

CAPTAIN SIMON METCALFE AND THE BRIG
"ELEANORA."*

In the various attempts to piece together something of the life-stories of those whose names are so frequently mentioned in the records of the early days of the maritime fur trade, no attention appears to have been given to this interesting man and his vessel. These few notes covering a part of the years 1789-1794 are offered as a contribution to a connected and detailed investigation of his operations.

In October, 1795 John Boit, the master of the sloop *Union*, met the celebrated John Young at Kawaihae, from whom he learned many things concerning the ships and the men engaged in the maritime fur trade. If he correctly understood and correctly reported that information it may hereafter be found that Simon Metcalfe in the brig *Eleanora* was not only among the first of the United States traders on the Northwest Coast of America, but also the first—the pioneer. In his "Remarks on the Voyage of the Sloop *Union*,"¹ Boit writes: "It appeared that Captain Metcalf had purchased this small vessel [the *Fair American*] at Macao after his arrival at that port in the *Elenora* from the *N W Coast* and did there fit her with the *Snow* for the Coast again and gave the command of her to his eldest son". Plainly this refers to the year 1788 and shows that Metcalfe had been trading on the American coast in the season of 1788, thus preceding the *Columbia* and the *Washington* which did not arrive until September, 1788.

The *Eleanora* and the *Fair American* on the 5th June, 1789, sailed in company from Macao. Off the Japanese coast they were separated in a storm and made their way thereafter by different routes towards Nootka. Somewhere in Alaskan waters, or off the Queen Charlotte Islands, the *Washington*, then in command of Captain Kendrick, met the *Eleanora* probably in the month of September, and later also encountered the *Fair American*. About the middle of October as Martinez, the Spanish commander at Nootka, was preparing to return to San Blas a schooner was seen

*Judge F. W. Howay, of New Westminster, B. C., submitted the main portion of this article to a recent meeting of the Hawaiian Historical Association.—Editor.

¹ These "Remarks" will shortly be published with notes by the Massachusetts Historical Society.

approaching the sound. It was the *Fair American*. After she had anchored a few miles from Friendly Cove Martinez invited her captain to bring her to that place. Upon her arrival he seized her for illegal entry into a Spanish port.² On 31st October, after Martinez had set sail for San Blas in company with the captured schooner, he sighted a brig bound for Nootka. At a distance of two leagues he raised the Spanish flag and fired a shot. He maneuvered to get with speaking distance but the stranger succeeded in preventing him. Martinez says: "She raised the American flag and acknowledged ours, and hauled the wind so that she could make toward the coast. The captain of the American schooner recognized her as his father's ship, but the latter was doubtless afraid that I would make him prisoner."³

It is stated by Manning that both the *Eleanora* and the *Fair American* were seized by the Spaniards,⁴ but it is doubtful if such be the fact. At any rate, if the *Eleanora* were seized it is certain that Martinez was not the culprit. His list, according to his own Diary, contains only the four vessels belonging to Meares and the *Fair American*.

Probably the better view is that the *Eleanora* was never seized by the Spaniards, for Vancouver states (vol. 3, p. 227, 1801 ed.) that "the Eleanor came on in the autumn of that year (1789) to the Sandwich (Hawaiian) islands, and remained principally about Owhyee (Hawaii) during the winter."

Further in a letter from Revila-Gigedo to Valdez dated 27th December, 1789, he states that Martinez seized the schooner ("goleta") and being uncertain how to act had brought her to San Blas for the Governor's decision. He goes on to say that, considering that the Americans had not interfered with the Spanish settlements, that their entry into the fur trade had created no embarrassment for Spain, that they were acting in good faith, and that the expense of keeping the crew as prisoners would be considerable, he had resolved to release the little vessel and allow her to proceed. But he does not mention any capture of the *Eleanora*; on the contrary he merely says that Martinez sighted her ("un vergantin") and attempted to intercept her but was unsuccessful and that she disappeared ("y se perdio de vista").⁵ It seems safe,

² Martinez' manuscript Diary, under dates 13-17th October, 1789.

³ Martinez' manuscript Diary, under dates, 13-17th October 1789.

