements which I know to be accurate.

SOURCE: GERMAIN PAPERS, WLC.

¹For the short career of the Royal Danish West India Trading Company see P.R. Sveistrup, "Det Kongelige Danske Octroyered Vestindiske Handelsselskab 1778-1785," Historisk Tidsskrift, VI (4 Hefte, 1943) pp. 385-427.

²Germain was British Secretary of State for the American Colonies 1775-1782.

JAMES RAMSEY¹ TO MAJOR GENERAL VAUGHAN

ST. KITTS, 23 January 1781

I mentioned to you a lately erected Royal Company at St. Thomas for taking advantage of the war to trade with the French Islands. His Majesty of Denmark, and his Prime Minister are principal members. Hendriques, [sic] a Prussian, is director, and has the control of two frigates, and some small armed vessels for the protection of the trade. The Borneholme frigate with ten vessels under her cover were lately met with, by three of our privateers returning from Guadeloupe loaded with sugar, and other West Indian produce. The frigate fired on the privateers for attempting to search her convoy. Her fire was returned with interest; and after she had fired four guns she struck her colors. The privateers then took possession of her whole convoy, and conducted them in here, leaving the frigate to go on her course. They had carried up to Guadeloupe goods saved from the French wrecks at St. Croix², and some private ventures, and some articles on account of the Royal Company. Their ladinges, when taken, were some French property, some private Danish, some on account of the Royal Company. One vessel sworn to be Danish property is order-

ed by letter found on board to be sold as soon as her voyage is completed on account of one Casamajor, a Frenchman of Guadeloupe.

SOURCE: VAUGHAN PAPERS, WLC.

¹A naval chaplain, Ramsey operated a plantation on St. Kitts during the revolution. He provided British civil and military authorities with military intelligence and advice. After the revolution Ramsey achieved notoriety as an anti-slavery crusader.

²Ships wrecked on St. Croix during the hurricane of October, 1780.

SAMUEL JOHNSTON¹ TO LORD GEORGE GERMAIN

ST. KITTS, 13 May 1781

...Sir Peter Clausen, Commander in Chief of His Danish Majesty's Islands in America, laid a Complaint before the late Governor a few days before his Death, first, relative to the Capture of Vessels and property of Danish Subjects coming from Guadeloupe; secondly, with regard to an Insult of the Captors to the Danish Frigate which convoyed those Vessels. To the first I answered that the Vessels had been libelled in the Court of Admiralty in this Island and declared legal prizes to the Captors, from which sentence the Claimants have appealed to England where the matter must be decided, it not being in my power to determine thereon. To the second I answered I should be ready to pay every attention consistent with the power in me vested, but this being an Affair of a delicate nature and committed on the High Seas, it must be referred to the King's pleasure which I would as I now do refer to your Lordship, no doubting but such decision would be consistent with the Honor and Rights of both Crowns....

SOURCE: PRO. C.O. 152/61.

¹Samuel Johnston, President of St. Kitts Council, who temporarily assumed the Governorship of the Leeward Islands following the death of William Mathew Burt.

GOVERNOR THOMAS SHIRLEY¹ TO GEORGE GERMAIN

ANTIGUA, 30 August 1781

I am sorry to inform your Lordship that the great Scarcity of Provisions here has obliged me, in order to prevent the little that remains from being sent to the Island of St. Thomas, which is becoming another St. Eustatius, and consequently the distress that must follow a state of real want, to take the step of prohibiting the

Exportation of every Article that can come under that discription..

..
SOURCE: PRO. C.O. 152/61.

¹Appointed Governor of the Leeward Islands following the death of William M. Burt.

Besides serving as an important entrepot of world trade, during the War of American Independence the Danish islands were also a focal point of international espionage. There is a distinct possibility (although understandably undocumented) that Philip Freneau served as an American spy during his residence on St. Croix. Certainly many pro-American residents, as well as visiting American mariners, gathered and relayed vital military information from the islands to contacts in the rebellious colonies.

The British likewise endeavoured to establish a spy network in the Danish colonies. In 1779, John Drummond proposed to Secretary of State George Germain that loyal British merchant spies should obtain Danish burgher briefs in order to gain entry as neutral traders into the Spanish and French islands. Later in the war the British unsuccessfully attempted to recruit spies from among British residents in St. Croix and St. Thomas. Equally, the French took advantage of Danish neutrality to obtain military information about the British islands.

/MANNING AND BAILEY/¹ TO LORD SHELburnE²

LONDON /1782/

To make it easy for you to combine the defense of the islands to Windward with that of Jamaica, I must desire that you will immediately take into your consideration some mode of obtaining intelligence concerning the enemy's operations to Windward, shall be earlier and more certain in it's conveyance than any which Jamaica itself can supply to you. For this purpose it has occured, that by means of neutral persons sent down from St. Croix and St. Thomas to Hispaniola, and the Havannah (under the pretence perhaps of trading and that with very small and swift vessels) you may establish a natural and authentic basis for intelligence. From this center, accurate and constant informations under of shape of mercantile news I should hope may circulate down to Jamaica and round to yourselves, and in the mode that will be pointed out to you may even reach Sir. Guy Carlton through the revolting provinces. For the purpose of facilitating any connections of this sort, which you may endeavor to establish, I enclose you two letters from considerable merchants here to persons in the Danish Islands, who may assist in forwarding your plans. By these channels, I would recommend that notice should be given of arrivals, junctions and departures, of disasters, victories and movements, and other incidents, which occur and the same maybe repeated in a like mercantile form to Mr. Manning or Mr. Bailey of London. As the part of this business which is the most dangerous, will consist in the direct intimations sent to Jamaica which I hope

need not in future happen frequently, I have high confidence in your address to fix upon proper persons for negotiating and executing a plan, of which the success is so important to the King's service.

SOURCE: SHELBURNE PAPERS, WLC.

¹West India merchants and absentee planters. Manning was William Manning, a prosperous merchant-planter of St. Kitts who had several personal acquaintances in St. Croix. See Philip C. Yorke ed. The Diary of John Baker (London, 1931).

²Secretary of State for the American Colonies 1782.

GENERAL EDWARD MATHEW¹ TO LORD SHELBURNE

ANTIGUA, 30 July 1782

Mr. Brown, the Gentleman whom I dispatched to St. Croix, returned yesterday. I have the Honor to inclose his report by which your Lordship will perceive our expectations are not answered in the degree we had at first reason to expect. I will use every endeavour to settle a Correspondence at St. Thomas as recommended by Mr. Ryan.²
...

REPORT BY JOHN BROWN:

July 7th 1782 Left Antigua. Arrived at St. Thomas on the 10th following, where I was informed of Mr. MacEvoy's³ having sailed for Europe from St. Croix about a week before.

July 12th. Sailed from St. Thomas and arrived at St. Croix the next day. Waited upon Mr. Ryan immediately and delivered Mr. Manning's Letter, a Letter from General Mathew, and a paper from Lord Shelburne. After Mr. Ryan had perused those papers, he said he was exceedingly sorry that Mr. MacEvoy had left the Island, that for his own part (although he had every inclination to serve his Country) he was a private Gentleman Planter and could not undertake to carry on the Business which I had communicated to Him. That he could not even recommend any person in that Island. The Principal Trade there being carried on either by French, Americans, Dutch, or people connected with them, and of course could not be trusted. He told me that from the little Trade carried on in St. Croix and the Situation of that Island in other respects, he did not conceive it to be a proper place to obtain Information, and he seemed to think such business might be carried on to greater advantage at St. Thomas as a place of more extensive Trade.

During the course of my Conversation with Mr. Ryan he often expressed a desire of being at Liberty to consult with Mr. William Newton, an intelligent Gentleman of large possessions in St. Croix and whom he said he could trust. I begged Mr. Ryan would take this Gentleman's advice, that perhaps he might put us in the way of

carrying on the Business on a smaller Scale provided it could not be executed so fully as we wished. In consequence of this we had a meeting on the 15th of July at Mr. Ryan's House, where Mr. Newton, after having read the Letters & papers, and the matter being fully explained to Him, Joined in opinion with Mr. Ryan that St. Croix was not a place of Trade sufficient for such an undertaking and if it was there were no merchants in the Island to whom they /could/ communicate business of such importance; both agreeing that St. Thomas (being a free Port) was much better Calculated to carry on such a Correspondence; And that Mr. Thomas Campbell, Merchant there, was the only person whom they could recommend, both as to Abilities & attachment to His Country, provided he could be prevailed upon to undertake it. This Gentleman sailed for Jamaica before I arrived at St. Thomas, and in all probability will not return before the Hurricane months are over, which is about the end of October.

Mr. Ryan intends to write by the first opportunity and give you his reasons at full length why the Bussiness could not be executed.

SOURCE: PRO. C.O. 318/9.

¹ Replaced General Vaughan as Commander in Chief of the British Army in the Eastern Caribbean.

² Henry Ryan, a member of a leading Irish family of Montserrat, who had moved to St. Croix in the 1750's. He was a close personal friend of William Manning. See Philip C. Yorke ed. The Diary of John Baker (London, 1931).

³ Probably Christopher MacEvoy, a Scotsman who came to St. Croix in 1751 and acquired several sugar plantations, including Estate Whim, which has been beautifully restored as a museum by the St. Croix Landmark's Society. For the history of the MacEvoy family on St. Croix see Florence Lewisohn, St. Croix Under Seven Flags (1970) pp. 121-5.

GOVERNOR JAMES CUNNINGHAME¹ TO LORD GEORGE GERMAIN

BARBADOS, 14 February 1782

...The pernicious Consequences that resulted from the Trade of Saint Eustatius are in a Degree arising at the Danish Islands. Many small Vessels have arrived here under the Danish Flag without any apparent Reason whatever, coming directly from the French Islands and landing Foreigners and other Suspected Persons. Every Step has been taken to prevent this illicit Practice, and I am now about making an Example agreeable to a Law of this Island in order to intimidate others from action in like Manner.

As I have been informed that General Clausen, Governor General of the Danish Islands, does by no means either approve of or encourage this kind of Traffick and that an Ordinance had been published by him forbidding any British Subjects becoming Burghers of any Danish Island subsequent to the Commencement of the War between Great Britain &

France, I thought it necessary to write to His Excellency...

I must remark to Your Lordship that all the Danish Vessels that have thought proper to visit us in this questionable Manner have been detained here by the Embargo, and as I have been informed several of them have been Sent here on no other Errand than to observe and give the French Information of our Situation and what was passing here, for they never undertake an Expedition that is not preceded by visits of this kind. It is with great Pleasure I can assure your Lordship that the keeping these Gentlemen here under the strict Embargo has had the most Salutary Effects....

SOURCE: PRO. C.O. 28/59.

¹ Governor of Barbados.

SECTION III:

MARITIME INCIDENTS IN VIRGIN ISLAND
WATERS DURING THE AMERICAN REVOLUTION

Throughout the American Revolution Virgin Island waters were the scene of many naval episodes which would have far reaching diplomatic repercussions in the Courts of Europe. The constant patrolling of the British Navy and especially the Tortolian privateers frequently led to illegal seizures of Danish ships and property. Overzealous British seaman often violated Danish waters in their quest for prizes. The Vice-Admiralty Court at Tortola, presided over by men who were principals in privateering ventures, was quick to condemn Danish vessels seized by the Tortolian privateers, irrespective of the diplomatic implications of such decisions. On the other hand, overt and covert Danish assistance to Americans in the form of flag salutes, assistance to American privateers, and the granting of Danish papers to American merchants and ships provoked numerable protests from local British officials. Thus, while ostensibly Denmark and Great Britain were at peace, their relations were strained to the utmost by the acrimonious cold-war situation that prevailed in the West Indies. Several of the most significant maritime incidents of the revolution, including the famous 1776 flag salute at Fredericksted, St. Croix, are detailed in the documents reproduced below.

GOVERNOR PETER VON CLAUSEN¹ TO VICE-ADMIRAL JAMES YOUNG

ST. CROIX, April 11, 1776

In the many years that I have had the honour to command in chief over my Royal master's dominions in the West Indies it has always been my point not only to observe due neutrality to the powerful allies of my King, but also on every occasion to pay the respective officers either by land or sea the compliments due them.

This I have thought should be unequivocally observed on both sides to continue the narrow alliance entered into by their most gracious Sovereigns, but I find myself mistaken herein by the behaviour of Captain O'Bryan Byrne, Commander of the ship of war called the Heyne Hind, who the 7th of February last with his said ship came to an anchor in the road of Fredericksted... passing the Fort without shewing any colour, nor informing neither the Fort or Custom House of his arrival... which tho' is a necessary compliment due from any ship to what Fort soever, and to which every Fort is entitled to compel them.

But this was not the only insult of the said Captain O'Bryan; he during his stay there searched every vessel in the harbour, both those residing at anchor, as those coming and going under Danish colours, ... properties of this Island; his long boats were watching the least motion, even of our drogues, by cruising forwards & backwards in the harbour and around the shore. He also entered a Brig coming around the Point and steering in the harbour and carried her off F under the guns of the Fort. This behaviour of the said Captain O'Bryan made our inhabitants attentive, and it struck me with astonishment when I heard of it at St. Thomas... I would not then believe it, but after my return to this Island I ordered an enquiry to be made and found more than the truth of what is related.... Lieutenant Nicholson of the Hind in conversation with some gentlemen here surprised, of the Captain's behaviour, declared that they had not only positive orders for so doing, but that the

old ship, the Heyne, was able to demolish the Fort in case the Fort should venture to hinder them in their proceedings. These declarations, compared with the actions of the said Captain, can certainly not be deemed but Insults & Hostilities, of which I find myself, for the honor of my King to make a due report to His Royal Majesty my Master, also to inform your Honour thereof, as I can't imagine these foregoing facts to be by the Laws, Treaties and Alliances, less by you, authorized.

I have been forced to order a Court Martial on the Commanding Officer in the Fort who silently bore those great insults & hostilities, and the decision of the Court will determine this matter....

SOURCE: VON CLAUSSEN LETTERBOOKS, BAN. LIB.

¹Governor General of the Danish West Indies.

CAPTAIN BRYNE TO VICE-ADMIRAL JAMES YOUNG

ANTIGUA, 9 March 1777.

In Answer to the Copy of a Memorial which you have received from my Lords Commissioners of the Admiralty, transmitted to them from the Earl of Suffolk, one of His Majesty's Principal Secretaries of State, from Monsr. de Hennoken, the Danish Charge d'Affairs, complaining of my Conduct in His Majesty's Ship Hind under my Command in the Road Fredericstadt off one of the Danish West India Islands; and Secretary Stephens having signified their Lordships' Directions to you to make immediate enquiry into the matter therein Complained of; I am to acquaint you the 7th February 1776, at seven O'Clock dark Night, I came to an Anchor in the Road, and without meaning the least disrespect to the Fort did not hoist any Colours 'till the next Morning, it not being Customary to wear them after Sun Set.

As to my boarding Vessels under their Guns, I remember to have spoke but two Sloops and I had suspicion of their belonging to His Majesty's Rebellious Subjects in America; both of them were at least three Miles from any Fort. On my Boats boarding one of them, the Fort fired a Shot and the Officer immediately desisted examining her. Afterwards, on the 18th April, 1776, I met with His Majesty's Armed Brig St. John (Commanded by Lieutenant Grant) off St. Augustine who had just before seized the above mentioned Sloop, having the same Master, Mate and Men on board (which were known by the Officer who boarded her off Frederickstadt) Laden with Arms and Powder bound to America....

