

## **Privateer Entrepot: Commercial Militarization in Liverpool, Nova Scotia, 1793-1805**

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On the afternoon of 27 November 1799, a flotilla of three privateers departed the little town of Liverpool, Nova Scotia. One by one they fired in salute of the battery at Fort Point, where crowds gathered to watch 230 of their men sail off to the West Indies. Ahead lay six months of chasing enemy ships, as well as storms, sickness and even assaults on island forts. For a town of only 1000 people, where no more than a hundred men were absent at sea in peacetime, it was a mobilisation ambitious in scale and great in risk.' With half the adult male population of the town aboard the privateers, the consequences of a disaster was something about which the onlookers probably tried not to think as they watched the sails vanish beyond the horizon.

Privateering was Liverpool's chief business from 1798 to 1801, as a fishing settlement with a modest export trade was transformed into a military base projecting armed force thousands of miles to the south. Liverpool went through an experience that can perhaps be called "commercial militarization," an era when outfitting privateers and disposing of their captured goods dominated the affairs of the port. This article will explore the effects of this unusual trade on the society of Liverpool in this period, considering who was drawn to privateering and how the trade affected them.

Privateers were privately-owned warships licensed by government in wartime to capture enemy ships and keep the proceeds as long as they adhered to an elaborate set of regulations administered by the Court of Vice Admiralty. To twentieth-century eyes, the notion of profiting directly from battles seems vaguely immoral and is often equated with piracy. State navies, however, were not large enough to wage war by themselves until relatively recently, making privateering a long-established — and by the late eighteenth century, a well-regulated — supplement to naval warfare that fitted well with mercantilist ideals. Little stigma was attached to those who personally profited at an enemy's expense. Indeed, state navies depended on the same reward philosophy, dividing the proceeds of captured ships among naval crews and officers as incentives and making commercial capture the most critical ingredient of wartime naval wages.'

Privateering was especially important for weak naval powers or colonies in which naval forces were stretched thinly or even absent. Atlantic Canada was no exception, and its communities sent forth privateers for almost a century and a half, from the French privateers at Port Royal in the 1690s to the final peak of privateering by Nova Scotia and

New Brunswick in the War of 1812. This study examines privateering during the wars with Revolutionary France from 1793 to 1805, a useful period for study as the records are more rewarding than at any time and privateering operations among the most ambitious and intensive ever mounted from the region.'

Discussion of Canadian privateering remains overshadowed by popular writers of the 1920s and 1930s, such as C.H.J. Snider and Thomas Raddall. More recently, some professional Canadian historians have dismissed privateering as marginal and irrelevant. This judgement appears to be mainly in reaction to the heavy patriotic and romantic tone of many of the older popular accounts, but it has ignored a growing body of international scholarship which has recently been joined by an important Canadian study of the War of 1812 by Faye M. Kert, who sets both privateering and the Royal Navy in the same business of "prizemaking" and concludes that privateering was effective, respected, well-regulated and community-based.'

The 1793-1805 period differed significantly in its use of larger warships and the capture of fewer but larger prizes much further from home. In short, the stakes were higher and the investment of human and physical capital was greater. A dozen privateer vessels operating from Nova Scotia in this period captured almost sixty enemy vessels (another thirty commissioned merchantmen, armed mainly for defence, took a few more prizes). Almost all square-rigged deep-sea vessels, they waged war in the West Indies, 2000 miles to the south. Over half of the privateers sailed from Liverpool, a community one-tenth the size of the colonial capital, Halifax (see appendix 1).<sup>5</sup>

Liverpool, located 120 kilometres southwest of Halifax, was founded in 1760 by migrants from New England. Optimistically named after the great English trading (and privateering) port of Liverpool, the potential provided by proximity to rich fishing grounds and large timber tracts, as well as a fine harbour, was only partially fulfilled in the first thirty years of settlement. Promised New England-style local government, the settlers instead were ruled by appointed officials and absentee Members of the Legislature. But after surviving the turmoil of the American Revolution, an expanding fishery and a booming trade with the West Indies led to considerable expansion. Loyalists and a slow but steady addition of Scottish and Irish settlers joined the core of New Englanders and the town's small but visible black population, both free and slave.<sup>6</sup>

Lists from a poll tax in 1792 showed a population of just over 1000, compared to Halifax's population of eight to ten thousand. The same source also provides a useful measure of the class structure of Queens County, in which Liverpool was situated, since it listed the tax assessment and occupation of every male.' At the top were a group of seven merchants, the same men who held most of the government appointments (see figure 1). A type of subordinate ruling class consisted of the fifteen local sea captains, mostly the sons and brothers of the elite. The county's middle class, about twenty percent of the populace, was divided about equally between tradesmen (mostly woodworkers) and owners of small fishing boats. About seventy percent of men had no occupation listed, but were assessed at the basic rate of one shilling, suggesting that they were labourers.