⁴ The Nootka Sound Controversy, by William R. Manning, p. 342; see to the same effect, History of Oregon, by Robert Greenhow, London 1844, p. 224.

⁵ This letter is in the Archivo General de Indias, Seville, Spain, under the reference 90-3-19. No. 198; copy in my library.

therefore, to say that the *Eleanora* was not captured. Further research may show how, when, and where the two vessels met, if at all, before they both arrived at Hawaii.

Apparently, immediately after her release the *Fair American* sailed for the Hawaiian Islands and spent some time there before she met disaster.

In March, 1790 the *Eleanora* under Simon Metcalfe was at Kealakekua Bay in the Hawaiian Islands.⁶ The boatswain, John Young, afterwards so well-known in the story of those islands, went ashore to visit some Americans residing there; he failed to return, and in the archives of Hawaii is still preserved the letter that Simon Metcalfe wrote to those residents threatening reprisals if his officer were not at once sent on board. A copy of that letter, with a fac-simile reproduction, will be found in the Twenty-fifth Annual Report of the Hawaiian Historical Society.⁶ At the same time the *Fair American*, under his son Thomas Humphrey Metcalfe, was at anchor near Kawaihae. It is stated that the two vessels had appointed, when on the Northwest Coast, a rendezvous in that vicinity. At this time, however, the *Eleanora* was probably unaware of the proximity of the other. The gruesome incidents of the visit—the Olawalu massacre and the capture of the *Fair American*—are familiar to all readers of Vancouver's Voyage (1801 ed. vol. 3, pp. 228-234; vol. 5, p. 54 *et seq.*); but as Ingraham in his manuscript journal gives the first account of these sad events I quote:

"It seemed this was not the only calamity which befell Captain Metcalf at these islands, for not long before this schooner was captured, his long boat was stolen from the stern of his vessel at the Island of Mowee (Maui). The man stationed in her, to watch her, being asleep, the natives towed the boat to shore, and murdered this poor fellow in cold blood, while on his knees in tears he was supplicating for mercy, and these unfeeling wretches often told with exulting pleasure how this unhappy man behaved before they took his life, saying the man who killed him was a great warrior. After this circumstance they had the impudence to bring off the boat's keel and the man's bones for sale, which they were by the account received from the natives themselves, 200 men fell, yet it seems that many innocent fell with the guilty, and the chief who murdered the man was on shore and escaped".

⁶ Hawaiian Historical Society's Reports 1913, p. 28. 1916, p. 58; Ingraham's manuscript Log of the Brig *Hope*, under date, 26th May, 1791; Hawaiian Historical Society Reprints, No. 4, p. 16 *et seq.*

Ingraham records also the story of the capture of the *Fair American*, as follows:

"A small schooner named the *Fair American* was taken by the natives of Owhyhee (Hawaii). This schooner was tender to the *Eleanora*, Captain Metcalf, of New York, and commanded by his son, whom the natives killed with 3 seamen. One they threw overboard, but after beating and bruising him in a most shocking manner, they took him into one of the canoes and lashed him in with his face downwards, where Ridler found him, and interceded to save his life, in which he succeeded. When the schooner was taken the *Eleanora* was in Karakooa (Kealakekua) Bay taking in sandalwood. This, it seems, was known by his son, as the natives had informed him. The seamen of the *Fair American*, conceiving their situation dangerous, urged this unfortunate young man not to remain in Toyahyah (Kawaihae) but to go to Karakooa (Kealakekua), where they would be under the protection of the brig and could there supply themselves with everything they were in want of; but unhappily for himself and those under his command he seemed infatuated and turned a deaf ear to this advice.