SOURCE: PRO. ADM. 1/309.

GOVERNOR PETER CLAUSEN TO ABRAHAM CHALWELL¹

ST. CROIX, 12 October 1776

The Bearer hereof Sir Cornelius Durant Merchant of this Island and for more than ten years a Burgher and constant Inhabitant thereof has informed me that his Sloop called Ste. Croix, in her Passage from here was taken up between this and St. Thomas by an armed Brigg under his Britannick Majesty's Colours and carried into Your Government. The near Alliances and amiable Treaties between my Royal Master the King of Danmark and his Majesty Your Souverain, have caused my Souverain Strictly and severely both in his Kingdoms and these his Colonies to forbid his Subjects to ship or carry any military Stores of what denomination to the Americans under the Penalty of Confiscation of Ships and Goods, besides severe Punishment.

...

I have looked over the Clearance for the Sloop of Durant called St. Croix and find Sloop to be loaded with Salt which is very legal and common from here to send Salt to Norway, when it can be got: as Norway is the best market for this Produce where Fish is abundant....

I must therefore beg of Your Honor not only to release the Sloop but also to procure the Owner as Subject of my King the due Satisfaction....

SOURCE: "LETTERS SENT BY GOVERNOR CLAUSEN TO FOREIGN OFFICIALS, 1774-1784,"
RG #55, USNA.

¹President of Tortola Council.

COMMANDANT THOMAS MALLEVILLE¹ TO JOHN FAHIE²

ST. THOMAS, 27 February, 1777

Most highly injured by the hostilities committed here on our Danish Coast by one William Stephens, Commander of a small Sloop from your Government belonging to Mr. Hetherington, Inhabitant on Tortola, I am obliged to acquaint your Honour thereof, and to demand Satisfaction therefore.

Said William Stephens did on the 24th instant.... pursue and chase a French Sloop here under our Shore in a hostile manner, but even after this pursued Sloop was stranded on the South side of this Island, Stephens had the insolence to drive the people away from her, work her loose from the Shore, and audaciously to carry her away, which plainly can be seen of the inclosed Instrument taken before the Notary Public of this Place. Said Instrument will convince your Honour that this William Stephens has acted... inconsistent in the highest Degree against the Laws of Nations and espec-



An Eighteenth Century Danish West Indianan, the "ST. CROIX PACKET" Of Copenhagen.

ially against the high Union and Alliance between the Danish and British Court, but even it may be looked upon as a Robbery on the Danish Coast and a Piracy committed on the Sea. After the French sloop was stranded, she was, and became, the property of my Sovereign; yet this William Stephens had the audacity to commit an open and violent Robbery in getting her of /E/ and carrying her away. In regard hereof I am obliged to demand in the most sacred name of my most gracious Sovereign Lord and Master: First, That the French sloop Le Solide, commanded by Capt. Dominique Diusive, loaded with Indigo and Rice, belonging to Mr. Joseph Artiguenare, thus as before mentioned taken and carryed away the 24th instant from our Strand by William Stephens of Tortola, must at once with her full load and all and everything that was taken and carryed away be delivered up to Johannes Magens Esq., His Majesty's Controulor of the Customs here, who is expressly sent up to demand and see this unjust Affair settled.

Secondly, my Demand is that this William Stephens must be punished for his committed Insolence, hostilities and Robbery, Yea! even Piracy, while the Antigua Public Newspapers.... Sheweth by the Publication of Vice Admiral James Young Esq. dated 7th February, 1777, that no English Privateers are at present authorized, /and/ that all who pretends to go under that name shall be looked upon as Pirates, /and/ None has a right to make prizes, much less commit Insolences and Violences even on their declared Enemies under the Dominion of another Monarch....

SOURCE: PRO. 152/56.

¹ Commandant of St. Thomas.

² President of Tortola Council.

JOHN FAHIE TO CAISTER GREATHEAD¹

TORTOLA, 4 March 1777

I received yesterday the inclosed Letter from Commandant Malleville of St. Thomas, to which I sent in Answer that it was out of my Province to determine upon his Complaints, and directed his Application to your Honour, whose Superior Judgment wou'd give them the Consideration they merited.

At the same Time I took the Liberty of representing to the Commandant how insulting to the British Flag and injurious to his Majesty's Subjects the Proceedings at St. Croix & St. Thomas have been by their Return of Salutes from the Rebels armed Vessels under Continental Colours, & by forcing twelve Prisoners out of one of his Majesty's Transports which had been already taken by the Rebels & retaken by five brave Fellows, who were suffered to remain on board

& who rose upon, mastered and confined in irons the twelve Rebels & carried the Vessel into St. Croix. This act of Violence and unparalleled partiality, they were soon upon Reflection convinced was wrong and notified ... the Person who had the Direction of the Transport Ship that he might take the Prisoners again on board, but he, with a becoming Spirit, answered that they had by Force taken them from him and released them, and he wou'd make his Complaint to the Admiral on the Station. I complained also of their Refusal to deliver up the Guinea Snow, which was taken between St. Kitts & Nevis by an armed Sloop navigated entirely by Frenchmen, who cou'd be considered only as Pyrates, the two Nations being at Peace & which not withstanding the Testimony of the Capt. and his Mariners proving these Facts was ordered out of their ports in the Possession of the French Pyrates.

The non-commissioned armed Sloop, of whose Hostility Mr. Malleville complains, is now on a Cruise, or I cou'd have taken the Deposition of the Officers & transmitted them to your Honour by this Opportunity.

With humble Submission to your Honour, I think very little Respect is to be shewn to these Powers, whose propensity to aid and support these Rebellious Pursuits each Day's Actions make evidently appear, and that the Law of Retaliation should be dispensed to them to evince the Resentment that such flagrant Insults must excite.

The non-commissioned, armed Vessels have made amazing Havock among the Rebels, having brought in within these three or four Days eight prizes of considerable Cargoes, consisting of Indigo, Flour, Bread, Beef, Pork, pease, Corn, Mollassis, Gun Powder and dry Goods. The Inhabitants seem to be revived from the Oppression the Captures of their Sugar Ships has cast upon them, and there is nothing to be heard or seen but the roaring of Cannon, the beating of Drums, Colours flying and the frequent Appearance of fresh Prizes coming in..

..

SOURCE: PRO. 152/56.

¹

President of St. Kitts Council, Acting Governor of the Leeward Islands.

DEPOSITION OF ROBERT NICHOLSON

TORTOLA, 28 April 1777

Personally appeared Robert Nicholson, who being duly sworn on the Holy Evangelists of Almighty God deposeth and saith, that he, the said Nicholson, sailed in the Transport Ship the Lasoye Planter on the first of November in his Majesty's Service from New York in the Capacity of Carpenter, one William Smith being Master; that the said Transport Ship was bound to Corke, and in the Latitude 38.20,

her Long. 60 West from the Meridian of London, fell in with a Privateer belonging to the Rebels and was taken by her; that the said Transport Ship was ordered into Boston as she was very leaky, the Rebels having put twelve of their Men on board, leaving at the same Time part of the said Transport's Crew, consisting of him, the said Robert Nicholson, four Men and one Boy. That on the Weather proving bad the Prize-master altered his Course for the West Indies to save their lives, most of their sails having been torn to pieces. That on the 20th November the said Nicholson with his four Men and one Boy attacked the twelve Rebels, overcame them, and retook the Ship and carried her into Saint Croix under the Dominion of his Danish Majesty; that the Commandant of the said Island of St. Croix sent a body of Soldiers on board the said Transport and insisted upon the freeing of the twelve Rebels, who were the said Nicholson's Prisoners and then in Confinement, and that they should be sent ashore; that he, the said Nicholson, considering himself in his Majesty's Service and not compellable by any other Power to deliver up the Prisoners who were Rebels refused giving them up and waited on the said Commandant; that the said Commandant treated him very ill, shaking his Fist at him several Times, and forced him to release the Prisoners, or put to Sea immediately, which it was impossible for him to do, the Ship not being in Condition to put to Sea; that the said Prisoners were sent on board an American armed Vessel that lay in the Harbour; that the said Deponent was abused in several Respects for having taken the said Transport, and further this deponent saith that it was the Constant Practice during the Time he was at St. Croix, when any of the Rebel Vessels came there with their colours flying and saluted the Forts under such Colours, for the Forts to return the said salutes, which he thought were the greatest affront that could be offered to the British....

SOURCE: PRO. C.O. 152/56.

GOVERNOR PETER CLAUSEN TO GOVERNOR WILLIAM M. BURT¹

ST. CROIX, 9 July, 1777

I have been Honoured with our Excellency's Letter of the 4th Instant by the Honourable Colonel Browne, in which it has pleased your Excellency to declare finding yourself under a necessity of stating to me the High Indignity which, by the Inclosed Affidavit, you have been informed the Forts under my Command have offered to the King your Master, in having returned Salute to one of His Rebellious Subjects, a North American Privateer.

Indeed, I was shocked by reading the assertion and perused immediately the Affidavit, but, finding the Deponent to have been a Sailor Carpenter, who likely has thought little or nothing of an oath prescribed for and signed by Him, I was in Hopes to find out the Truth of the whole, and for that Purpose demanded the Honour-

able Commandant Schimmelmann, who at that time commanded in my absence, His Declaration on the Accusation which He transmitted to me under his Hand the 7th Instant.

After reading this I find that Nicholson's Deposition is in every Respect false, and when I reflect that said Commandant's entrevue with the said Nicholson was in the Presence of the Honourable Counsellor of Justice Lindeman, Capitain Von Haxthausen, Messrs. Benjamin Yard and Abraham Lynsen, who all Declare Nicholson's Assertions to be a True Sailor Story and absolute false I am then astonished that a Fellow of His Education could prevail on a Gentleman which I took Mr. John Fahie for and intrude his Declaration on said Fahie's Believance as a Real Fact. The Commandant has on this occasion declared the said Nicholson to be a nefarious lyar, calumniator and Perjuror, and insists that said Nicholson may be inflicted Corporal Punishment to prevent him and others like him to backbite People in Post. Relative to what your Excellency has been pleased to mention of the Return of a Salute from our Forts to a North American Privateer, I assure your Excellency that you positively have been misinformed because no American Vessel is permitted Entrance in these Harbours under American Colours, and which I already did forbid in the Month of March last year, with this addition, that if such Vessel should come in under American Colours, the Forts then should Hail them ordering them to strike such Colours, and if not immediately obeyed, to fire at them. As to other Vessels from America trading here under English Colours and Carrying some small guns, these have, agreeable to my Royal Master's Ordinance, been returned Salutes from the Forts after they have been first saluted by the Vessels, like all other Nation's Trading Vessels. In Regard to what your Excellency has been pleased to observe to me - "that in the Government committed to your care, no Indignity shall be offered to my Royal Master or Injustice done His Subjects, wherefore you trust, Sir, the same Conduct will be pursued by me, and that I will not Protect or suffer the North American Piratical, Rebellious Armed Vessels either to arm, refit, or bring their Plundered Prizes into any of the Ports within my Government" - I beg leave to inform your Excellency that the King my Sovereign has the 4th of March 1775 ordered me to forbid all foreign vessels enter these Ports with any kind of Ammunitions and under a serious Penalty interdicted His from Europe trading Subjects to carry the least species of warlike Stores for trade. These Laws I have duly obeyed and have publickly advertised them for Every Trader's Regulations, so that your Excellency will see that your Trust is founded in my obedience due to my Royal Master's Orders, originated from the strict alliance between the Two Crowns of Denmark and England, which I on my side always have made it a Point to dwell upon. But your Excellency will give me leave to demonstrate to you my Doubt of your Assertion - "that in your Government no Indignity shall be offered to my Royal Master or Injustice done his Subjects" - which doubt is founded not upon Sailor's Affidavit, less on Probables; but a Probates and Facts, viz., one Hetherington with other Inhabitants of the Island Tortola under your Government has armed some Privateers, which neither have Commissions nor Letter of Marque, contrary to all Laws of Nations and particularly contrary to a Treaty between the

Crowns of Denmark and England of the 11th of July 1670 with many others subsequent; so that it is evident that they are theoretical and practical Pirates, for which His Honour Admiral Young has publicly advertised them in the Antigua Gazeteer. These Pirates, or, as They call themselves, Non Commissioned Armed Vessels, took in February last a French Vessel on shore a Bay called Flamingo on the South Side of St. Thomas and after having pilfered her carried her in to Tortola.

A Schooner belonging to Two Ancient Burghers of this Island, coming from North America with a load of Tobacco, Flour, and Slaves, and anchoring in a bay on the great north side of St. Thomas where One of my Royal Master's Custom House officers at St. Thomas agreeable to his Duty and Post went on board and with His Majesty's Custom House Seal, sealed up the Hatches to bring her into the Harbour of said Island, was also taken by Tortolian Privateers or Pirates in a small Cobble and carried into Tortola, after...they first had sent the Custom House officer a Shore.

His Honor the Commadant of St. Thomas had immediately claimed these vessels from the government of Tortola, also insisted upon satisfaction for this unlawful and unnatural Behaviour of His Majesty's Allies, but instead of getting a satisfactory answer from the President in the absence of the Honorable Governor Nugent Esq. He got a vain letter from one Fahie, which as he was not known in a Publick Post was not reflected upon.

Another Sloop belonging to some Merchants of St. Thomas, passing with a Load from North America by Tortola, was there taken up and carried into Tortola, by which the owners agreeable to their calculations have suffered P. 15520 (7 joes 2 Stivers).

A privateer, namely Phillips, who had a Lawful Commission, came in the Harbour of Saint Thomas in the month of May last to carreen and during his stay there sent out its armed Tender from the Harbour, and took an American Vessel that lay to an anchor at the Black Point of St. Thomas.

I leave it to your Excellency's censure whether these actions can be called amicable or Hostile, and if they are to be countenanced or punished.

Even in these Days, I have been informed that Different Danish European Vessels with His Majesty's own Manual Pass and loaded from His Majesty's Dominions here are brought up and carried into Tortola on suspicion that they were loaded with North American Produces, which if so, I cannot find that North American Produces, regularly and lawfully entered, and Duty paid by an American Trader, and by Him sold to the Inhabitants of a Colony under the Dominion of a Prince in Alliance with his Britannick Majesty, and afterwards by them shipped and again cleared out for Europe, can be seized, less condemned, as American Produces, when they, after having paid the Duty, amongst all nations are reasonably looked upon as Naturalized of that Place from whence last shipped. I do not doubt but your

Excellency by Experience will know that these have been the Rules in the last War between England and France, when all French Produces in Foreign Bottoms and regularly cleared out from Foreign Places never were seized, less condemned; and I am amazed to find that these Rules are unknown to the Tortolians, who seem to be countenanced in their unruled Behavior, of which I find it my Duty to inform your Excellency, and to demand satisfaction for their ill Behavior and Indignity shewn the King my Royal Master and His Subjects....

SOURCE: PRO. C.O. 152/56.