The Liverpool population did not suffer immediately when war flared between Britain and France in 1793. Despite alarms and invasion scares, the conflict at first stimulated trade. But when France established key privateering bases, such as Guadeloupe in 1795, and was joined by Spain in 1796, Liverpool's West Indian trade was affected

seriously by enemy privateers. Seven Liverpool vessels were captured in 1796 and 1798. Soaring insurance rates made further voyages impossible to finance. Navy press gangs afloat and ashore took local mariners. These costs and losses also crippled the fishery, which lost markets to American competitors. While the dockyard and garrison town of Halifax thrived on military spending and the sale of captured enemy ships, few of these benefits reached coastal communities like Liverpool.'

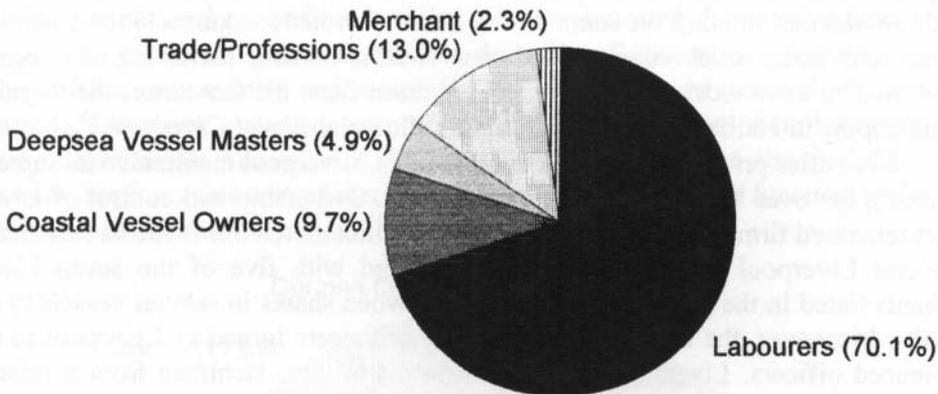


Figure 1: Occupations, Liverpool, 1793.

Source: Public Archives of Nova Scotia (PANS), RG 1/444/23, 52, Nova Scotia Polltax, 1792.

A variety of responses emerged to the deepening economic crisis in the late 1790s. Appeals and petitions, although mostly futile, were circulated for better naval protection, more trade assistance and fishing subsidies. Others voted with their feet and left town, including Benajah Collins, one of the founding merchants. Liverpool's remaining merchant elite met in the spring of 1798 to launch a bold bid to challenge decline with a dramatic reinvestment programme, the centrepiece of which was a newly-built, sixteen-gun privateer called *Charles Mary Wentworth*, the province's first privateer of this war. Eighty Liverpoolians quickly signed on. The vessel more than paid for itself on its first cruise with two substantial captures. A second voyage netted spectacular success: five prizes, worth about £ 10,000.

More investment in privateers quickly followed. Soon the *Wentworth* was joined by six other Liverpool privateers. Nearby Shelburne also commissioned a privateer and Halifax merchants outfitted four more. Three busy and successful years followed until a shortage of enemy prizes by 1801 slowed activity. It continued on a lower level, although what little remained of French trade was by then carried in neutral American vessels and barely justified the legal complications of seizure. A revival of trade following the American Embargo Acts in 1807 removed the economic necessity for privateering but left Liverpool with an experienced core of privateers ready for the War of 1812.

During the peak years of privateering, Liverpool took on the character of what one scholar has called "a privateer entrepot," a hive of supply, organization and activity in private sea warfare. To feed the large crews of privateer vessels, cattle drives crossed

the province from the Annapolis Valley. Bakeries in Shelburne, Lunenburg, Halifax and even as far away as New York and Québec were put to work making bread. Large amounts of gunpowder, scores of cannon, and hundreds of muskets and cutlasses flowed into the town. In fact, so many sword blades were imported that Halifax customs officials briefly held up one shipment, alarmed that something nasty might be brewing.' Privateers and their prizes crowded the harbour, requiring new wharves and warehouses. Auctions of captured ships attracted schoonerloads of Halifax's wealthiest merchants along with crowds of seamen bidding on some of the more affordable luxuries. Privateer parades, funerals and noisy celebrations added new rituals, mixing patriotism and economic optimism. The town received praise and recognition from the Governor, the Royal Navy administration in Halifax, and even Britain's influential *Naval Chronicle*.<sup>10</sup>

Even after privateering spread to other ports, Liverpool maintained its supremacy, accounting for over half the colony's total vessels. Ownership and control of Liverpool vessels remained firmly within the town. While Halifax merchants owned a few sixteenths of several Liverpool craft, majority control rested with five of the seven Liverpool merchants listed in the 1793 poll tax list. Each owned shares in several vessels to spread the risks. Moreover, the Halifax and Shelburne privateers turned to Liverpool to recruit experienced officers. Liverpool's leadership seems to have stemmed from a mixture of economic need, experience in the prewar West Indian trade, and long-term success in privateering."