"One of the chiefs coming aft with a feathered cap presented it to Captain Metcalf, (i. e., the young Metcalf, the captain of the *Fair American*), at the same time desired he might fit it on his head. In doing which, finding him off his guard, he (the chief) clasped him round and threw him overboard. At the same instant everyone on board was seized and overpowered by numbers. After being thrown into the sea those in the canoes, in the most cruel manner, beat and bruised with their paddles, etc., till they put a period to their existence".⁶

After the loss of the schooner and her crew Simon Metcalfe, Ingraham tells us, sailed away⁷; but whither we do not know. The *Eleanora* simply goes into eclipse. One might surmise that as the two vessels had only reached the Northwest Coast late in the season of 1789 and as one of them had been seized the work of that year must have been somewhat of a failure, and that, in consequence, Metcalfe may have spent the summer of 1790 in obtaining a cargo of sea-oter skins. Unfortunately, 1790 is a blank year; up to the present no record of the activities of that year has been discovered. All that we know is that in November, 1790, a Danish ship which had been dismasted in a typhoon, was pur-

⁷ Ingraham's Log of the *Hope*, May 26, 1791; Hawaiian Historical Society Reprints, No. 4, p. 17.

chased at Wampoa by "Capt. Medcalf to be sent to New York".⁸ Presumably this was Captain Simon Metcalfe. Between March and November there would be sufficient time to sail from the Hawaiian Islands to the Northwest Coast, spend three months in trading, and return to China. It is possible that Metcalfe may have been on the coast again in 1791; but that is scarcely probable, as neither Bartlett nor Ingraham mentions his being in the trade during that year.

So far as available records extend the *Eleanora* does not emerge from the umbra until January, 1792. Bartlett's manuscript journal shows that, on 16th January, 1792, he shipped as gunner on the *Eleanora* Captain Simon Metcalfe commander, bound for the Isle of France (Mauritius) with a cargo of 2,500 chests of tea. Arriving there in March the brig, after discharging her lading, was thoroughly repaired and strengthened—new beams being placed in her, fore and aft. Captain Metcalfe then, with a view to another voyage to the Northwest Coast, purchased a large quantity of copper and iron and a general assortment of articles for trade. Just as he was about ready to sail he saw a chance to make money by buying for \$4,000 a small French brig that had been wrecked on a rock at the entrance to Port Louis and was supposed to be bilged. Examination proved her to be quite seaworthy, after some small repairs had been made. This purchase absorbed all his ready cash and caused him to change his plans.⁹ He disposed of the goods he had obtained and resolved to try a venture to the island of Desolation, or Kerguelen's Land, in the southern Indian Ocean, in search of fur-seals and seal oil.

With his two brigs—the *Eleanora* and the *Ino*, as he had renamed the French vessel—he sailed on 19th September, 1792, from Mauritius to Madagascar to obtain wood and water, rice and other necessaries for a sea stock. Coming out of Port Louis the *Eleanora* had the misfortune to strike a rock and throughout the whole voyage to Kerguelen's Land one pump had to be kept constantly going to keep her afloat.

At Fort Dauphin, Madagascar, Metcalfe had an encounter with the natives. Bartlett describes an incident in that struggle, which is here reproduced in all the quaintness of his original grammar and spelling. He says:

⁸ Bartlett's manuscript Journal, under date November, 17x0. This Journal is shortly to be published by the Marine Research Society, Salem, Mass.

⁹ Bartlett's Journal, under date, May 9, 1792, and following dates.

"...in our Vessel we had a Brass four Pounder when I Loded her I put not quite a half of a nine Pound Cartrige in her and throught that wos Suffisient for her knowing that She had a Chamber in her and Required Less Powder than a Other Gun that has No Chamber the Captn Assoisted uppon haveing More Powder put in her I Did So Loded her All moust upto the Muzel and my Fireing of her So Often I knowd how She would have to be with it Nearly. After that I had Eivated the Gun for the Shore I Tuck Long Stick of fire on One end of it for with a Comon Charge She would Brack her Britchens and fly round with her Muzzel Against the Capstain for the Same Reson I went be hind the Capstain to fire her to Prevent her Bracking my Legs. Our Cook being About half Drunk ran with a Brand ends of Fire and tuckt her before I Could Git Redy to Do it my self The Gun Busted and wounded the Captn in his Lip and the Cook in his Arm and knockt all the Vituals Out of the Combuse and killd two men On the Shore".¹⁰

After some further desultory firing on both sides the natives asked for a truce and peace was restored.