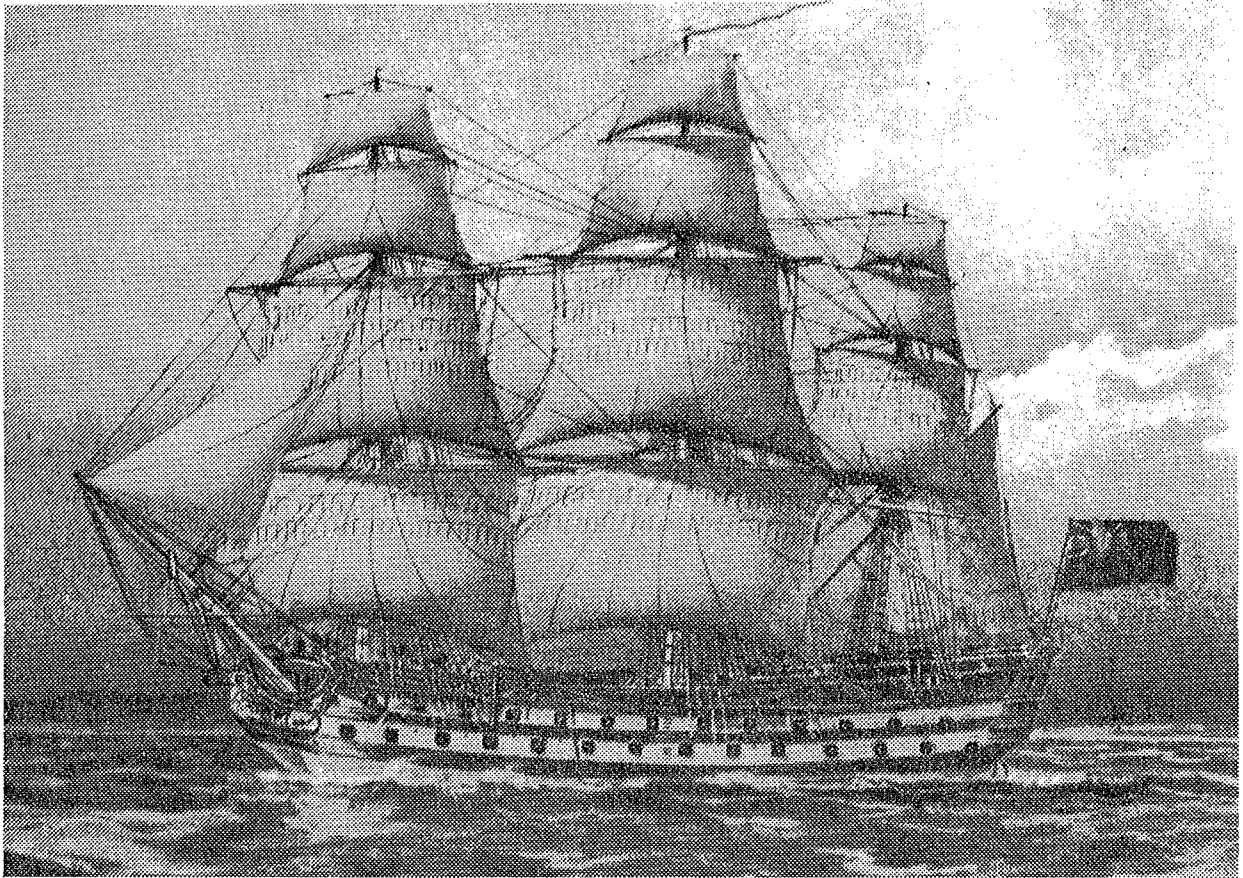
¹Governor of the British Leeward Islands 1777-1781.

GOVERNOR WILLIAM M. BURT TO GOVERNOR PETER CLAUSEN

ST. KITTS, 15 July 1777

Yesterday Col. Browne, my Aid De Camp, delivered me your Excellency's letter in reply to that he had the honor of handing you. I am truly sorry to find your Excellency mistaken in respect to the validity of Nicholson's Deposition. It is with us an invariable Rule to give Credit to Depositions of persons unless convicted of perjury; but more especially of Men of fair character such is Nicholson, and who cannot be interested in the Event of His Deposition. ...Nor can I deem him a Notorious Liar, Calumniator and Perjurer, very harsh Epithets; much less will I attempt, or think of (even had I power) inflicting Corporal punishment on him at the Dictatorial requisition of a Foreign Officer, your Commandant. I am still more concerned to acquaint Your Excellency that Mr. Nicholson's is not the only Evidence I am furnished with on this occasion, as many respectable characters in this Island, and also from St. Croix, have aver'd, and would give their oaths as to the same fact, but they fear, should their names appear, receiving Injury to their private Fortunes as they have connections with St. Croix.

To the time Nicholson alluded your Excellency was at St. Thomas, the fact of his prisoners being forced from him has also been confirmed by Danes and Col. Browne, who informs me Mr. Shimmelman told him he did it from a principle of Humanity as some of them were wounded. Your Excellency will excuse me if I say Humanity could have been equally extended to them, for their recovery, had they been left in their captor's Custody; this wou'd have prevented their going immediately, as I am informed, on Board of an armed North American Vessel then lying in your Road. In short, I cannot admit that Mr. Shimmelman had a right under any pretext whatever to force Mr. Nicholson's prisoners, and these not provisions of a common kind, but Men made prisoners in arms against their King, from him; and that this Conduct of Mr. Shimmelman's was a violation of national Confidence.



An Eighteenth Century British Man of War

In justice to the Honorable Mr. Fahie, president of His Majesty's Council of the Virgin Islands, I cannot pass unnoticed those parts of your Excellency's letter which allude to him. He is a Gentleman of Known and approved abilities, Zeal for his Master's Service, and has long been in Command not only in the Virgin Islands, of which your Excellency, Mr. Shimmelman and the commandant of St. Thomas have long been well acquainted as you have all either personally known or corresponded with him, but also hold high posts and Rank in the Windward Islands. That your Excellency shou'd glance a Reflection on this officer of the King my Master's doing his Duty, in taking the Deposition of Nicholson, is astonishing. In another part you mention -"instead of getting a Satisfactory Answer from the President in the Absence of the Honorable Governor Nugent Esq. he got a vain letter from one Fahie which as he was not known in a public post was not reflected upon"- I am convinced this Indignity offered to president Fahie, your old acquaintance, is to be ascribed to your Secretary, who ought to have wrote at least Mr. Fahie, and your Excellency's hurry in a Multiplicity of Business most probably overlooked that Mode of Writing, or you would, with a Reprimand to your Secretary, directed its Amendment.

I shall on this Subject trouble your Excellency with but one more remark-your Acknowledgement that American Vessels are Saluted from your Forts if they hoist English colors. Your Excellency is well apprised America is in open Rebellion against their Sovereign the King my Master, and returning a Salute to an American is returning a Compliment to a Rebel. How far this is consistent with the Honor and Dignity of a Royal Fort, in Alliance with my Master, your Excellency will best reconcile to yourself.

Your Excellency has taken leave to demonstrate your Doubts of my assertion that no Indignity shall be offered in my Government to your Royal Master or Injustice done his Subjects, You will permit me to say your Excellency has never yet has even the Shadow of a Ground for such a Doubt, and that its Substance is more Aerial than the Sailor's Affidavit. The Captures which your Excellency alludes to, made by the Inhabitants of Tortola, have been consistent with that Loyalty and Zeal they owe the best of Sovereigns, The King their Master, who by His Proclamation has called on His Liege Subjects to annoy His Rebellious Subjects; and also from the wise, well founded advice and opinion of His Majesty's first Law Officers, the Attorney and Solicitor General/s/ of the Leeward Islands; and also in obedience to an act of parliament of Great Britain which has the sanction of our King, Lords, and Commons, the Highest Earthly Authority an Englishman knows, which act directs the produce of North America during the time they are in Rebellion to be seized wherever 'tis met going from North America to any Port, and to be carried into some port belonging to His Britannic Majesty where 'tis condemned under proper process as legal prize; as such...Vessels...which you allow to be all loaded with North American produce and bound from thence have been treated. And as a proof of the propriety and Justice of their Sentences, not a Single Vessel you mention has appealed which they might have done had they thought themselves aggrieved. I must assure your Excellency, notwithstanding any Gazette you may

have seen, neither the Tortolean Zealous Subjects, nor any other persons within my Government, who have fitted out armed Vessels are in any Sense with us Deemed pirates; as a proof...not one of them has lately at Antigua recovered in the Courts of Law of Admiral Young twelve hundred pounds for having taken possession of her; had they been pirates this Vessel wou'd have been punished and no Verdict given against the Admiral; But your Excellency surely will never esteem Newspaper Intelligence a Solid Authority.

Whatever may have been the Rules between the acknowledged (by Europe) powers of England and France during the last War, no Experience will tell me they are to be observed during an unnatural Rebellion, or to be laid down as precedents to direct conduct with Rebels. The laws of Great Britain, united with the established Law of Nations to which Rebels are not entitled, will always direct not only my conduct but that of the Tortolians, whose behaviour, shou'd it be improper, will never be countenanced. Be assured Sir I have not any Objection in laying our letters before our Masters for their orders. I intend forwarding them by the next Convoy; as your Excellency proposes also sending them, one set will in all probability be soon received.

I am informed Mr. Vanbibber¹, a natural Born Subject of the King my Master, and an Agent of the Rebellious congress of America who lately resided at St. Eustatius, on being demanded by me from His Excellency Governor De Graff², has lately fled from St. Eustatius and taken Refuge last Wednesday Morning the 9th Instant in St. Croix. I get your Excellency will cause him to be Siezed and Delivered to me, that he may be treated as his crimes may deserve. I observe with pleasure that your Excellency will not suffer Warlike Stores to be carried from your Government. I also trust, tho' hitherto escaped your observation in your favor of the 9th, that you will not suffer the Rebellious piratical armed Vessels to arm or refit in your Government, or to bring their plundered Vessels into any of your ports.

We, Sir, are governed thank God by our own Laws; by these and my King's Instruction I act. These direct, and my own Inclinations will ever induce me, to render Justice to all Mankind and to pay every proper Respect to Sovereigns....

SOURCE: PRO. C.O. 152/56.

¹ Abraham van Bibber, a Maryland merchant served as an American commercial agent in St. Eustatius in 1776 and 1777. Early in July 1777, he was arrested and imprisoned by the Dutch for an unspecified offense, but he managed to get off the island and make his way to St. Croix.

² Johannes de Graaff, Governor of St. Eustatius.

GOVERNOR WILLIAM M. BURT TO LORD GEORGE GERMAIN

ST. KITTS, 30 July 1777

Immediately on my arrival at Tortola I dispatched an Aid-de-Camp to the Governor of St. Croix with a letter of which I enclose your Lordship a Signed Copy. I also send Mr. Clausen, the Danish Governor's Answer, in which he denies having saluted the American Flag, but acknowledges having Saluted American Vessels under English colours, Evidently an Evasion. I have also another Deposition on this fact, Substance of which I have with my Second letter sent him and enclose your Lordship: permit me to observe to your Lordship that in my 87th Instruction I am directed to assert His Majesty's Right over all the Virgin Islands, Except St. Thomas. Now St. John at present, and has some time been in the possession of the Danes, is one of the Virgin Islands; it has a prodigious fine Harbour, is Contiguous to Tortola... My Commission nor Instructions have anything similar, or I wou'd on the above Misconduct of the Danes have asserted my Master's Right, and have acquainted the Governor of St. Croix that the King of Denmark has no good title to St. Thomas. By the inclosed Deposition your Lordship will see the Piratical Americans have been saluted at St. Thomas; Nay more, my Lord, until within these few years, I am assured whenever an English Man of War anchored at St. Thomas or St. John the English Flag always flew in their forts. I beg to know His Majesty's pleasure, if he wou'd have me here assert his Right to St. John, and in what manner. Your Lordship may be assured it shall be done.

Within these Six Weeks many Spanish Men of War and other Vessels with the Troops on Board have passed the Virgin Islands bound to the Havanna. About three weeks ago a Spanish Man of War of Seventy four Guns got within the Reef called the Anagada Shoals. She made signals of Distress, and Armed Vessel belonging to Tortola took her under her care and piloted her out from her Distressful Situation. Where she must soon have perished had she not been fortunately discovered. She had on board I am told many Soldiers, besides her Compliment of Sea Men, and was completely armed. I have made the strickest Inquiry relative Porto Rico, and find they have on that station only one Man of War of 36 Guns; and on Shore about three thousand five hundred Regular Troops, but none have lately arrived thither.

In the Course of Answers to Interrogatories filed in the Court of Admiralty at Antigua it lately appeared that one Mr. Vanbibber Agent for the Congress, resident at St. Eustatius had there been concerned in fitting out a Vessel to cruize against the Subjects of Great Britain: About the same time I received...an affidavit that Vanbibber was a native of Maryland. Immediately I demanded him of Mr. DeGraff the Dutch Governor, from whom I received a polite Answer acquainting me that Vanbibber was fled; that he is fled from St. Eustatius is certain, as I traced him to St. Croix, and your Lordship will see in my second letter to Gov. Clausen have there demanded him. This measure will, I hope, be attended at least with these Advantages. [It will] destroy the resident Agent at St. Eustatius

and St. Croix. I have obtained an assurance from Gov. Clausen that he will not suffer any Rebellious, piratical Vessel to enter the ports under his Command; or to bring their prizes into them. Shou'd I be able to obtain proofs of the place of Birth of the Congress Agents resident at Martinique and Guadeloupe, I will also demand them as the Subjects of the King my Master, in Rebellion. I receive innumerable applications from all foreign Governors on Captures made by the Non-Commissioned Vessels, and with Difficulty can make them understand the Ground Work of our Courts of Admiralty on this Occasion and the Nature of the Prohibitory Act. I am on the best terms with the Neighbouring Governors, and will if possible so continue; but will never give up a Title of the King my Master's prerogative, or suffer his Dignity to receive the most minute Indignity.

The Courts of Admiralty within this Government condemn all American product found in any Vessel of any Nation. This has been done under that part of the Prohibitory Act directing to prevent the North American Trade; but my Lord, had it not been on this ground, as 'tis a fact well known that houses are established and exist in foreign Governments, particularly the Danish, to which the property is consigned to be sold or shiped on North American Account as the Markets will best Answer. Your Lordship will I hope be of Opinion the Condemnation of North American product wherever found or under every cloak was not only justifiable, but also very proper. That this product did not truly and specifically belong to either French, Dutch or Danes is Evident from this single Circumstance, Viz., there has not been but one appeal, and that lodged at Tortola last week, against any Sentence passed in the Court of Admiralty within this Government....

SOURCE: PRO. C.O. 152/56.

DEPOSITION OF JOHN ADAMS

TORTOLA, 15 July 1777

Personally appeared Captain John Adams, who being sworn on the Holy Evangelist of Almighty God, deposed and saith that sometime in the month of January he, this Deponent, was at the Island of St. Thomas, under the Dominion of the King of Denmark, and that he saw an American Schooner in the Harbour with the Rebel Colours flying and that when the said Schooner departed the Harbour she saluted with three Guns and her Colours flying, which Salute was returned by the Fort; and further, this Deponent saith that while he was at the said Island of St. Thomas a Vessel belonging to Mr. John Panyea, Merchant of this Island, came to Anchor there, which said Vessel happening to weigh her anchor and to go out at the same time that two American Vessels sailed, the Captain of the said Panyea's Vessel was, on his return to the Port next Day, by the Complaints

of some Americans, particularly one Abraham Chyler¹, taken into Custody and fined in a Considerable Sum under the pretence of his having gone out after the said two American Vessels....

SOURCE: PRO. C.O. 152/56.

¹Abraham Chuyler, a New York merchant who traded extensively with the Danish islands.