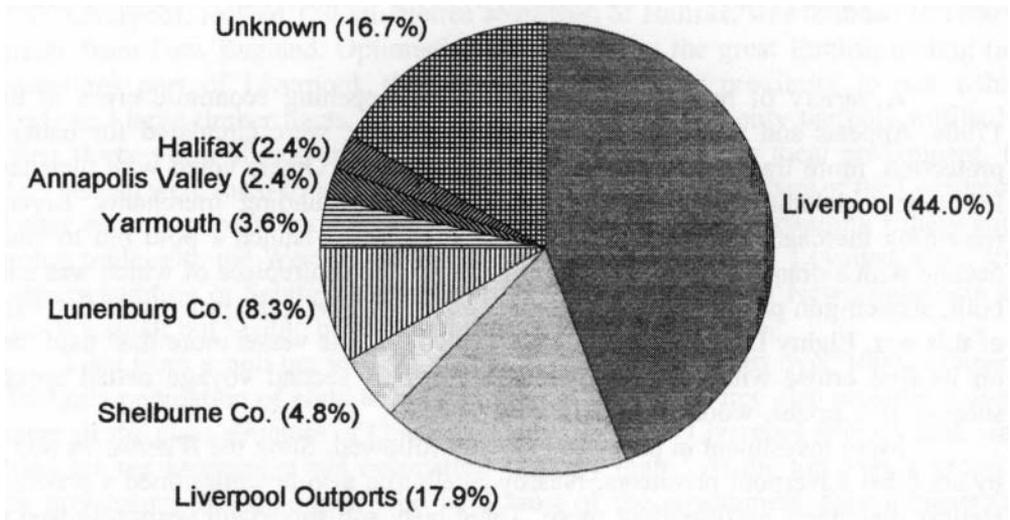


Figure 2: Charles Mary Wentworth, Crew, Hometowns.

Source: PANS, MG 20/215/10, C.M. Wentworth Crewlist; Polltax, 1792; PANS, MG 1/817-863, R.B. Smith Collection.

Those who equate privateering with piracy have assumed that the crews it attracted comprised the most disreputable and marginal elements of the marine

community.<sup>12</sup> But an examination of the crews of Liverpool's privateers indicates that they were closely representative of their community, including the most powerful and respected families and every population and occupational group. A useful case study of the people attracted to privateering is provided by the crew list of the privateer *Charles Mary Wentworth*.<sup>13</sup> Privateering seems to have attracted participants from a network of coastal communities (see figure 2). Liverpool was most important, and Halifax contributed very few crew members. A small proportion remain unidentified, possibly drawn from the mobile, international pool of seamen that circulated around the North Atlantic.

The privateers also reflected the diversity of Liverpool's population, with the area's African community and recent Scottish and Irish arrivals well represented (see figure 3). Loyalists, however, seem under-represented. Almost completely absent were clearly identifiable Acadians or Mi'kmaq. This may reflect the isolation of these communities from this sort of marine endeavour, or it may be a function of the absence of detailed records to trace them.<sup>14</sup>

