

FURTHER NOTES ON BENJAMIN CLAPP

Since the publication in the *Quarterly* for April, 1934, of "Benjamin Clapp: Notes on His Later Life," information acquired during visits to the Missouri Historical Society and to the New York City office of the Astor Estate has confirmed certain assumptions in that article, corrected others, and added new details to the whole. Any reader who was interested in the former notes on Benjamin Clapp will probably be as much so in this new information.

An obituary in *The Saint Louis Weekly Reveille*, July 2, 1849, states that Clapp was born in New York, 1790, of a family of Quakers. After his return from Astoria, it goes on, he went to Canton and remained there till 1818; this confirms the assumption that he was the Clapp of the firm of Ogden & Clapp, mentioned in the earlier article and that the "voyage to the Pacific Ocean," given as the reason for his resignation from the United States Navy on Dec. 23, 1815, was in the joint-interest of John Jacob Astor and himself. We have further evidence of Clapp's presence in China and of the reasons therefor in a letter from Nicholas Gouverneur Ogden, found in a work entitled *In the Superior Court of the City of New York, transferred from the Supreme Court in Equity, Samuel G. Ogden (etc.) . . . vs. William B. Astor (etc.) . . .* (N. Y., 1850). This letter, found in vol. iii on pp. 339-342, dated from Canton, June 4, 1817, and addressed to John Jacob Astor, deprives of validity any suggestion that the comparative brevity of Clapp's stay in Canton was caused by any friction between Ogden and himself. Ogden writes: "You will . . . have the consignment of some silks belonging to Mr. Clapp who has taken a credit from Monqua of 8,060 Ds. payable in 12 months with interest. . . . Mr. Clapp goes home in the *Seneca* . . .; I have found him active and discreet and think he merits the high character you gave me of him. I hope it may be in your power to do something for him."

This hope was fulfilled, after Clapp's arrival in the United States, Dec. 2, 1817, by his being sent on various voyages to the West Indies in the Astor interest.

According to the obituary account, he returned to New York in 1819 to take charge of Astor's business while the latter was in Europe, for which continent he had sailed June 2, 1819. This is probably an exaggeration, as William B. Astor was left in at least titular control during his father's absence, but Clapp may well have been brought from the West Indies to give his employer's son guid-

ance from his own wider experience. This helps to account for Clapp's refusal in 1821 to continue to attend to the business of John Jacob Astor & Son unless made a partner; doubtless he felt that he had earned such an advancement during Astor's absence. During the summer of 1819 Clapp is said to have toured the Great Lakes region and later to have become associated at Mackinac with Crooks, Abbott & Co., agents of the American Fur Co.

Clapp's return to the service of the American Fur Co., after a period as an independent fur-merchant, begun in 1822, took place at least as early as March 24, 1824, according to a letter of that date, a copy of which is found in the volume *Letters of the American Fur Company* at the Missouri Historical Society, in which Astor wrote Clapp at New York from Geneva on the business of the Company.

Upon Ogden's death Clapp was sent to Canton to take charge of Astor's interests there, according to vol. i, pp. xxxii-xxxiv, of the legal report mentioned above. He sailed for Canton on the *Henry Astor*, April, 1824, and arrived in August. He seems to have been still in China as late as March 31, 1825, according to vol. ii, p. 41.

According to his obituary, Clapp then entered business on his own account again and "accumulated a handsome fortune." The earlier article suggests a doubt as to whether he succeeded for long in retaining his property.

On June 30, 1835, Clapp was appointed president of the American Fur Co., during the absence of Crooks, Astor having retired the previous year.

On Dec. 8, 1835, he was about to sail for Europe, where he remained till the summer of the next year. On his return he was again appointed president *pro tempore* while Crooks was at the Lakes, according to a letter of July 30, 1836, in the Papers of the American Fur Company at the New York Historical Society, where also are to be found the above references to his European trip.

In 1838 he settled in St. Louis where he was connected with the western American Fur Company. He was there regarded as "a good musician . . . a connoisseur in art," and a lover of poetry. According to the *Reveille*, June 25, 1849, he died June 24, 1849, 8 p. m., though apparently not from the "prevailing epidemic" (colera), as his health is noted as having been declining for a year. He was buried from Christ Church.