GOVERNOR WILLIAM BURT TO LORD GEORGE GERMAIN

ANTIGUA, 14 December 1777

In a Letter which I had the Honor of writing your Lordship respecting the Conduct of the Danish Governor dated July 30th, I mentioned that Agents for the Americans resided in that Government; a Proof of that Assertion I have now the Honor of inclosing your Lordship under the notarial Seals of the Island. I have only sent your Lordship a Copy. I keep the Original intending the first Time Messrs. Tennent and Ross came within this Government to seize them as Aiders and Abettors to Rebels and try them. They were both born in Scotland and Subjects to the King my Master, tho' now admitted Burghers of St. Croix¹. Inclosed I send your Lordship a Copy of my Letter to Governor Clausen on the Complaint of Flemming whose Wife and Children were seized and taken from him by Messers. Tennent and Ross under a Power of Attorney from a Mr. Walls of Georgia. By the Court of Judicature of St. Croix's Proccedings your Lordship will see the Protection they give the Rebels. I do not expect Gov. Clausen will permit me to appoint the Agent....

SOURCE: PRO. C.O. 152/57.

¹While on this occasion, Tennant and Ross were acting on behalf of a Georgia slaveowner, there is no evidence that they were ever official agents of the Continental Congress or any of the thirteen American states during the revolution.

GOVERNOR WILLIAM M. BURT TO GOVERNOR PETER CLAUSEN

ANTIGUA, 6 October 1777

Peter Flemming a Subject of the King my Master will have the Honor of delivering your Excellency this Letter. He complains to me and applies for Redress to an Injury he has received from Messrs. Tennent and Ross, natural born Subjects of my Master, but now Burghers resident in St. Croix, whom he tells me have violently taken

from him and detained his wife (a mulatto Woman) and his three Children under Pretence that they are the Property of my Master's Subjects now in actual open Rebellion, and to whom they pretend to say they intend sending this Mulatto Woman and Flemming's Children. Your Excellency I Presume will not suffer Agents for the rebellious Subjects of my Master to reside and act in your Government; and I am astonished that Messrs. Tennent and Ross wou'd appear and act in a Character so very dishonorable and which must ever put them in a despicable Light among loyal Subjects. I must therefore apply to your Excellency for the Delivery of this Mulatto Woman named Cressey and the three Children to Peter Flemming. Not only Justice, but Humanity wou'd restore a Wife and Children to a Husband and Father. Your Excellency will also be very sensible that as the Property of his Britannic Majesty's loyal Subjects, when brought into your Government by Americans, has not been stopped and taken away to be restored to them, much less will you give your Countenance to any Person who shall audaciously presume to plunder the loyal Subject for the Benefit and Support of the Rebellious.

SOURCE: PRO. C.O. 152/57.

GOVERNOR PETER CLAUSEN TO GOVERNOR WILLIAM M. BURT

ST. CROIX, 14 December 1777

When your Excellency's honoured of the 6th of last Month came to Hand I immediately issued a written Order to Messrs. Tennent and Ross for the Deliverance of the mulatto Woman Lucretia and her Children to the Bearer of your Letter a free Mulatto Peter Flemming.

But said Messrs. Tennent and Ross insinuated to me their Answer under the 23rd last, which was supported by original lawful Documents, whereby the said Mulatto Woman and her Children were adjudged to their legal Owners and Master Mr. Walls; which Documents I perused and saw them to be founded not only upon Justice and Equity but also conformable to the Laws of my Royal Sovereign, which I dare not alter.

I inclose to your Excellency a notarial Copy of Messrs. Tennent and Ross, their Answer, to which I only will add that they as Danish Subjects have acted agreeable to the Danish Laws which are only Rules of all Danish Subjects.

SOURCE: PRO. C.O. 152/57.

DEPOSITION OF TENNENT AND ROSS

ST. CROIX, 23 October 1777

In Obedience to your Excellency's Letter of the 21 Inst. we beg leave to demonstrate that we are Merchants and Danish Burghers of this Island. As Merchants & Members of a public Society we think it our Duty to correspond with other Merchants or Individuals for the Benefit of that narrow Society in which we dwell. And as Danish Burghers we strictly adhere to the Laws of our Sovereign, which in all Occurrences is our Guide.

Your Excellency will be graciously pleased from the following Documents (which after being perused we humbly pray may be return to us being Originals) to observe that Benjamin Walls of Georgia, Gentleman, after having been robbed by a free Mulatto, namely Peter Flemming, of a Mulattoe Wench called Lucretia who then was big with Child, and had two Children, Joe and Jenny; besides also, after getting Information that the said Peter Flemming was seen here in this Island with said Mr. Walls' Property, the Mulatto Wench and her Children, He, the said Mr. Walls, immediately executed a lawful Power of Attorney for us dated 12th May 1777, by which we were authorized to sue and prosecute such Person or Persons that withheld the Possession of said Slaves, and by Law to demand Satisfaction and Indemnisation for them. By this Power of Attorney was joined said Mr. Walls' Deposition on Oath before the Honorable Chief Judge John Gleen Esq., and whereby the said Mr. Walls declares that the said Mulatto Peter Flemming had clandestinely Stolen and carried off from him his Mulatto Wench with her two Children Joe and Jenny.

In Consequence of this Power of Attorney which said Mr. Walls trusted us with, we found it incumbent on us, or any other honest Persons, that declined dealing with a Thief and Robber like said Mulatto Peter Flemming to lay hold of the Thief, and secure said Mr. Walls' Property; and we addressed ... for this Intent to his Honor Judge Prihn, who lawfully arrested said Peter Flemming, having none but vague and frivolous Excuse for withholding the said Mulatto Wench Lucretia with her three Children, which third child was born here, and secured said Mulatto Wench and her Children in the Fort.

The commenced Attachment was immediately prosecuted agreeable to Law (and said Mulatto Peter Flemming procured a Council to defend his Action) but his Honor the Judge finding said Mulatto Peter Flemming to have robbed and stolen said Mr. Walls' Property, gave a Judgement against him the 25th of Aug. last, by which said Mulatto Peter Flemming was judged to pay four Ryalls per Day from the 1st of May last Year for detaining the said Mulatto Wench Lucretia untill she was restored to her Master Benjamin Walls Esq., also to pay Costs and Charges of the Law-suit....

This Peter Flemming being convinced of his atrocious Crime begged and prayed us to sett him on a free Footing in order to work for the Cost and Damages, also for the Rent he was condemned to pay for

the said Mulatto Wench to her Master, to which we agreed. But instead of performing his Engagements he eloped and found Shelter by His Excellency General Burt in Antigua, a Gentleman distinguished in that high Station he fills (and private Character he always bore) shou'd so precipitately pass his Opinion and Sentence so harshly upon us before he heard our Defence, and give Credit to a Mulatto (and an ungrateful Fellow to his former owner) to clandestinely to convey away his Property and be allowed peaceably to sit down unmolested or brought to Justice for his Villany.

We leave it to your Excellency's Determination whether it is consistent with Honesty, Probity or the Law of God and Nature that we now deliver up a third Man's Property, which the Court had adjudged him, and is entrusted to us; and we are satisfied that said Mr. Walls gets his Slaves back again without the Loss of the said Peter Flemming's Life, which he wou'd Risk in any Part of the World if insisted on.

SOURCE: PRO. C.O. 152/57.

GOVERNOR WILLIAM M. BURT TO GOVERNOR PETER CLAUSEN

ANTIGUA, 27 December 1777

I have received Information that a Sloop mounting 14 Guns, actually fitted out from St. Thomas within your Excellency's Government, has not only annoyed the King my Master's Subjects residing within the Virgin Islands and endangers the Intercourse between them, but has also lately taken three Vessels out of the last Fleet bound from Cork to Jamaica, one of which has been carried to Buck Island belonging to his Danish Majesty opposite to the Harbor of St. Croix, there landed and sold her Cargo. From your Excellency's Assurances to me by my Aid de Camp Col. Brown in July last I shou'd have thought this would have been impossible.

In the Name of the King my Master, I call on your Excellency to exert that Authority with which you stand fully vested, not only to stop and disarm the said Sloop fitted out from St. Thomas, but also to prevent any Vessel piratically taken from the King my Master's Subjects being brought into and sold within your Government, and also expect that on any Vessel being brought in, your Excellency will detain and seize her and Cargo for the British Subjects to whom she may in Law, Justice and Equity belong.

Your Excellency has already supplied me with a Proof under the notarial Seal of your Island that Messrs. Tennent and Ross acting and claiming under a Letter of Attorney from Georgia, a Province belonging to the King my Master now in Rebellion, were admitted to claim and obtained Judgment against a Subject of the King my Master

in your Courts. I call on your Excellency to know whether you will for the future admit the Attorneys for Rebels to appear as Suitors in your Courts, and also whether you will admit an Attorney authorized by me a Loyal Subject to appear, claim, and recover the Property of my Master's loyal Subjects Equally with that of his rebellious.

SOURCE: PRO. C.O. 152/57.

GOVERNOR PETER CLAUSEN TO GOVERNOR WILLIAM M. BURT

ST. CROIX, 30 January 1778

By your Excellency's letter of the 27th of December last I find that a mere naked information which you say to have received of a sloop mounting fourteen guns actually fitted out at St. Thomas has not only alarmed you, but also inticed your Excellency on the strength of this information, to call upon me in the name of the King, Your Master, not only to stop and disarm this said sloop fitted out from St. Thomas, but also to prevent any vessel particularly taken from the King, your Master's Subjects being brought into and sold within my Government.

I must beg leave here upon to assert that I am at a loss to find any probability for your Excellency's believing any such informations, as I am confident that your informer had no other proof than hearsaying. And I am amazed that your Excellency will upon the slight strength of your informer's tale accuse me of disobedience of my King's Laws and Ordinances, which I unavowedly must have committed if your assertion had only the shread of Truth.

I declare upon Honour that there never was fit out any armed sloop or kind of vessel at St. Thomas, and I will have forfeited my life if ever any vessel has been carried to Buck Island belonging to His Danish Majesty opposite to the Harbour of St. Croix... and sold her cargo.

I call, therefore, upon your Excellency in the name of truth and honesty to oblige your informer to prove his information, and in failure thereof, to punish him according to his committed crime of falsehood....

Let me further beg of your Excellency to establish an honest agent here and another at St. Thomas in whom you have confidence and you will then not be importuned with false reports, nor I troubled with their vexations, which greive me....

SOURCE: PETER CLAUSSEN LETTERBOOK, BAN.LIB.

LORD GEORGE GERMAIN TO GOVERNOR WILLIAM M. BURT

LONDON 10 March 1778

The Danish Minister having presented to the Earl of Suffolk the inclosed Memorial Claiming the restitution of two Danish Brigantines called La Dorothea and L'Elizabeth Christine, stated to have been the property of Danish Subjects, and to have sailed in June last from the Island of St. Croix, the one bound to Dunkirk and the other to Amsterdam with Cargoes of Tobacco, Rice, Rum but taken and Carried into Tortola by some Non-Commissioned armed Vessels and there Condemned; and his Lordship having transmitted the said Memorial to me, I have received The King's Command to send it to you and to signify to you His Majesty's Pleasure that you do make enquiry into the truth of the Facts therein stated, and whether any appeal has been entered from the sentence of Condemnation, and report the result of your Enquires to me for His Majesty's Information. And in the meantime you are to direct such steps to be taken for detaining and securing the Monies arising from the sale of the said Brigantines and Cargoes so as that in case the adjudication shall be found unjust and compensation decreed to the Claimants to value may be forth coming.

SOURCE: PRO. C.O. 152/57.

GOVERNOR WILLIAM M. BURT TO LORD GEORGE GERMAIN

ST. KITTS, 14 June 1778

I have the Honor of your Lordship's Letter... & at the Same time Received...the Memorial of His Excellency Baron Dreyer Complaining of the Capture, Detention, & Condemnation of the Two Brigantines the Dorothea & the Elizabeth Christine. I am truly Concerned to find such Misrepresentations have been made to the Court of Denmark which have, amongst the great & Numberless Matters of Importance, given you trouble. The transactions being truly & fairly Stated I hope will induce the Baron Dreyer to Entertain a more favorable Opinion of this Matter & Consequently a Similar Report to his Court.

Much, My Lord, has been said by Governor Clausen on the Conduct of the Inhabitants of Tortola. I am sorry to say Regularity & a Proper System of Government is not Established there as in the rest of this Government Committed to my Care. I hope soon to have it. However, in these Cases from the Account which I herewith have the Honor to inclose your Lordship it will appear that far from the Danish Captains being Compelled or forced to Renounce their Claim Mr. Tennent from St. Croix, who Pretended to be Owner of the Brigantine Dorothea, refused to Enter a Claim to Part of her Cargo but

admitted it American....

We had long in this Government Suspected, & had almost Proof Positive, that Agents for the Rebellious Americans Resided in St. Croix & Publicly received Consignments which they either Sold at St. Croix or Covered as their Property & Remitted to Europe. Mr. Tennent Refusing to Claim the American Produce but immediately Relinquishing it, is a Proof that it did not belong to His Danish Majesty's Subjects. Whatever was Danish Property was delivered & not even Libelled /on/ July 30th 1777 I troubled your Lordship with Copies of Letters which has Passed between Governor Clausen & Myself on the Subject of the Captures now Complained of; Since that Period, Applications have been Necessary to Governor Clausen on a Complaint I received from one Flemming a Free Mulattoe that his Wife and Children, Negroes whom he had brought from Georgia, were Seized, Detained, absolutely taken from him & Sold at St. Croix by Governor Clausen to whom I wrote on the Subject. The Governor Declared they were Claimed & taken by Course of Law under a Letter of Attorney from a Mr. Walls of Georgia directed to Mr. Tennent, the Identical Person who Claimed the Brigantine Dorothea, and as a Proof of the Legality & Justice of detaining the Wife & children from the Husband & Parent inclosed me under the Notarial Seal... a transcript from the Record that American Agents were Permitted to appear in their Courts on the Part of the Rebels. Thus, My Lord, you see is Justified the Idea that American Agents Reside in St. Croix & Cover, where they Can, American Property.

The Non Commissioned Vessels your Lordship knows /were/ Armed in Consequence of His Majesty's Proclamation Calling on his Loyal & Zealous Subjects to Annoy & Distress his Rebellious. I am happy to find we had so many in this Government who immediately Armed at our Sovereign's Call.

With the Memorial March 21st is a Paper of Reference: there are two Schooners in...this Reference which the Baron Dreyer States as Danish Property Coming immediately from America Loaded with Tobacco, Rice, Flour and Slaves; how far the Capture of these Vessels & Cargo acknowledged to be American were Condemnable by the Prohibitory Act your Lordship will determine, but this Singularity attends all these Complaints-not an Appeal was ever prayed....

I do imagine the Tortola Privateers may have Chased, Perhaps made Prizes opposite & in Light of the Ports of St. Croix & St. Thomas, but not within Double the Reach of Cannon. I have been assured they have Relinquished many Chases at that Distance....

SOURCE: PRO. C.O. 152/58.