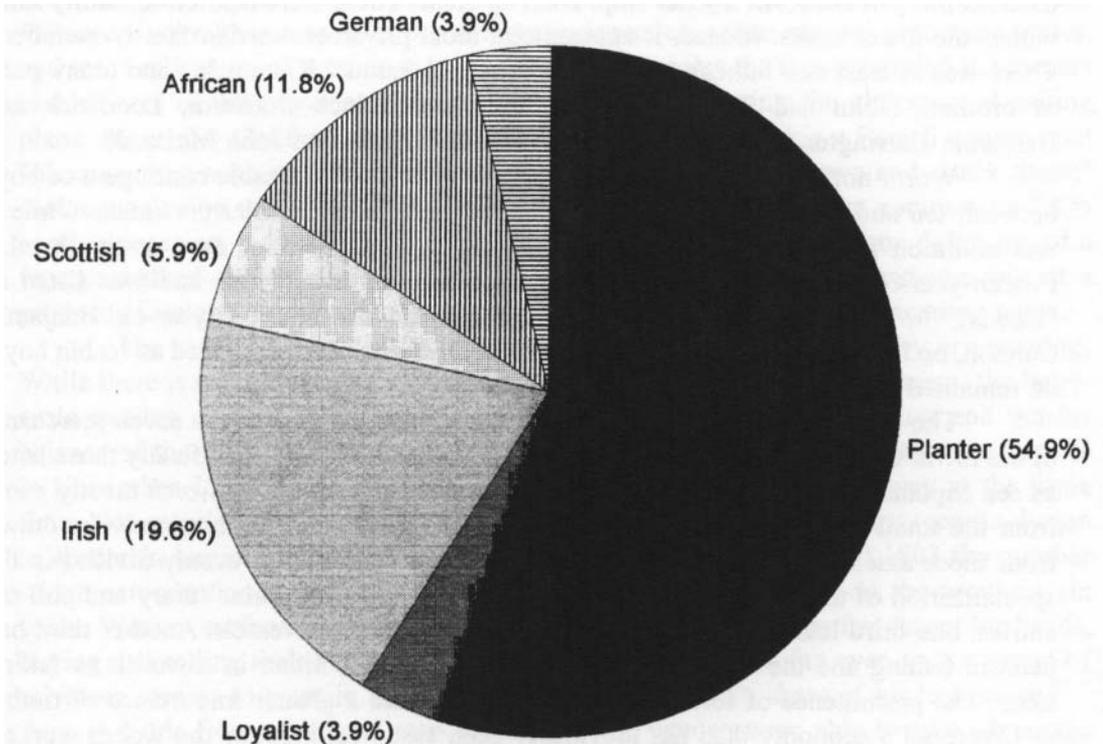


Figure 3: *Charles Mary Wentworth*, Ethnic Groups.

Source: PANS, *Wentworth Crewlist*; Perkins Diaries; R.B. Smith Collection; M. Robertson, *A Kings Bounty* (Halifax, 1983).

If we consider class in privateering crews, some important distinctions emerge. While the *Wentworth's* overall crew drew from a network of coastal communities and represented an ethnic microcosm, the owners and officers were drawn almost entirely

from the New England Planters in Liverpool itself. The one exception was the marine officer, Benjamin Knaut, who was from the German stock that settled Lunenburg. Knaut, however, was thoroughly integrated into Liverpool society, having married the daughter of one of the Liverpool shipowners and moving to the town. This pattern of using local officers exclusively was repeated on other privateers, including *Duke of Kent*, *Rover* and *Nymph*. One of the few genuine outsiders who served as a privateer officer was John Galvin, an ex-Royal Navy man shipwrecked in HMS *Tribune*. But his first and only cruise ended in acrimony, as a violent argument with the captain led to death threats against other officers and a challenge to duel before he left town. While he had the sympathy of some of the crew, he clearly did not fit in with the Liverpool officer/merchant class.<sup>15</sup>

By and large, the privateer officers were directly related to the owners, typically either sons or brothers. For example, the captain of the *Wentworth*, Thomas Parker, was a brother of one of the ship's owners, Snow Parker. The first officer, Enos Collins, was the son of another owner, Hallet Collins. Nathan Tupper's father was also an owner of *Charles Mary Wentworth's* sister ship, *Duke of Kent*. There were also close family links within the lower ranks. Indeed, it appears that most privateers carried family members. There was at least one father/son team (Samuel and Samuel Kinney Jr.) and many pairs of brothers (John and Stephen Gardner, John and Prince Goreham, Lodowick and Benjamin Harrington, Daniel and John Morine, and James and John McLeod).

Worth noting as well in the *Wentworth's* crew was a sizeable contingent of boys between ten and sixteen years of age, most of them related to older crewmen. While it was common for boys to go to sea, there were class distinctions even at this level.<sup>16</sup> Fifteen-year-old Samuel Parker was the son of one of the owners and was listed as "stewart;" he later became a sea captain and cargo supervisor. Fourteen-year-old Benjamin Cahoon, on the other hands, was the son of an Irish seaman and was listed as "cabin boy;" he remained a seaman and fisherman for the rest of his life.

The owners of *Charles Mary Wentworth* comprised five of the seven merchants of the town. Officers were drawn mostly from merchant families, specifically those listed as sea captains in the poll tax rolls. The petty officers on the *Wentworth* mostly came from the small fishing boat owners or tradesmen, while seamen and marines were drawn from those assessed as labourers. Indeed, the seamen were almost evenly divided in the specialization of their labour backgrounds. Based on Simeon Perkins' diary and poll tax entries, one-third had served as seaman on coastal or deep-sea vessels. Another third had been in fishing and the remainder had worked in forestry, either in sawmills or felling trees. The prominence of forestry workers may indicate a greater importance of timber in Liverpool's economy than has previously been assumed. Most of the woods workers and some of the fishermen were employed at different times by Simeon Perkins, perhaps reflecting his role in directing wage labourers to the privateer he owned.