Leaving Madagascar on 1st October the two vessels about the end of November reached Kerguelen's Land and anchored in Christmas Harbour, as Captain Cook had named it. There they found the bottle that Captain Cook mentions, containing the record of the arrivals of Kerguelen and Cook together with a letter showing that the *Phoenix* of Macao had visited the spot. To Metcalfe's great disappointment, though there were many seals, very few were of the fur-seal species whose pelts were of value in China. His first business was to seek some place where he could, in safety, overhaul his brigs, repair their rigging, and heave down the *Eleanora* so as to stop some, at least, of the leaks. These duties accomplished, and seal skins not being obtainable, he was, perforce, compelled to content himself with a cargo of oil. Then day by day numbers of sea-lions and sea-elephants were slaughtered and their blubber went to the melting pot, the crew living upon penguins and their eggs and the well-known Kerguelen cabbage--for of bread there was none and the supply of flour was so limited that only one pint was allowed per day for four men.

So as the month of December passed, barrel after barrel of oil found its way into the holds of his vessels. Metcalfe celebrated New Year's Day, 1793, by naming the place Port Ino and by setting

¹⁰ Bartlett's Journal, under date, 25th September, 1792.

up a sheet of copper marked with thirteen parallel stripes and bearing the letters "U. S. A." He also left a bottle with a record of the fact of his visit. Having by the 12th January, 1793, obtained 600 barrels of oil he got under way and the *Eleanora* and the *Ino* were headed for the Isle of France (Mauritius) once more. He "hove too of Christmass harbour to Send the Bottle with Captn Cook Letter On Shore the wind blew so frish that it was imposable for a boat to Land we Preceeded on Our Course towards the Isleand of France." On the way he passed close to the islands of St. Paul and Amsterdam, and observed that the latter was on fire in several places; doubtless the remains of its recent volcanic birth.

The exact date of his return to the Isle of France is unknown; but, at any rate, it was prior to 17th March, 1793, for on that date Bartlett sailed thence a-whaling in another ship.¹¹

It is altogether probable that Metcalfe sailed, some time in 1793 in the *Eleanora*, from the Isle of France to Macao; but there is nothing to show where he disposed of the *Ino*, unless we assume, from Bartlett's having shipped in another vessel, that it was at the former. In the season of 1794 he was on the Northwest Coast again probably in the *Eleanora*. There, at Houston Stewart Channel, near the southern end of Queen Charlotte Islands his brig was captured by the savages; and there Simon Metcalfe, with all his crew but one man, perished under the daggers of the Haida. The story is told in John Bolt's manuscript Log of the *Union* and in Bishop's manuscript Log of the *Ruby*. Oddly enough both of these men obtained their information from residents of the Hawaiian Islands. Boit's account was given to him by John Young; while Bishop received his from Captain Barnett of the *Mercury* who got it from Isaac Davis. As Boit's is the more detailed it will be quoted verbatim. He says:

"Young likewise informed me that old Captain Metcalf in a Brig from the Isle of France had been cut off at Coyars in ye Queen Charlotte Isles by ye Natives of that place & ev'ry soul murder'd except one man who got up in ye Main top & was taken alive Captn Metcalf's younger son was mate of the Brig. this man whom ye Natives took alive was afterwards bought of by ye Master of a Boston ship who pass'd here about a fortnight since. 'Twas from this man that Young got his intelligence the purport of which was as follows: that some time in the year '94 Capt Metcalf came to an anchor in his Brig at Coyar's Sound &

¹¹ This account has been condensed from Bartlett's Journal.

began a friendly traffic for furs with the Savages but not being much suspicious of them, let a great number come upon his decks & the natives taken advantage of their superiority in numbers, clinch'd and stab'd, ev'ry man on board, except ye one that sprung up the shrouds. This horrid Massacre was executed in the space of a few minutes, with no loss on the side of the natives."

Thus we see that the northwest trade had taken heavy toll of the Metcalfe family. The eldest son, Thomas Humphrey Metcalfe, was killed near Kawaihae, when the *Fair American* was captured; and both Captain Simon Metcalfe the father and Robert Metcalfe the younger son were murdered on the Northwest Coast when his brig, presumably the *Eleanora* was captured in 1794.

In conclusion I desire to re-iterate one of the opening sentences; this is not put forward as a complete study, but merely as a contribution, in the hope that some of the gaps indicated may be filled in by others.

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