WILLIAM LESLIE HAMILTON¹ TO GOVERNOR WILLIAM M. BURT

ST. KITTS, 17 June 1778

...I have examined the papers in my possession relative to the capture and condemnation at Tortola of the Danish vessels the Dorothea and Elizabeth Christina....As the parties interested did not think proper to put in a Claim, a Condemnation of the vessels and cargoes in question followed of course. Their silence when personally on the spot and apprised of the proceedings admitted the relevancy of the Libel, and the definitive sentences of the Court of Vice Admiralty consequent thereon was similar to a judgement by default at Common Law. Had a Claim been put in, and the Question argues at large, there was sufficient evidence from the information I received to prove an intercourse with some of the Rebellious Provinces and to unfold a prevailing practice among many of the British subjects, Resident Burghers of St. Croix, of visiting the American vessels immediately on their coming into Port and purchasing their respective cargoes. Factories have been established for that purpose at St. Croix and St. Eustatius, and the American Rebellion has been supported by the Rebels finding that they had markets provided for the disposal of their produce. Your Excellency will observe that I did not interfere with the Danish property on board, which was safely delivered to the owners, and the Parties concerned had a fair opportunity before them of trying the validity of the Seizure as to the American produce....

SOURCE: PRO. C.O. 152/58.

¹Deputy Soliciter General of the Leeward Islands.

GOVERNOR WILLIAM M. BURT TO LORD GEORGE GERMAIN

ST. KITTS, 29 July 1778

In my former Dispatches... I have mentioned that Messrs. Tennent & Ross, residing at St. Croix, were Agents for the American Produce which was Shipped by them. I have now the Honor of inclosing your Lordship a farther Proof of that fact in the Case of the Brigantine Dorothea, one of the Vessels complained of & Claimed by the Baron Dreyer... it is a Relinquishment of Tobacco Shipped by Messrs. Tennent & Ross at St. Croix and carried into Tortola. Also, I send your Lordship a similar Discharge...from Mr. Morrice for the Tobacco & Rice taken in the Elizabeth Christiana. Nothing, My Lord, but what Messrs. Tennent and Morrice Relinquished was Condemned; the Remainder of the Cargoes being Danish Property was Discharged. These Certificates will I hope, My Lord, convince His Danish Majesty of three facts: first, that his Governor Clausen has been Deceived by misrepresentations; next, that no Injustice was done his Subjects

by our Court of Admiralty at Tortola, & thirdly, that American Produce is Shipped on American Accounts by Persons Residing at St. Croix which, when taken and Carried into a British Port, they cannot Claim as their own, but relinquish as American Property. I flatter myself that after these Extracts are laid before your Lordship & the Earl of Suffolk you will not hear anymore of this Complaint respecting the Dorothea & Elizabeth Christiana from His Danish Majesty....

SOURCE: PRO. C.O. 152/58.

GOVERNOR THOMAS SHIRLEY TO LORD SHELburnE

ANTIGUA, 30 July 1782

Having very lately received a Copy of the Proceedings in the Court of Vice-Admiralty of Tortola from Mr. President Chalwell relative to the recovery of the nett proceeds of the Sales of the Danish Brigantines Dorothea and Elizabeth Christiana with their Cargoes, which I had his Majesty's particular Orders to enquire into, I have the Honor of enclosing them to your Lordship together with the Copies of several Letters tending to explain the Transaction.

It appears that these Vessels were captured by a sloop belonging to Tortola which had no Commission, & carried into that Island. They were tried and Condemned as Droits of Admiralty on the 15th of July 1777, and as an Encouragement to the fitting out such non-commissioned Vessels, the Proceeds were directed to be paid into the hands of the Owners of the Sloop, upon their giving Bond with sufficient Security to restore the same whenever His Majesty should demand it - A Practice which first Originated in this Island.

The Vessels and Cargoes being put up to Sale were purchased by the Owners at a very moderate price: The Elizabeth Christiana and her Cargo for f646.17.10 Stl., and the Dorothea for fl440.9.8. like Money, making the whole f2086.17.6.... Your Lordship has been misinformed as to the value of these Vessels, as they were stated to you to amount to f4199.10, which is nearly double the value. Perhaps the late Governor Burt thro' a mistake gave your Lordship the penalty of the Bonds.

Messrs. Tennent & Ross and John Morris Merchants, Danish Subjects and Residents of St. Croix, the Shippers of the Cargoes, made application to the Owners of the non-commissioned Vessel to let them have these Vessels with their Cargoes at the moderate price they gave for them (well knowing the value of their Cargoes at that time), engaging themselves to quit all claims and Demands whatever to them in future. The Owners wishing to be on a safe footing consented to it, and these People by a strong Instrument of Writing relinquished

all future Claims to either Vessels or Caroges....

It appears in proof by the Confession of one of these Danish Subjects that they cleared upwards of Three Thousand pounds Sterling by this Bargain....

I cannot help observing to your Lordship that these Danish Subjects seem to have made their Market of the Owners. The Vessels and their Cargoes after Condemnation were sold only for f2086.17.6, and they have cleared upwards of f3000 by being permitted to send the Cargoes as Prize Goods to an English Market; so that it is impossible they can be any sufferers. I am confident your Lordship upon examining into the Papers herewith sent will see abundant reason to censure the conduct of these People.

...The Judge of the Court of Admiralty of Tortóla is in great expectation of being able to remit the proceeds of these Vessels shortly, and I hope will not be disappointed. I am however very sorry to inform your Lordship that I am in a most unlucky predicament respecting this Business, not being able to make use of compulsive Measures.

SOURCE: PRO. C.O. 152/62.

DEPOSITION OF
DANIEL CONANT, PHILIP ALLEN, BENJAMIN HAMMOND AND RILEY SANDFORD

ST. CROIX, 20 November 1778

Be it known that in the Year of Our Lord 1778 this 20th Day of November, Before me Otto Christian Müller, Secretary and Notary public of the Island aforesaid, Personally appeared Daniel Connant, Part-owner, Philip Allen, Mate, Benjamin Hammond and Peter Sandford, Seamen of the Schooner Nancy, belonging to the Island aforesaid and owned by said Connant, Nicolas Cruger & Benjamin Yard, all Burghers and Residenters of the abovesaid Island of St. Croix, and loaded as follows viz., "300 bbls. of fine Flour, 4500 lbs. Hams, 12,000 lbs. Tobacco, Eight Hogs and a Quantity of other Stock. When the above-mentioned Deponents made Oaths upon the Holy Evangelists of Almighty God and deposed, declared and said: that the 19th instant they were in sight of this Island and the 20th Instant in the morning about 6 o'Clock they made this Island, and about 8 o'Clock same morning they were pursued by two Vessels and fired on by one of them who shewed no Colours, upon which the Deponents attempted to come to anchor within the Reef at a Bay called Coackley's Bay about four English Miles to windward of the Fort of Christianstad and run a shore about twenty or thirty yards from the main Land, where they dropt their Anchor. Finding that one of the Vessels in Pursuit followed them inside of the Reef & on hoisting an English Pennant dropt Anchor within a Pistol shot of the Deponent's Schooner, They, the

Deponents, then hoisted out their Boat, took in their Chests and made for the main Land, leaving the Master, Capt. Lasay, and two sick hands on board. And as they were rowing to the shore, the armed Vessel fired then her Service Guns after them, and followed them in their Boat. They most inhumanly fired at them, as the Deponents were landing, and thereby drove the People that had come down to their assistance from the Shore. /T/hen they carried off the Boat with the Chests and returned to the Schooner where they, being apprehensive of being detected, did not wait to weigh the anchor but cut the cable, which anchor and the greater part of the Cable now remains there, and finding the Schooner on Shore as she laid on her Beam Ends, they carried out an anchor and hove her off and proceeded immediately to Sea with her. The Deponents declared further that after they came ashore they were informed that these Armed Vessels belonged the one to Tortola & the other to St. Christopher, after which the Deponents protested against the said two armed Vessels for in the most hostile and piratical Manner to take their Schooner and Cargo within the Reef and upon the Beach,... not a Pistol shot from the main Land in Sight of different Inhabitants, and to carry her off....

SOURCE: PRO. C.O. 318/5.

GOVERNOR PETER VON CLAUSEN TO GOVERNOR WILLIAM M. BURT

ST. THOMAS, 30 November 1778

Your Excellency will be pleased to excuse my troubling you by these presents, when the Duty I owe my Sovereign and Lord point with The Respect I bear for his Allies, prom't me to insinuate you the inclosed Abstract relative to the Behaviour of two Tortolian Privateers with a Danish Schooner called Nancy on Shore the Island of St. Croix the 20th instant.

I have the Proceedings of the sworn Witnesses in the Court before me of which I send Your Excellency the mentioned authentique Abstract for your Perusal, leaving at the same time to Your Excellency's Decision whether the Behaviour of these Privateers can be reconciled with your King and Masters Instructions of the 2d of May 1776 and the 27th of March 1777 their first Article or not?

I am convinced that my King has by them suffered the greatest Insult ever offered from a pretended Ally not by these pitty Privateers but by your Excellency who by granting them Commissions suffers them daily to insult our Coasts. I shall not now claim the then robbed Schooner Nancy belonging to danish Subjects, but leave it to your own Direction if you will countenance such Hostility or not.

In the mean time, I will acquaint your Excellency that I

expressely shall lay my Complaints against you before my King, as your Sovereign has with a most gracious Trust invested you with the Power of impeding Hostilities and of which You seemingly dare not make use of in your Colonies.

SOURCE: "LETTERS SENT BY GOVERNOR CLAUSEN TO FOREIGN OFFICIALS," RG#55, USNA.

CAPTAIN OLIVER GARDNER TO CHRISTOPHER CHAMPLIN¹

RHODE ISLAND, 11 July 1779

...According to your request I send you the memorandum of my Cargo as near as I recollect when I was run on shore on the Island of St. Thomases five thousand gallons of Rum and seven thousand weight of sugar. I entered a regular Protest at St. Croix and tuck a copy of the same but on my Passage had my chest brook open and lost it. if you wold be at the Expençe of entering another it shall be dun. I left my business with Mr. Nicholas Croger at St. Croix and likewise the Governor he told me he should lay a clame for my vessel and cargo and had sent up to St. Christophers in order to triall the Custom as I was informed then by Croger if the vessel is recovered I am to have two thirds and the government the other third. I was run on shour about twelve o'clock at night by two privateers belonging to Totolar the one name was John Strickling and the other John Graham that is the captains names of the proverteers also I made my escape from them, when I came away when they bade me under examination, they offered me if I wold sign a Instrement of theare drawing in order to have my vessel condemned they wold gave me all my ventur that I had on board when run on shour.

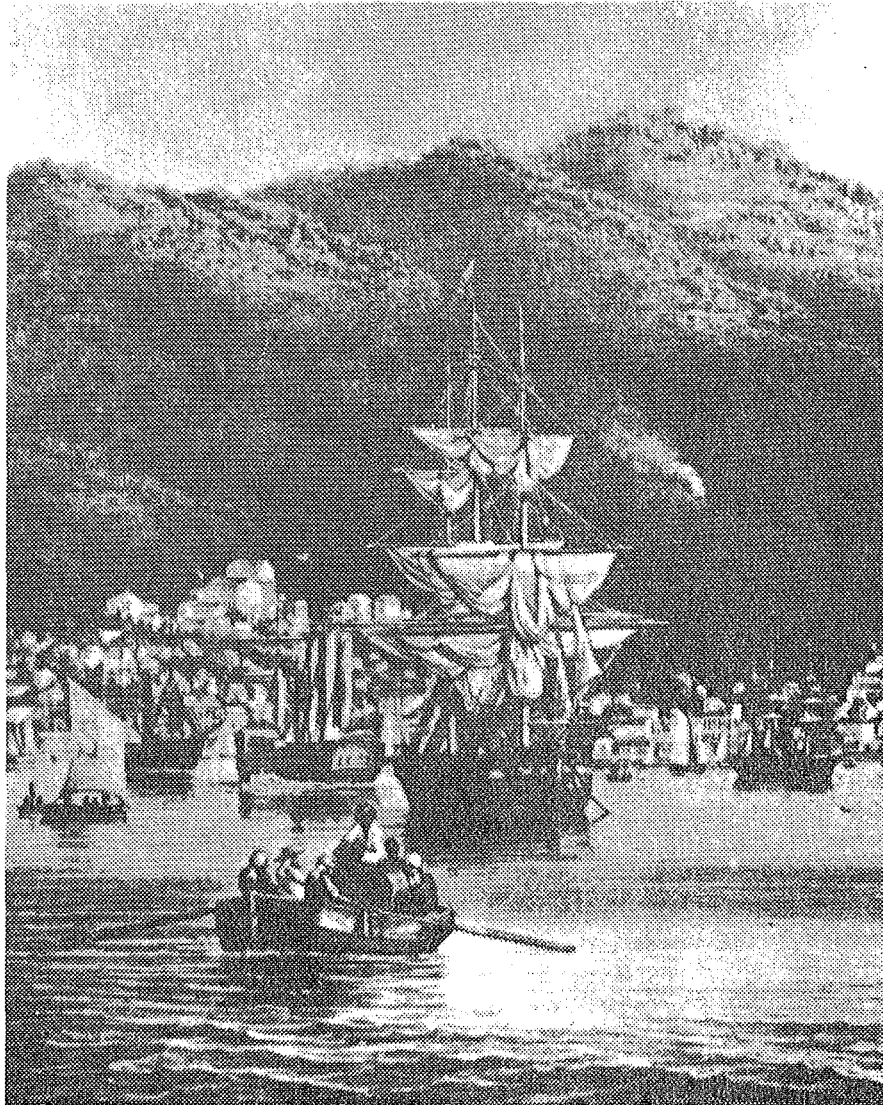
SOURCE: COMMERCE OF RHODE ISLAND, 1726-1800, II, 1775-1800, Collections of the Massachusetts Historical Society, X (Boston, 1915), p. 62

¹A Rhode Island merchant.

GOVERNOR PETER CLAUSEN TO ABRAHAM CHALWILL

ST. THOMAS, 6 March 1781

William Johnston just has delivered me your favor of the 27th last month, whereby you claim a Brigantine called Betsey and Cargo commanded by Silvanas Jenkes taken the 4th of the same month as you are pleased to assert by a private commissioned Sloop of War Liberty (whereof said Bearers Father is a principal Owner) commanded by one William Parrott, who after taking the Brigantine and putting a few Hands on board was obliged to bear away for Tortola to



ROYAL MAIL
(Passenger Ship)by Frederik Melby KB

repair the Damages sustained in the Action with the said Brigantine Betsey, who's Crew after the departure of the Privateer Sloop arose and forceably retook said Brigantine from the few hands left on board by the privateer and brought her into this Port. Said Mr. Wm. Johnston just has also delivered me a Copy of the Deposition to Interrogatories in the Court of Admiralty and of the papers found on board, whereby you think if is out of all doubt; that said Brigantine is entirely and Solely Dutch Property: whereon I must take the Liberty to animadvert; that both Narratives as well in Regard to the Capture as to the Property are very wrongly represented. I have just before me now a Copy of a Deposition of said Capt. Jenkes, his Clerk John Dunbar, the Gunner John Darling and two Passengers Gavins and Trisbey made before the Notary publick of this place the 6th of February last and sworn to in the publick Court of this Island (a Copy of which I am told Capt. Jenkes has sent to Tortola in order to claim his Trunk they carried away) which represents the Capture in a quite different Light. Said Brigantine Betsey was captured by a Privateer Ship called the Stag and the mentioned Sloop Liberty being at an Anchor in one of the Bays of this Island, the Commander Capt. Jenkes was brought on board the Stag, wherefrom he was sent to his Brigantine the next Morning and allowed to proceed to this Harbour. so there was no Necessity for the Crew left on board to retake her by force. The Prize-Master William Sharburry sent on board the Brigantine Betsey from the Sloop Liberty has also, before he was sent to Tortola, been examined here before a Polity Court together with five other hands left on board the Brigantine and belonging to the Privateer - Sloop, under solumn Oath to Interrogatories of said Court unanimously deposed that two hours after the Brigantine was taken, when the Privateer Ship the Stag, the Sloop Liberty and the oft mentioned Brigantine were beating up for Tortola. The Royal Danish Frigate & Troup came out of this Harbour, when Orders were given to bear down before the Wind to the West End of this Island in Order to close these Kings Vessels from whom they escaped in the Night, and being at Daybreak in the Morning to the Northward of St. Thomas; Capt. Jenkes was sent on board his Brigantine Betsey by the Commander of the Stag Capt. Carey and allowed thereby to proceed to this Harbour, but why this whole Circumstance of the Stag being present and assisting at the Capture is entirely omitted in your Claim. I do not know, may be this Circumstance would not prove the least Subservient to the Claim. I have also in my Hands a Copy of the Commissions for the said armed Sloop Liberty under the Notarial Seal of your Island, brought on board by said Prize Master Wm. Sharbury, which Commission mentions no Wm. Johnston Senior but William George Crabb and George Leonard Sen principal Owners, the Reason why these Names should not appear in your Letter. I do not preceive if the mentioned George Leonard Senior is a Father of the Judge in your Admiralty Court, then it needs no other Reason why this Gentleman joins You so zealously in the above Claim. Said Commission seems even to be entirely out of force, as well from the Date signed by General Burt deceased as that when transported by the Honorable Judge Leonard, there being more then Six Months eloped since either of the dates so that Captures by Virture of the Commission are entirely unlawfull.