To Liverpool as a whole, privateering was both a stimulant and a disruption. Privateering clearly provided a critical economic stimulus during an otherwise economically bleak era, a valuable counter-cyclical effect noted in other British seaports." Nova Scotia privateers successfully captured about £120,000 worth of prizes, a sum that was almost equivalent to the total spending of the army, navy and civil government combined in prewar Nova Scotia. About £78,000 went to privateers based in Liverpool. While the dismal economic picture in other sectors no doubt constrained the impact of this windfall,

its effects were seen in several ways. For one, the demand for poor relief in Liverpool fell by forty percent after privateering began. The merchant class also benefitted: privateer owner Simeon Perkins, for example, was at last able to pay off years of accumulated debts and to expand his lumber mill and build new vessels. Shipbuilding, sometimes depressed in wartime, when large numbers of enemy ships could be captured cheaply, does not appear to have declined substantially and may have been influenced by the new designs embodied in captured French and Spanish blockade runners. Nova Scotia's governor and Royal Navy commander credited privateering for preventing economic disaster after the collapse of trade and the fishery.<sup>18</sup>

Privateering also had a political dimension for Liverpool. The most successful privateer owners and officers were the families of Joseph Freeman and Joseph Barss. These men emerged during the war as the town's political leaders, founding political dynasties that sent representatives to the provincial assembly for several generations and ending the reliance on absentee legislators based in Halifax.<sup>19</sup> Privateering also had an interesting, although short-lived, political dimension for Liverpool's working class. Privateers were known to offer crews more independence than normal peacetime trades, and those of Liverpool were no exception. On one occasion the men overruled the owners and officers of the privateer *Charles Mary Wentworth*, forcing the alteration of sailing plans. Alexander Godfrey, *Rover's* captain, wrote before engaging a French convoy that "on consulting with my ships company, we determined to bear down and attack them;" such consultation would have been unthinkable to a naval or merchant commander.<sup>20</sup> On another occasion, a crew unhappy with an attempt to impose a peacetime definition of a voyage walked out *en masse*. Yet for Liverpool's workers this independence proved a product of unique wartime conditions and did not lead to substantial peacetime gains.

The role of women in Liverpool was also altered dramatically by privateering. While there is no convincing proof that women served on Liverpool privateers, the large-scale exodus of men to privateering dramatically altered the population and gender balance of the town.<sup>21</sup> At times, such as the departure of a squadron of three privateers in November 1799, almost half of Liverpool's male population was away at the same time. Not surprisingly women, usually all but absent from contemporary records, began to appear in larger numbers. As a general measure, between 1797 and 1803 the number of women mentioned in Simeon Perkins' diary doubled compared to the previous six years. Women surfaced in privateering account books as managers for absent husbands, buying and selling their husbands' shares. Rebecca Irish of Halifax even took a group of privateer owners to court in 1806 seeking her late husband's share of his last cruise!

Aside from additional responsibility, some women were able to take advantage of business opportunities in privateering. As Liverpool harbour grew crowded with privateers and their prizes in 1799, Mrs. Cobb, the widow of Sylvanus Cobb, was able to rent out her family's storehouse and wharf as a much needed base for *Duke of Kent*.<sup>23</sup> Among the women who took on more work was Mrs. Scott, the midwife, who in the absence of two of Liverpool's three doctors (who were off serving on privateers), doubtless had more citizens call on her for general medical knowledge. Another example was Phoebe West, who operated one of Liverpool's three leading taverns, an establishment that flourished during the privateering boom. "Mrs. West's" seems to have been the preferred location for regular meetings and dinners held by privateer owners and officers.

It was also a prime location for recruiting drives. Phoebe West was well integrated into the world of privateering through her family: her eldest daughter married the famous privateer captain, Alexander Godfrey, and her brother-in-law served on the *Wentworth*.<sup>24</sup>

Privateers also contributed to Liverpool's wartime security. Aside from their overall contribution to the war, which was praised by Nova Scotia's governor, they had a direct effect on the town's defences.<sup>25</sup> On two occasions Liverpool privateers acted as defensive units. In August 1803, three small French privateers lay in wait off Liverpool Harbour. Unfortunately for them, the port was a poor choice for a raid, since it was swarming with armed privateersmen preparing for a cruise. At the first news of the arrival of the French vessels, the Liverpool men manned several small boats and attacked with musket fire, driving the French craft off into the Atlantic. On another occasion, a large armed ship was reported to be waiting ominously at White Point, just outside the approaches to the harbour. The privateer brig *Rover*, preparing for a cruise, quickly assembled its crew, fitted sails and within an hour sailed to challenge the stranger. Fortunately, the vessel turned out to be a Halifax-bound merchantman that had just made landfall on a voyage from the Caribbean.<sup>26</sup>

Since privateers depended on successful captures to finance their operations, they could not provide long-term or consistent defence. They nonetheless were welcome additions to the sporadic Royal Navy presence on the coast. Moreover, the privateersmen forged strong links with the town's militia, in some ways providing them with a seaborne platform. In broad terms, Liverpool's privateersmen could understandably see themselves as a defensive force. Excluded from peaceful trading in the Caribbean, they were not going to relinquish the southern waters without a struggle and thus replaced trading activities with military behaviour. The way privateering changed the perception of security in Liverpool may be seen clearly in Simeon Perkins' reactions to strange sails off Liverpool Bay. Before privateering, an unrecognised ship was a cause for alarm, for mustering the militia and priming the cannons at Fort Point. After the advent of privateering, however, unidentified vessels were a cause for optimism, since many proved to be new prizes sent in by Liverpool's privateers.<sup>27</sup> Privateering by and large made Liverpool a well-armed and organized community, a poor target for enemy raids and a far cry from its helplessness during the early years of the American Revolution. Instead of being a hapless victim of a huge international struggle, Liverpool had become a player.