As to the Brigantine Betsey and Cargo being dutch Property, I do hereby inclosed send you a Certificate from the Secretary of this Place, whereby it appears that said Silvanus Jenkes the 7th of Decemb'r last Year became a Burgher of this place, and the 9th thereafter was granted a Danish Pass for said Brigantine Betsey, whereby he and every one is obliged to make Oath that no Foreigner directly or indirectly has any part or Share in the Vessel also to produce a Bill of Sale for the same: but the Reason why this danish Pass and his Burghers Brief could not be found on board as well as the pretended dutch Papers, I can not conceive, as Capt. Jenkes assures, they were there with the others when he was taken, I must suppose the Captors finding them quite contrary to that dutch Property they wished to establish of both Vessel and Cargo, have thrown them away.

I believe from the premisses Your Honor will be Sensible that it is impossible for me to grant the desired Restitution, much less to look upon the Capture as good, it being of the same Nature with the many former Tortolian Captures or Depredations on Danish Vessels. Should the Owners of the mentioned Privateer Sloop Liberty think them the least injured by this my Refusal, they are welcome to go to Law in our Court with said Silvanus Jenkes; but I must certainly conclude that the Commander of the Stag privateer by sending Silvanus Jenkes on board his Vessel, and allowing to make the best of his Way to this Port is a convincing Proof of the Illegality of the Capture, in the Share of which he naturally was part concerned and to whom I think the pretended Captors may address them if they think proper. It was not even in my power, if the eloped Vessel was a foreign, Dutch, French or any Vessel, to deliver it up to the Captors, as they may blame them Selves, if the Hands sent on board a captured Vessel, were not able to defend it against the Crew of the former Possessors.

Relative to what the Prize Master and five men belonging to the Sloop Liberty have reported about their being sent as Prisoners of War on Parole for the Exchange of an equal Number of Americans, I do assure Your Honor, this is entirely false, as I do not Know, who should dare here to declare them as such. You may depend upon that no Man shall be declared less detained prisoner of War in this Government as long as I am the Chief Commander, this are things that hardly would pass without the Consent of the Chief Commander in any other Government but yours, wittness the Tortolian Emprisonement of Kammerer Graah from this place. The Prize Master and an other of the Crew were taken at Night in the Street here by the Patrol and confined in the Fort where from Capt. Silvanus Jenkes had them released for his Acct., thinking by this Act of Charity to meet with Retaliation in having his people sent from the Sloop Liberty in Tortola.

SOURCE: "LETTERS SENT BY GOVERNOR CLAUSSEN TO FOREIGN OFFICIALS," R.G. #55, USNA.

GOVERNOR PETER CLAUSEN TO ADMIRAL GEORGE RODNEY

ST. CROIX, 5 June 1781

...Of the Tortolian privateers - who either according to their hostile or tirannical behaviour toward the Danes and their property might be called pirates, are still every day two or three to an anchor at Buck Island - and likewise at Black Point of St. Thomas; who are very troublesome to the going and coming vessels in treating them ill; by which your Excellency will observe that mere threats do not make these insolents fear, but punishment should be employed to some of them for an example to others. I am in hopes your Excellency will... promise this,... which is the only method if your Excellency's orders shall be supported and regard shown for my Sovereign's flag, also the property of Danish subjects in the West Indies secured....

SOURCE: PETER CLAUSSEN LETTERBOOK, BAN. LIB.

LORD GEORGE GERMAIN TO GOVERNOR THOMAS SHIRLEY

LONDON, 1 September 1781

So many Complaints have been Made of the Irregularities committed by Privateers belonging to the Virgin Islands, and of the Encouragement given by the Courts of Vice Admiralty there to the capture & Detention of Neutral Vessels loaded with British Property, as well as with that of the Subjects of Neutral States, that it has been judged proper to take the Matter into the most serious Consideration; and it appearing that because of there being no Courts of Civil Judicature in those Islands wherein Damages might be sued for and recovered, no Reparation can be obtained by the injured Parties against the Owners of the privateers, and that the Bonds given by the Owners for the due Observance of Instructions when Commissions of Marque are granted become nugatory from the defect of a legal Mode of suing for the Penalties, the King's Servants are of Opinion that the Irregularities & Abuses complained of are more likely to increase than to discontinue, seeing they may be committed with Impunity, and that, therefore, the most dangerous consequences may be apprehended from the Disputes they may occasion between this Country and Neutral States, and great Injury may arise to the Commerce of His Majesty's Subjects. To prevent Consequences so dangerous & alarming to the public calls for the most effectual & immediate Interposition of the Authority of Government, and no Measure being judged so proper & adequated to the End proposed as the Suspension of the Admiralty Courts in those Islands, I have received the King's Command to signify to you His Majesty's pleasure that you do immediately recall all subsisting Commissions granted by you or your Predecessors to any Persons to act as Judges,

Registers, Advocates, Protectors, Marshalls, or other officers of any Court of Vice Admiralty within the Virgin Islands and issue no other until His Majesty's further pleasure shall be signified to you for that purpose. And that all Vessels fitted out, or armed by persons residing in the said Islands may be made amenable to Justice it is His Majesty's Command that you do not grant Letters of Marque to any Vessel armed or fitted out in the said Islands, unless the usual Bond for the due Observance of Instructions be signed by at least one good & sufficient Security resident in some other of His Majesty's Islands within your Government.

SOURCE: PRO. C.O. 152/61.

GOVERNOR THOMAS SHIRLEY TO LORD SHELburnE

ANTIGUA, 30 July 1782

His Majesty having been pleased to issue his Commands to that purpose, I was under the necessity of suspending the Court of Vice-Admiralty of Tortola and the Virgin Islands in the Month of December last. I have been since applied to by Petition from the President and Speaker of that Island to take off the suspension, but his Majesty's Commands to me are so positive that I dare not do it. I cannot therefore sue the Bonds in that Court; And there is no Court of Justice in the Island to apply to, or any Law for the establishing Courts of Justice. There is one now before the Lords of Trade, and has been before them sometime, of a very voluminous nature which I apprehend will require a great deal of consideration, and I could wish if their Lordships approved of it, that it might be passed, as the Island is greatly distressed for want of a Law of that Kind.

I take the Liberty of enclosing to your Lordship the Petition sent to me from the Resident and Speaker of Tortola, praying the Suspension may be taken off from the Court of Vice-Admiralty. In answer thereto, I wrote them I could not grant the prayer of it, but if they would draw up a dutiful and humble Petition to the Throne I would do everything in my power to recommend it. Thro' some inattention or other they have neglected to do it. I assure your Lordship their case is exceeding hard, and I could wish His Majesty would be graciously pleased to take it into consideration. I shall do everything to give your Lordship the utmost satisfaction in this Business, and am with the greatest Respect....

SOURCE: PRO. C.O. 152/62.

THE PETITION OF THE COUNCIL AND ASSEMBLY OF
THE VIRGIN ISLANDS TO GOVERNOR THOMAS SHIRLEY

TORTOLA, 1782

Sheweth.

That the American War having by woeful Experience been productive of Hardships and Inconveniences to his Majesty's faithful and loyal Subjects the Inhabitants of his Sugar Colonies which they have never known or experienced in former Wars, they have been obliged (under the Sanction and Authority of the Statutes in that Case made and provided) to have recourse to the Expedient of arming and equipping Privateers to cruise against and to capture the Property of Americans bound to the French and neutral Ports in these Seas.

That by means of exercising this Expedient the Virgin Islands have experienced the Relief and enjoyed the Benefits arising from the Capture of american Vessels and their Cargoes, in common with the other British Islands, and equally with them have contributed to distress and annoy the Trade of the continental Colonies.

That by the Adoption and vigorous exertion of these Measures the Virgin Islands have not only supplied their own Wants in the particular articles of Flour and Lumber, for which the Planters and Inhabitants were beholden to, and in which they were wont, of Necessity, to deal largely with the continental Colonies in Times of Peace; but by their Captures of Tobacco and other dead Commodities (the Growth and Produce of these Colonies) which are calculated for the British Markets, they have also contributed in no inconsiderable Degree to the Commerce and Revenue of Great Britain.

That these Blessings and these Advantages are now no more! Bereft of them by Means of your Excellency's Proclamation which suspended their Courts of Admiralty from the ninth Day of December last, the Virgin Islands have now only to lament their Distress and to bemoan their harsh and unpropitious Fate that could mark them out as the Objects of so severe and so disgraceful a Censure.

That if, after the mortifying and truly humiliating Consideration of their being excluded from Rights which are and ever have been enjoyed in common in every other Part of the British Empire, there is any Consolation left, it is that the Inhabitants of the Virgin Islands are conscious they endure a Punishment which they have never invited, and which they are persuaded his Majesty, of his Royal Goodness, of his Affection for his faithful Subjects of this Colony, and of his regard for their Honour and Welfare, could never have ordered to be inflicted if they had been indulged with the Privilege of being heard.

That your Petitioners are conscious that some Excesses and Irregularities have been committed by Privateers to the Annoyance of the Trade of neighbouring neutral Danish Islanders which ought to

be particularly and decisively redressed.

That as such Excesses and Irregularities have been committed by Privateers while hovering round the coasts of those Islands, the burthen of Censure and Complaint hath fallen upon the Privateers equipped at, and belonging to, Tortola merely because it happens to be situate ā in their Vicinity, when at the same Time it has been well known Fact that the most noted Transgressions have been committed by Privateers from the Windward Islands while hovering round their coasts. And your Petitioners are firmly persuaded that this Suggestion would be well authenticated upon proper Investigation.

That the Court of Vice Admiralty of the Virgin Islands since the commencement of the present War hath adopted the same Principles and the same spirit in its Decisions which have formed the Rule of Conduct for other Courts of Admiralty in the neighbouring Windward British Islands. And if its judicial Proceedings (which are the highest and best Evidence to elucidate the Truth of the Position) were but to be investigated, the Strict Correspondence would be readily evinced.

That if the Exigencies of the Times required or justified the Adoption of Rules of Conduct in the judicial Department more lenient and less decisive than in former Times; the Admiralties of other Islands have been fortunate enough only to receive the necessary reproving Hints, and have profited by them. And your Petitioners are well assured that if the Admiralty of this Island had in like manner been only admonished of any error that might have occasioned any Influence in its Proceedings or Decisions, it would have been as open to conviction as other Courts have been, would have reformed its Plan, and would have carefully and consistently adhered to the future Standard. But to punish the Colony with Suspension from the Exercise of the judicial Powers of that Court is a Measure pregnant with Cruelty, and has not failed to reflect the severest Imputation of Disgrace on the Community at large.

That the late unpropitious Submission of three valuable neighbouring Colonies¹ to the Arms of France has rendered the Communication between Antigua and this Colony infinitely more difficult and precarious than it was wont to be; and that in consequence thereof the Prizes captured by British Privateers to Leeward of Saint Martin, or any other intervening French Island, cannot proceed to the said Island of Antigua, but must, of Necessity, be brought into the Port of Tortola.

That the abuses and Irregularities committed in respect to such Prizes, under the Pretence that they are intended to be conducted to Antigua for Trial, are dayly manifested. And while there is no Court to restrain or controul, will not fail to be introductive of Evils infinitely worse in their Consequences than any that could possibly have been intended to be remedied by the aforesaid Suspension.

That your Petitioners paying all due attention to the principal Ground for such Suspension, as set forth in your Excellency's

Proclamation, can with great Justice suggest that their Endeavours for the Establishment of Courts of common Law for the redress of civil Injuries have been abundantly displayed in their having passed an act for that Purpose about two Years since, and submitted it to his late Excellency General Burt to be by him transmitted for the royal assent.

That the Distresses resulting from the aforesaid Suspension have been already too sensibly felt, and have created a lasting Impression which can never fail in future to furnish a full reserve of Tenderness and Caution in the judicial Exercise of the Admiralty Jurisdiction.

That your Petitioners are well persuaded that your Excellency is furnished with competent discretionary Powers to re-establish the aforesaid Court of Vice Admiralty without farther Delay; and that your Conduct in adopting so just, so wise, and so salutary a Measure cannot fail to gain the approbation and Applause of our good and gracious Sovereign.

Your Petitioners therefore, impressed with the deepest Sense of your Excellency's Goodness, and of your equal regard for the Credit, Prosperity, and Honour of every Part of your Government, are emboldened to intreat, and humbly to hope, that your Excellency will be graciously pleased, without farther Delay, to re-establish the same Court of Vice Admiralty....

SOURCE: PRO. C.O. 152/62.

¹St. Kitts, Nevis and Montserrat.

THOMAS TOWNSHEND¹ TO GOVERNOR THOMAS SHIRLEY

LONDON, 27 October 1782

On the 1st Instant I had the honor of laying before the King Your Letter... relating to the Danish Brigantines Dorothea and Elizabeth Christiana taken by a Sloop not having a Commission and carried into Tortola where they were condemned as Droits of Admiralty, setting forth the occasion of the delay in remitting the produce of them and their Cargoes to the Receiver General, and recommending that the Suspension laid on the Courts of Vice Admiralty in Tortola and the other Virgin Islands conformable to the Instructions given to you by the late Secretary of State in his Letter of the 1st Sept. last, may be taken off; and in answer thereto I have the King's commands to acquaint You that in expectation the late restraint they have been under will have a tendency to Check in future such unwarrantable and unprecedented proceedings as have been practiced by the Privateers belonging to those Islands, His Majesty has been graciously pleased to condescend to accede to Your proposal, and You will give the necessary Orders in consequence thereof, taking care to enforce the immediate recovery of the

produce of the Danish Vessels before mentioned previous to Your taking off the Suspension, and to cause it to be remitted agreeable to the directions already given on that head....

SOURCE: PRO. C.O. 152/62.

¹British Secretary of War.