Yet not all effects were positive. Clearly there was a price, especially in lives, for waging a commercial war far from home in the war-torn West Indies. Between 500 and 700 men shipped out of Liverpool on privateers between 1793 and 1805.<sup>28</sup> Their total losses as recorded by Simeon Perkins were ten battle deaths; ten battle injuries; sixty-two men taken prisoner; seven lost at sea; seven who died of disease; forty-four who developed serious illnesses; thirteen who died after being impressed; and seventy-seven men lost for the duration to impressment (see appendix 2). As well, these numbers probably under-report slightly the losses. This is because they are drawn mainly from Perkins' diary which, detailed as it was, tended to focus on the merchant/officer class.

Still, no major event, especially if it involved death, sickness or injury, was likely to be ignored by Perkins. The picture that emerges is not one of large, bloody battles but rather a steady string of small tragedies in short but violent confrontations in the Caribbean. Battle losses were relatively light because privateers usually attacked lightly-

armed merchantmen, although some sharp clashes occurred with French privateers and Spanish provincial forces. Privateers captured by the French or Spanish, or by Haitian revolutionaries, seem to have been able to return home on exchanges, usually within a few months. It was impressment, far more than enemy capture, that was the biggest threat to the well-being of privateer crews. Short-handed naval craft would often stop and select the best crewmen from a privateer. Almost eighty Liverpool privateersmen were pressed into the Royal Navy between 1798 and 1805. One devastating impressment in 1799 took twenty men from *Duke of Kent*, a total that represented over a quarter of its crew. Privateer officers were usually able to obtain their release within a few months, but it is difficult to tell how many seamen ever made it back to Liverpool, as many simply disappeared from the record. Perkins recorded at least twelve privateersmen who died while in the navy, and those who survived usually served at least a year. In contrast, privateersmen captured by the Spanish were usually exchanged in less than a year, making capture often a better proposition than service in the mother country's navy.<sup>29</sup> Remarkably, at least three privateersmen pressed into the Royal Navy jumped overboard in enemy waters, fancying their chances in prison better than in the lower decks of a King's ship. Many of their adventures in outwitting the RN became part of Liverpool folklore.<sup>30</sup>

A few things should be noted, however, about the hazards of privateering. As Marcus Rediker has stressed, almost all these dangers — capture, impressment and storms — were also faced by fishermen and merchant seamen. In fact, as Liverpool insurance rates suggest, merchant seamen in the Caribbean actually faced greater risk of capture than did privateersmen.<sup>31</sup> Merchant mariners and fishermen also faced impressment, although those on the heavily-manned privateers attracted somewhat more attention. Perkins recorded nineteen merchant seamen and fishermen who were pressed between 1798 and 1805, and at least another dozen who were nabbed before privateering commenced.<sup>32</sup>

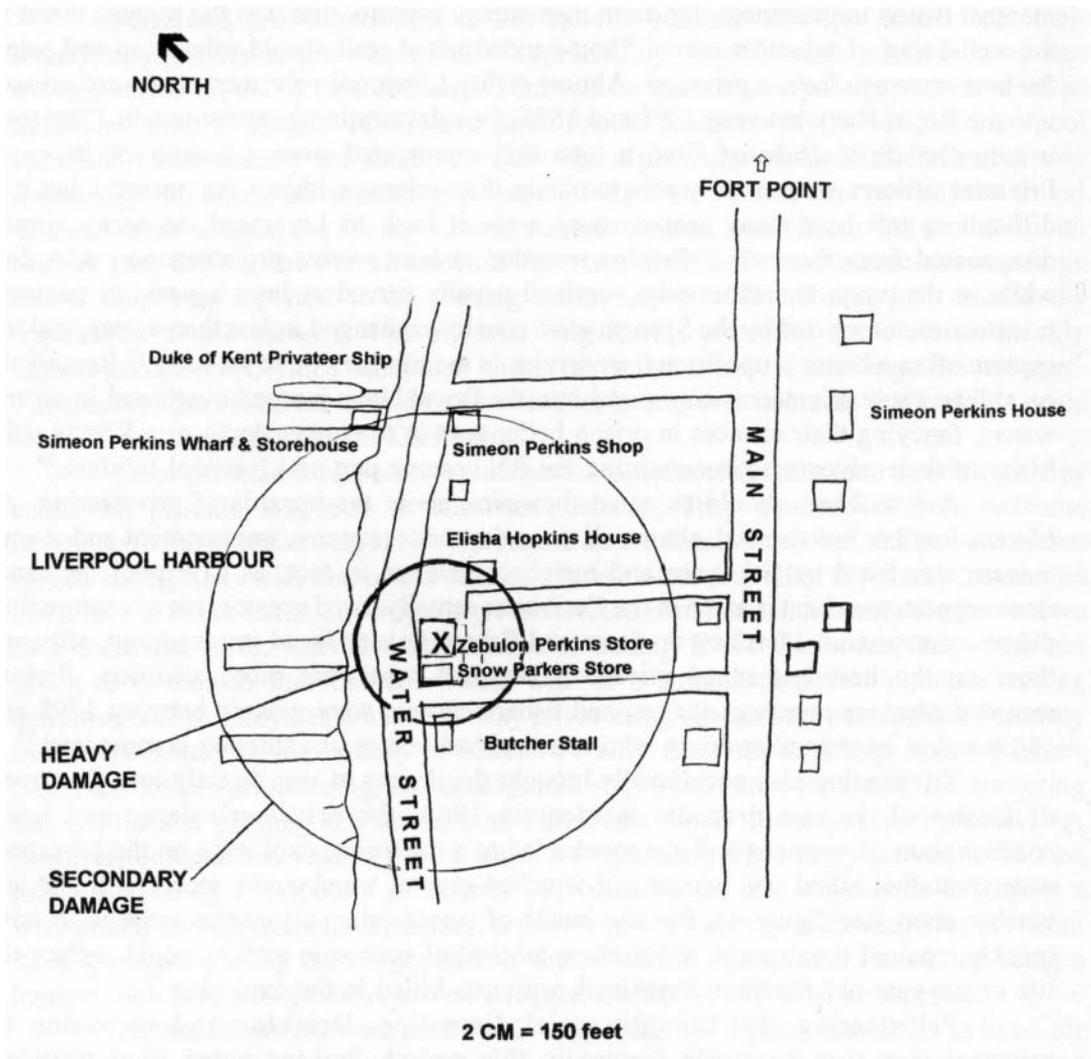
Privateering also occasionally brought the danger of war directly into the streets of Liverpool. In one dramatic incident in 1800, the privateer's large and hasty concentration of weapons and gunpowder led to a munitions explosion on the Liverpool waterfront that killed one person and wrecked several warehouses, stores, a home and butcher shop (see figure 4). But the bustle of privateering commerce appears to have quickly repaired the damage, although no amount of economic activity could replace the life of ten-year-old Matthew Strickland, who was killed in the explosion.<sup>33</sup>

Privateering also brought social disruption. Drinking and carousing by privateersmen was a notable feature in this period. Perkins noted loud privateer celebrations several times, as well as numerous threats, assaults and at least one duelling challenge among privateersmen.<sup>34</sup> One sad incident in particular points to the social costs:

William Brocklesby had hanged himself in an old barn...He was formerly Subject to Drink, till about 2 1/2 years ago he reformed & Lived very temperate, until lately he got with the Privateers people at Mr. Boyle's [tavern], and got in Liquor, and has ever since been very intemperate... & scarcely went home to Sleep.<sup>35</sup>

Not surprisingly, pressure mounted to restrict the growing number of taverns in Liverpool. Several tavern keepers were able to extend their licenses through privateering connections,

but others had their privileges curtailed. Thomas Harrington's family blamed his heavy drinking on his privateering cruise and subsequent naval impressment.<sup>36</sup>



*Figure 4:* The Liverpool Explosion, 14 November 1800.

*Source:* Map by author based on Perkins Diary, 14-16 November 1800; street and building notes by T.H. Raddall and F. Tupper, Dalhousie University Archives, MS 2/202/Q.

At least one illegitimate birth followed in the wake of privateering. Rebecca Freeman, the widow of a man pressed into the navy, was reported pregnant, most likely by a recently returned privateersman, John Dexter. The economic and social consequences of this disturbed Perkins. The last time Perkins had noted a "burst" of illegitimate births was during the American Revolution, also a time when many men were away on

privateers. As he put it, "several such instances have happened of late, to the great disgrace of the place, tho till lately it was remarked that never was a place clearer of such vices, not being a bastard born for many years."<sup>37</sup>