By way of retaliation against the inhabitants of Tortola for their privateering activities throughout the war, the Americans organized a punitive expedition against that island early in 1782. After rendezvousing in Martinique, five American warships set sail on March 2, 1782, to raid Tortola. Although the American raid failed, it seriously alarmed the Tortolians, who requested naval protection from Admiral Rodney. Rodney immediately dispatched the HMS Santa Monica to the scene. While cruising the British Virgin Islands in search of the American raiders, the Santa Monica struck an uncharted rock and sunk off the Danish Island of St. John¹. The story of this fascinating, but little known episode in the maritime history of the Virgin Islands unfolds in the following first hand accounts by American and British participants².

LOG OF THE PILGRIM

February-March, 1782

...Monday 25th On meridian we came to an Anchor in the harbour of Saint Pierre³, where we found several American Vessells. We were likewise announced of the arival of our prizes, Prince Wm. Henry, Penobscott, and Friendship (the one orded to y^e Havanⁿ). The Hercules sunk at sea the day after our parting with her & Mr. Rand & his Crew were taken from her by the Mohawk. many sever reflections were cast upon Mr. Rand respecting the prize, and probably not without great Cause. Immediately upon our arival all hands were employed in fitting ye Ship for Sea.

Saturday 2d On meridian, having been 48 hours under way, we made Sail in Company with the Porus of 22 Nine pounders, Captain Carnes⁴, & 118 Men. The Brutus 20 Six pounders & 95 Men. Captain Brookhouse⁵ The Franklin 18 Six pounders Capn. Duvall⁶, & 85 Men, & the Halker /Holker/ Captain Cane /Roger Keane/ 16 pounders & 105 Men, with a determination to invest the Island of Tortola. This plan having been several days in agitation, regulations were adopted for the government of the Fleet & Captain Carnes was appointed Comodore. At Evening passed the Island of Dominica 3 or 4 leagues distant.

Sunday 3d In the afternoon chaced a Danish Schooner. The Comodore spake her, & made a Signal for all the Captains, to go on board him, passed St. Eustatia & Saba, the latter plainly in sight.

Monday 4th About 3 pm we saw the Virgin Islands, & Two Sails under the Land, By a signal from Cap: Carnes The fleet gave chace,

but spake neither of them. At Sun set the Captain's were called on board the Comodore, where they spent an hour. At Evening spake a small Schooner which was detained with the Fleet. we ran in among the Islands. 200 chosen men were to land for the purpose of taking the Town, on Tortola, & to be commanded by Major Courtis, each officer of Marines commanding the party from their own Ship's. by accident, the night being dark, we passed the place of our destination & ran 3 or 4 leagues to leward, by which we were kept beating to windward thro' the night. we found by several circumstances that the Island were alarm'd, particularly by false fires which were very frequent in different places.

Tuesday 5th At day-light we were just abreast the Town, not more than 3 Miles distant, The Fleet hove too & the Captains held a consultation on board the Comodore, at Eight OClk saw several Vessells under way and endeavouring to make their escape. The Brutus & Halker were sent in chace of them. Finding the Inhabitants to be alarmed, abolished the Idea of surprize, And it was thought eligible to demand a surrender of the Town, which was to be effected by a flag of Truce to the Governor in the name of the Comodore & Major Courtis. in Case of refusal an attack by the Ship's was proposed, and they were accordingly prepared for a Cannonade. About ten OClk the Brutus (being at a great distance, and the Halker not in sight) displayed a Signal for superior Force, in Consequence of which the former proposals were delayed, And The Franklin with our Ship were sent to her relief, soon after which, she doubled a head of Land & we saw no more of her. About noon we passed a nuteral harbour on the Island of St. Johns, were were several vessells under English Colours, particularly 2 Ships of 24 or 26 Guns each a pilot boat came off, but did not board us. After getting clear of Tortola we hove too in a large Bay (among the Islands) for the Commodore who was to follow us, after discharging the Pilot, Schooner &c. in this Bay we spake One of the Brigg's from Tortola, which the Halker had manned and Ordered for St. Pierre. She mounted 14 Guns & was formerly a Salem privateer called the Macaroni. By the Men taken in her we learnt that on the preceeding evening 8 or 10 Liverpool Men had run from the Harbour in consequence of our appearance, & that the Brutus, and Halker were gone to lewd in quest of them. we supposed the vessells which we passed to be a part of them & that sundry others which we saw to leward at anchor on nuteral ground were the remainder, as they displayed English Colours. About 2 OClock the Comodore made his appearance and we found him to be engaged with 2 Ships, who upon seeing him came to Sail & posted themselves in such a manner that Captain Carnes could not avoid running between them. The fire was warm for a few minutes but the Porus had the good fortune not to loose a Man. her standing rigging was much injured & One Shot struck her Hull. so soon as he had passed, the Ships came to an Anchor again under the Danish fort. wh put it out of our power to revenge the Cause. Upon speaking the Porus Captains Duval & Robinson went on board her & spent an hour. At Evening we made sail to get clear of the Islands, & thus concluded the expedition. In the night we parted Company with the Franklin. In an affair of Intrest a plan will generally be condemned or applauded in porportion to the success

attending its execution; and among a variety of opinions, of almost every character it must naturally be supposed, that many remarks were made, and reflections cast upon the conduct on this expedition. uninfluenced by the sentiments of any one, I endeavoured to be acquainted with the principle of our undertaking it, and the particular object in view: upon weighing the matter maturely it appears to me, that the failure of the plan proceeded from misinformation rather than from ill-behaviour. Captn Robinson says that before our sailing from Martinico they took every possible method to get authentic intelligence. That the Island of Tortola was represented to be in almost a defenceless state (having but 2 Batteries, of no great consequence) and subject to the command of small Ships & a few men. Under these circumstances the attempt appeared very eligible, and enquiry was made for a proper Pilot; A Gentleman presented, who professed a thorough knowledge, but it proved that he scarcely knew our object from the neighbouring Islands. An old man from St. Eustatia belonging to the Schooner we detained, was so well acquainted that while we were running to leward in the night he frequently represented the mistake, and offered to carry the Ships to a proper station; and also to accompany the men who landed, & conduct them to the principle & commanding Fort; But the pilot brought from Martinico, was depended upon: And to his ignorance in a very great measure I impute our not succeeding; as the Enemy (judging us to be French Frigates at the distance they saw us at dark) were so much deceived in our force, that had we landed in the night & attacked the proper posts, in all probability we should have taken the Town; by which I conceive we should have been richly rewarded for the risque. when day light appeared, instead of 2 inconsiderable forts we found that the harbour was regularly fortified, and that Batteries were erected within shot of each other, upon the shore, the whole length of the Island. The inhabitants were collected in the Forts, and they hoisted Colours, which to me wore the appearance of defiance, but to many were only considered as Scare-Crow's, From this presentation I dispaired of doing any thing: And was there any error in judgment, I think it was shewn in the want of system necessary for enterprize; and in the purposal of demanding the surrender of a Town, which to appearance would have resisted, had our force been greatly superior. Upon the whole, weighing the particulars deliberately, I think the Brutus's Signal was a fortunate circumstance, as our demand would probably have been rejected, & ridiculed, if not attended with more serious consequences.

That part of Tortola which presented to our view appeared greatly cultivated & in a very flourishing state. The plantations extensive & slaves numerous. The Town is compact, but small; its situation low, & the Air consequently confined by Mountains adjacent, which were exceeding high. The harbour is not large, but from its situation may reasonable be judged a place of security, from the severity of bad weather. At each fortified part of the Island were a cluster of Houses, pleasantly situated, which I supposed to be the residence of principle planters: But this description cannot be perfect, as the observations were made in the heighth of Business,

when the Enemy's Shott were flying over us. On our retreat the Ships received the fire of the different Batteries wh we returned. some of their shott went between our Ship's Mast's, but fortunately did us no damage....

SOURCE: "THE LOG OF THE PILGRIM, 1781-82," THE COLONIAL SOCIETY OF MASSACHUSETTS (DEC., 1922), pp. 112-115.

¹The wreck of the Santa Monica has been located and excavated (See Alan B. Albright, The Excavation of the HMS Santa Monica, 1974). Many of the re-covered artifacts are on display at the St. John Museum, the St. Thomas Museum and the Marine Archaeological Laboratory of the Caribbean Research Institute, College of the Virgin Islands, St. Thomas.

²A short secondary account of the Tortola raid can be found in William Bell Clark, "That Mischievous Holker: The Story of A Privateer," The Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography, LXXIX (January, 1955), pp. 54-58.

³Martinique.

⁴Capt. John Carnes.

⁵Capt. Nathaniel Brookhouse.

⁶Capt. Silas Devol.

LETTER TO THE PUBLIC ADVERTISER FROM
"AN INHABITANT OF TORTOLA"

TORTOLA, 6 APRIL 1782

... A squadron of American privateers, armed, equipped and manned at Boston, and other neighbouring northern ports on the continent, having planned a predatory expedition against the Virgin Islands, took with them a party of disbanded Continental volunteers, who were, by agreement, to come in for a share of the plunder. On their progress to Martinique, where they first intended to rendezvous, their squadron suffered a diminution by capture: they therefore on their arrival in that island, had recourse to the expedient of beating up for volunteers, who, on the principles of freebooting, were to be allowed every privilege incident to that humane and honourable profession. Not content with the force that flocked to the piratical standard, (which were about one hundred and fifty in number) they had the modest assurance to solicit their Excellencies the Marquis de Bouillé and the Count de Graffe to give them three hundred men and two frigates to co-operate with them in securing the glorious and important object; but were unfortunately given to understand, that the forces of his most Christian Majesty were employed in the achievement of honour and conquest, and never made plunder an object.

Although thus thwarted by this unequivocal testimony and avowal of the sentiments entertained by their ally respecting their designs, their noble courage was not to be cast down; they therefore persisted. Their squadron, consisting of four large ships, the well known Holker brigantine, and a fast sailing sloop (tender to their Commodore, and a repeater of signals) took their departure from Fort-Royal, Martinique, about the first day of March last, having on board the freebooters about three hundred and fifty continentals, composing in the whole a force of about five hundred men, who were officered by persons who had borne commissions under Congress.

Early in the evening of the fourth of March, this squadron was descried from the Heights of Tortola, bearing directly for one of the entrances through that chain of keys to windward of the island, which describe a kind of semicircle, and contribute to form the bason of Tortola. They effected their entrance into it some time before the night closed in; and by their manoeuvres announced themselves to be enemies who were well acquainted with the coast. The alarm was very speedily communicated in the usual manner, by signal guns throughout the island; and the militia evinced a spirit and alacrity on the occasion which reflected the highest honour on them. The hostile squadron continued manoeuvring to windward of Road Town harbour for several hours; and the boats were all hoisted out and put in readiness to conduct the military and freebooters to the intended place of debarkation, at a small distance from the principal fort, which lies North-East of the town. The dead of the night was the time fixed on for the operations to begin. The largest ship was to have anchored close under the principal fort commanding the harbour, and to have brought up with a spring on her cable; and the second ship in point of force was to observe the like rule as to another of the forts: and the intention in so doing was to cover the landing of the troops, in case they should be cannonaded from the forts.

The person who commanded this expedition was a Continental Lieutenant-Colonel, who, the more effectually to preserve the pageantry of this business, went on board the Commodore to hold a Council of War, where a full Board of Officers attended, in order to come to a full understanding respecting the final plan of operations; but the last chearing glass of vin du pays (which constituted a necessary part of the warlike stores taken on board at Martinique) was so well relished and so frequently repeated, that the awful hour of descent was postponed until about three or four in the morning. They accordingly stood out again, and returned about two, in order to come to an anchor. As they were bearing down into the harbour, close in a line a-breast, they were clearly distinguished by favour of the moonlight; and Fort George, the principal fort, repeated the alarm, which was taken up and repeated, in regular succession, by five other forts to the southward, about two

miles distant one from the other, and all within sight of the foe. This seasonable, well-conducted, and awful signal of preparation, had so great an effect on the irritable nerves of the foe, that it was once more deemed adviseable to defer the attack until day. When that approached, the enemy were again presented to the view of the inhabitants, manoeuvring in the offing. Their great delay admitted of no other interpretation than that of timidity, which impressed the inhabitants of Tortola with the most confident assurance of their being Americans, whose designs were to plunder and destroy; and every animated arrangement was accordingly fixed on, in order to meet them manfully in the first instance, and leave everything to the issue of the bayonet. The force of the enemy, as you may suppose, was not at that time known; but the militia alone would been a full match for that which is already described. However, proper arms were prepared for about four hundred trusty negroes to co-operate with the militia; and the laws of necessity and of self-preservation justified the measure.

About eight o'clock, three brigantines in the Road Harbour weighed anchor, crouded sail, and directed their course to the south west, along the coast of Tortola, in order to endeavour to effect their escape through the channel that divides Tortola from the Danish island of St. John, which is about a mile and a half in width. They had not been well under way, when the Holker and one of the ships were discovered to separate from the squadron, and to bear down under a press of sail in order to cut them off. Two of them got safe through the channel; the third was taken in it by the Holker.

There were, at this time, several letter of marque ships and brigantines taking shelter in the different bays of St. John, which belonged to London, Bristol and Liverpool, were receiving their freight from Tortola, and almost in readiness to sail. So soon as the Holker and her consort espied them, they threw out the necessary signal to windward, which was obeyed, and two other ships bore down. These stood in so close to the shore, that they were fired at from President Chalvill's, and all the other batteries to the south-west of his. To some they returned the fire; but as it happened, no injury was received on either side. About an hour after, the last ship, after dispatching the sloop to windward of the Keys upon the look-out, bore down, and she and the sternmost of the other two ships were most manfully met by the two letters of marque ships the Fame, Captain Saunders, mounting 18 guns, and the Northumbrian, Captain Chapman, mounting 12 guns, who both weighed anchor, and went out from Smith's Bay in St. John's, to offer them battle. A smart engagement ensued, which lasted better than half an hour; in which time, so well directed a fire was preserved against the foe, that they received very considerable damage, and lost some men. The two letters of marque finding the enemy disposed to draw them to leeward, where

the other vessels were lying to with their prize, could not venture to pursue their advantage, and therefore returned to their port without having received any damage. The hostile squadron having refitted, kept hovering about to the westward. A day or two afterwards, the Holker and one of the ships worked up again through the channel, and the other three ships stretched to the northward, where it was supposed they would form a junction, and attempt a descent on the north side of the island.

The Experiment sloop of war, Capt. Herbert, having just come in from a few days cruise, and anchored at the valley of the island of Spanish-Town, to water his ship, espied the Holker and her consort standing toward him: being at that time ignorant of the coast being infested, he hoisted his private signals, which not being answered, he slipped his cable, and stood for the passage between Anegada and Spanish Town. The endeavouring to preserve his Majesty's ship from capture was his obvious and indispensable duty; for each of the vessels was, in point of real force, superior to the Experiment. However she was soon overtaken by the Holker, and a smart engagement ensued. The Junius Brutus soon after came up under English colours, and fired several broad sides at the Experiment, while under her quarters, with an intent to take her; but the Holker having, in the mean time, been most severely handled, and having had her rudder dangerously wounded, and part of her cabin stove in, and being otherwise much crippled, fortunately enabled the Experiment in a very short time to give the noble Roman so warm a reception, that she and the Holker willingly took their leave, and left the Experiment to pursue their voyage to Antigua, where she had just arrived, when the Santa Monica appeared off, took her into the squadron destined for the relief of the Virgin Islands. The injuries sustained by the Experiment were trifling; and the cool and determined valour shewn in opposing so superior a force, and with so much success, reflects the highest honour on Captain Herbert, his officers and people.

The squadron having formed a junction to the northward, cruized there for some days, between the latitudes of 19 and 21, in order to lay in wait for the running ships, which they learnt from their prize were then about to fail; but two of them having taken a rich prize, bound from Liverpool and Cork for Jamaica, while rest were not in sight, they quarrelled about the division of the spoil; and this incident happily put an end to the expedition. The Holker went to Martinique with her Tortola prize, named the Brigantine Delight; and from the officers and crew of the Delight, as well as from the most undoubted evidence of others, who have had the account of the intended operations from the commanders of the squadron themselves, you may depend on the foregoing narrative being substantially just.

Tortola is indebted to Providence for averting the intended calamity. Had a landing been effected, the island must have been indebted to its own internal force for protection; and the most cruel

ravages might have been committed, and the enemy removed far from the coast, long before the arrival of any relief. This circumstance, added to the consideration of the remote leeward situation of Tortola, and its great importance to the nation, in point of the vast revenues accruing to the Mother Country from its annual imports, must evince, in the fullest manner, the necessity of allowing it a standing naval protection.

SOURCE: PUBLIC ADVERTISER (LONDON), 16 AUGUST, 1782.

As indicated in the previous selection, following their failure to invest Tortola three American warships departed, while the Holker and Junius Brutus remained in Virgin Island waters seeking prizes. Four British warships, including the HMS Experiment and HMS Santa Monica, soon arrived on the scene to protect Tortola and British shipping. On the morning of March 6th the Experiment spotted the Americans, and the subsequent naval engagement is related in the first reading below. The HMS Santa Monica was less fortunate; while cruising in search of the raiders she struck a submerged rock and sunk off the Danish island of St. John, as described in the second selection.

COMMANDER EDWARD HERBERT TO CAPTAIN JOHN LINZEE¹

ANTIGUA, 17 MARCH 1782

I have received your order of this day's date to put myself under your Command and proceed in Company with His Majesty's Ship Santa Monica.

I beg leave to inform you that on Wednesday the 6th Instant at 9 A.M. (having come to an Anchor off Spanish Town of Virgin Gorda from a Cruize the Night before with the Foretopmast Sprung) saw a Ship and Brig to the Southward pass through the Passage called dead Chest Passage, and continued turning up between the Islands with a press of Sail, at Ten made the private Signal which they not answering was convinced were a part of an American Squadron and which (by Information) were in quest of me, the Ship appeared like a small Frigate and the Brig a Vessel of War, not being near enough the Shore to Co-operate with a two Gun Battery there thought it Expedient for the preservation of His Majesty's Ship to Slip and put to Sea, at half past 11 Slip'd our Cable and made Sail to the Northward through the Islands, which the Enemy unexpectedly Weathered and gave me Chase at 3 P.M. (Virgin Gorda E $\frac{1}{2}$ S 6 or 7 Leagues)

the Enemy having come within random Shot who hoisted English Colours and seeing an Action unavoidable through their superiority in Sailing prepared to shorten Sail and given them Battle the Wind blowing fresh at E.N.E: the Sea high and the Enemy on the Lee Quarter at 3/4 past three shorten'd Sail and bore away in order to the better fighting my Guns at the same time both Vessels placed themselves the Brig on the Starboard Bow and the Ship on the Larboard Quarter, I spoke the Ship who after a few of the usual Questions shifted her Colours to those of American and directed ours to be struck. I gave my Broad Side to the Ship and the Action commenced at the distance of about Twenty Yards. We continued our position for half an Hour the Brigg keeping up a constant and heavy fire of Musquetry Grape and Langridge. At half past four the Ship having Slack'd her fire and the Brig endeavouring to get on my Starboard Bow, I haul'd up and in so doing ran on board on her Quarter, by which she received much damage; by this time our Bowlines and Braces being cut away the Topsails took a Back and we drop't astern of both. At a Quarter before five the Brig put before the Wind and our Topsails taking full we again stood for the Ship who immediately wore gave a few Guns in return to ours and made Sail after the Brig, which lost her Foretopmast and Boom soon after. Not being able to command the Ship in consequence of the damage done to the Masts Yards standing and Running Rigging etc. which were in general Shot away and a Gun dismounted, I got the Courses set as soon as geer could be got ready and stood to the Northward. At Six lost sight of the Enemy, since that time have been employ'd mending Sails, getting up Rigging to support the Masts and Yards and turning up to Antigua. I must likewise observe that we make much Water and have received a number of Shot in our Hull Booms and Boats. Notwithstanding which am happy to inform you I had only one Man kill'd Mr. Walker the Lieut, Mr. King the Boatswain and thirteen others Wounded most of which being with Musquet Shot and Splinters are in a fair way of recovery.

P.S. I am since informed the Ship was the Junius Brutus of 18 Nine on the Main Deck & 6 Sixes on the Quarter Deck and Fore-castle and the Brig Hulker of 18 Sixes.

SOURCE: LETTERBOOKS AND ORDER-BOOK OF GEORGE, LORD RODNEY ... 1780-1782,
PUBLICATIONS OF THE NEW YORK HISTORICAL SOCIETY, VOL. 65 (NEW YORK,
1932), pp. 33-302.

¹Captain of HMS Santa Monica.

CAPTAIN JOHN LINZEE TO ADMIRAL GEORGE RODNEY

ANTIGUA, 29 APRIL 1782

I take the first and only opportunity to acquaint You that on the 1st Instant at 6 A M I Weigh'd Anchor at Peters Island near Tortola road with a Pilot on board and stood out to Sea with His Majesty's Ship Santa Monica under my Command in Company with the

Convert, Germaine and Experiment through the Common and General Channel from Tortola, with an intention to intercept the Enemy's Vessels that was daily passing Tortola, as well as to Block up the Passage of the round Rock which leads to Tortola, through which passage I did suppose the two French Frigates would endeavour to make their way that was said to be at St. Christopher's and intended for Tortola which I had the Honor to give you an Account of by Letter of the 27th of last Month by His Majesty's arm'd Schooner Barbic.

But I am exceedingly concern'd to inform you at 3/4 past 7 of the Morning I Weigh'd, when standing as near as possible after the Convert, and going about Six Knots with a great Sea that His Majesty's Ship Santa Monica struck four times very heavy and in the space of two Minutes she bulged on an unknown sunken Rock S.S.W. two Miles from the S.W. Point of Norman's Island and back'd off, and immediately made a great quantity of Water all the Cask in the Hold floating about, five Pumps and forty Bucketts were employed to free the Ship of the Water, but finding the Water to gain very fast and the Officers reporting to me that the Ship would go down, I therefore with their advice bore away for the nearest Harbour to save the people's lives and such Stores as I might be able, at ¼ before Nine A.M. I was Compel'd to run His Majesty's Ship ashore in 3½ and four Fathoms Water in Crawl Bay in the Island of St. John's where she sunk with the greater part of her Main Deck under Water, at the time I grounded the Ship there was fifteen feet Water in her, and must have gone down before we could have got to the shore if we had been a quarter of a Mile further off. After I had got the Ship in it was the opinion of the Captains of the other Ships that was with me, and the Officers and Pilot of the Santa Monica that nother could be done but saving the Stores that was above the Main Deck. I therefore without loss of time saved every thing that could be got at, it was impossible to save any part of the provisions or any Stores under the Decks, except four Cables, and three or four Sails.

The Rigging with Sails Yards, Boats, Anchors, Guns, and a great many small stores are saved, and all that could be put with the Officers and Ship's Company were, and are now in this Harbor on Board His Majesty's Ships Convert, Germaine and Experiment; the Guns, Anchors, Cables, Tops, Mizzen Mast, and some small stores are left at Tortola under the Charge of Edmd Burke Esqr....

SOURCE: LETTERBOOKS AND ORDER-BOOK OF GEORGE, LORD RODNEY ... 1780-1782, PUBLICATIONS OF THE NEW YORK HISTORICAL SOCIETY, VOL. 65 (NEW YORK, 1932), pp. 374-75.

SECTION IV:

A QUEST FOR FREEDOM:

AFRO-WESTINDIAN RUNAWAY SLAVES IN THE REVOLUTIONARY ERA

Precious little has been written about the Afro-Westindian inhabitants of the Virgin Islands during the era of the American Revolution, despite the fact that these people made up almost 90 percent of the total population of the islands. Afro-Westindian slaves were the sinews of the local economy. Without their labor no sugar, rum, molasses or other tropical staple could have been produced for trade with American or other merchants. Afro-Westindians worked not only as plantation laborers, but as artisans, stevedores and sailors, and were thus as crucial to the mercantile economy of St. Thomas as to the plantation economy of St. Croix.

Those interested in learning about eighteenth century Afro-Westindians must creatively seek their information in the hidden recesses of the historical record. One little used source in which they obtain some identity are the notices of runaway slaves that frequently appeared in the colonial newspapers. Not only do such notices give lie to the claim that the slaves passively accepted their servitude, but they also provide fascinating and invaluable data about the physical appearance, place of origin, culture, skills (it should not be overlooked that a high percentage of the runaways were highly skilled individuals) and, to some extent, the motivation of men and women seeking to break free from the brutal web of slavery.

A representative selection of the many runaway notices that appeared in the St. Croix newspaper, The Royal Danish American Gazette, during the years 1772-1778 is reproduced below. Taken collectively they clearly demonstrate that North Americans were not the only New World peoples struggling for freedom, independence and human dignity during this age of revolution.

Absented from the subscriber, since the 29th November 1772, A YELLOW NEGROE WOMAN of the Ebo nation, formerly the property of Alexander Davis. She is well known in town and country by the name of Mulatto Nancy;¹ she is a stocky, thick, well-limbered wench, speaks good English and Dutch, and reports in every place she is detected as a runaway, that she is working for her owner; for she has been seen by several negroes selling or trafficking goods in West-End town and plantations.² Whoever will apprehend, or bring or send her to the subscriber, shall be satisfied, and whoever will apprehend her selling, buying, or in the employ of any person or persons, so that the same may be proved, and will bring her to the subscriber, shall have thirty pieces of Eight reward from

John Peter O'Donnell

SOURCE: THE ROYAL DANISH AMERICAN GAZETTE (ST. CROIX), FEBRUARY 17, 1773.

¹Nancy was apparently a chronic runaway, for a notice in the Royal Danish American Gazette of June 3, 1775 shows her as being absent again, this time for thirteen months.

²It was a common practice for most slaveowners in town and country to employ slaves as hucksters. The slave would receive a small percentage of what he or she sold and, equally as important, enjoyed a considerable degree of personal freedom.

RUNAWAY from the subscriber, a NEGROE TAYLOR named Wanico,¹ well known in this island, and tho' often before advertised is yet employed by several to make cloaths for them, passing as a free fellow, and tho' I well know who are the people that employ him, they pass unprosecuted for want of sufficient evidence in some instances, and in others, unwilling to discover the person that inadvertently told me.² I will give one piece of Eight to every driver that will bring me a certificate from a white person that he has given him 50 or 60 with a cart whip, and 1 piece of Eight for bringing him home or securing him. He trades largely in stock, eggs, sugar, etc., and has emissaries in town to sell for him, which makes him useful to Negroes on estates.

Tho. Cullen

SOURCE: THE ROYAL DANISH AMERICAN GAZETTE (ST. CROIX), APRIL 7, 1773.

¹Wanico had been absent since September 19, 1772, when the notice of his running away first appeared.

²Despite harsh legal penalties for "harboring" runaways, many free people of color, and some poorer whites, sheltered runaway slaves in exchange for their labor.

RUNAWAY from Lucas Uytendsile Baron von Britton, the following NEGROES, viz., Coffe Smith and Pompus, 2 head men of the Runaways; Bombo, a mason; Pertinax, Mamima, Paulus, Class, Arra, Lawrence, Jupiter, March, Abner, a boy; Theodora, a woman. For the 2 head men a reward of Ps. 10 per head will be given. Ps. 5 per head for the 9 men and Ps. 2 for the boy and woman per head. All persons are hereby forbid harbouring or employing said Negroes, as they will be prosecuted as the laws direct. Gentlemen Planters and Managers will be kind enough to make this known to their hunters.¹

SOURCE: THE ROYAL DANISH AMERICAN GAZETTE (ST. CROIX), MARCH 22, 1775.

¹Most plantations employed one or two slaves to hunt birds and other animals. Like the hucksters, these people enjoyed a freedom of movement unavailable to the average bondsman.

Runaway four days ago, a NEGROE MAN named MATTADORE: he is a well made fellow, upwards of six feet high, and walks very erect. It is supposed that he may keep at some of the good fishing bays, as he is an excellent fisherman, and carried his cast net with him; has few acquaintances in this Island having been here only 6 or 7 months, but as he lived in Guadeloupe for some years it is imagined he may take up his residence on some estate where there are French Negroes, as he speaks French very well.

SOURCE: THE ROYAL DANISH AMERICAN GAZETTE (ST. CROIX), JUNE 5, 1776.

RUNAWAY from on board the sloop Polly, (after striking an iron ring from off his leg, and twisting a collar with hooks from his neck) ... A SAILOR NEGRO named Charles; he is a very black, stout made fellow, about five feet, eight inches high, stoops a little when he walks, has several knobs and marks upon his breast, talks good English, and gives out (though contrary to truth) that he was born in Rochelle in old France, and assumes the name of Charles Lewis Turene. He is sensible, active and cunning, and it is imagined that he is conniving to convey himself and other malcontents off the island.... He has several wives in these parts, who with others, may be seduced by his insinuations to leave the island. The Free Negroes at West-End, with whom he pretended to be extremely intimate, will be pleased to beware of him....

SOURCE: THE ROYAL DANISH AMERICAN GAZETTE (ST. CROIX), OCTOBER 29, 1777.

Absented from the subscriber some weeks ago, a YOUNG NEGRO MAN named Primus, about twenty-four or five years of age, of a yellowish colour, having a remarkably bushy head of hair, and has somewhat the appearance of an Indian; he went in search of a negro woman that was runaway, and having a pass, he has, and may perhaps make use of it to prevent his being taken; he speaks extraordinarily good English. Also Louisa, a very likely young wench, about 19 or 20 years old, having very large holes in her ears, and is of yellowish colour; she has been absent near two

years, and it is imagined she is harboured among some of her country negroes on the north-side to work in their grounds;¹ she is of the Mandingo nation....

John Patterson

SOURCE: THE ROYAL DANISH AMERICAN GAZETTE (ST. CROIX), JUNE 3, 1778.

¹It was not uncommon for plantation slaves, particularly drivers, to secret runaways in exchange for their labor on the provision grounds provided by the master.

Whereas a Negroe Fellow belonging to the subscriber, named Peter, by trade a mason, well known all over this island, has been away for thirteen weeks, and ... did not come home until last Saturday the 4th ..., when a gentleman brought him; that same night he again made his escape with a COLLAR AND CHAIN. He has a wife named Alexandria ... belonging to Christopher M'Evoy, Esq. with whom he told me he has kept during his last absence of thirteen weeks. This is to give notice that as I before advertised 5 Ps. of Eight reward for taking him, I will now only give two silvers; and I hereby proscribe him to be delivered up to the law to have his leg cut off, if he absents himself the length of time prescribed for that purpose,¹ as a public example to such negroes as can be secreted on plantations unknown to the owners or managers.

Thomas Cullen

SOURCE: THE ROYAL DANISH AMERICAN GAZETTE (ST. CROIX), JULY 8, 1778.

¹A runaway had to be absent for six months before he could be legally punished, whether by dismemberment or deportation.

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