The church's attitude towards privateering was mixed. Perkins, an intensely pious man and a pillar of the Methodist Church, integrated privateering into his beliefs with little difficulty. He hailed some privateer victories, such as *Rover's* battle with *Santa Rita*, as providential acts of God. The passage he penned in May 1798, less than a month before he entered privateering, indicates that religious anger may have been part of the decision to strike back at the French: "the foreign News is that the French go on very Spiritedly in making preparations for Invading England...God only knows what they may be permitted to do. They appear to be wicked people, that have denied the Christian Religion and Cast of the fear of God."<sup>38</sup> More ambivalent was a Halifax priest, who wrote to his bishop in 1802 that he was quite happy to accept captured goods from privateers, although he characterized the work of privateers as theft: "I am sending you some vestments...Some privateers from here stole them from some Spaniards, and not knowing what to do with them made them a present to us. You see my Lord, how the misfortune of some becomes the good fortune of others."<sup>39</sup> But Henry Alline, the famous New Light preacher, took a harsher view. He was briefly captured by American privateers during the Revolution. Although he was treated kindly, Alline warned: "Let them that wish well to their souls flee from privateers as they would from the jaws of hell (Eternal damnation), for methinks a privateer may be called a floating hell."<sup>40</sup>

Alline was perhaps upset by the swearing aboard privateering vessels, and was probably also concerned by the temptation provided by earthly riches. Yet despite Alline's condemnation, privateersmen and their families were an important element in the New Light congregations he inspired in Liverpool. When privateering took off, Liverpool churchgoers were divided between the Methodists and the New Lights. Privateers were drawn more or less equally from both churches. Hannah Blowers, the widow of a pressed privateer, switched congregations and joined the New Lights shortly after her husband died during impressment by the navy off *Duke of Kent*. The two congregations were busy with rival building and renovation schemes during the height of privateering, fuelled in large part by donations from the proceeds of privateering voyages.<sup>41</sup>

If we follow the privateers into their peacetime pursuits, we can see that while the experience was generally positive, the benefits were reaped mostly by the elites. Privateer officers followed two career paths. Some, such as John Goreham, continued as captains, while others, like Benjamin Knaut and Enos Collins, stayed on land as shipowners and public officeholders. Enos Collins later amassed a sufficiently large fortune in shipping, trade and investment to be acclaimed upon his death in 1871 as the "richest man in British North America."<sup>42</sup> The personal privateering fortunes of several owner/officers, such as Joseph Freeman, Joseph Barss, Snow Parker and Enos Collins, laid the foundation of several Liverpool dynasties that dominated town affairs for the next twenty years.

Yet money and upward mobility did not come automatically to all privateer officers, despite their connections. Consider Benjamin Collins as an example. A cousin of privateering owner Hallet Collins, he rose from petty officer in 1799, to First Lieutenant in 1800, and finally captain of *Rover* in 1803. But on his only cruise in command he made several rash seizures of neutral ships with limited evidence that they

were violating the laws of trade. As a result, he landed the Liverpool privateering community in hot water and lost his commission. He started anew as captain of a fishing schooner, and while he eventually returned to the West Indies trade, he attained none of the public offices of peers like Benjamin Knaut or wealth like Enos Collins."

Most working-class privateer seamen and marines went back to their old occupations after privateering service. A few went on to own small boats or to captain fishing schooners. Many more continued to serve on privateers into the War of 1812 where some, like John Gardner and John Morine, became petty officers or prize masters.<sup>44</sup> There were also a few genuine working-class success stories, the best example being that of Francis Kempton. From a family that was marginal economically, he was described by Simeon Perkins as a "poor labourer" who worked in the woods. Before the war, Kempton and his father were assessed under the poll tax at the lowest rate of one shilling.<sup>45</sup> But Francis Kempton was able to use the opportunity of privateering to become an officer and later a captain and shipowner. He also provided history with one of the few voices of lower-deck privateer identity, describing himself in a verse on a logbook:

Francis Kempton is my nam  
Seaman is my stashon  
Nova Scotia is my dwelen plas  
And Inland is my nashon.<sup>46</sup>

Nonetheless, Kempton's success was exceptional. John Morine and William Dolliver are more representative of typical privateersmen. Morine built a small fishing schooner following his service as a privateering seaman and in the following years was hired as a coastal schooner captain. In the War of 1812 he returned to privateering as a prizemaster. While William Dolliver was a seaman before the war, he worked as a labourer between privateering voyages. By the end of his privateering adventures in 1805, he was able only to buy a small fishing boat.<sup>47</sup>

Privateer hierarchies reflected the economic and social classes ashore, and the opportunities from privateering were also distributed by class, with Liverpool's merchant elite benefitting most of all. In this way privateering resembled most economic activities of the time. Prior to Liverpool's ambitious entry into privateering, however, townspeople of all classes had received all of the disruptions but few of the benefits of war. Privateering was an initiative that reoriented a stream of wartime activity into Liverpool and nearby communities. While it also brought additional costs, on balance the experience seems to have been positive. The uneven distribution of its gains, and the very real human costs in lives and social trauma, tempered the achievement, but the successful organization of substantial deep-water raiding squadrons and the recognised feats of its mariners reflected a growing maturity that earned Liverpool greater autonomy from Halifax.

**Appendix 1**  
**Nova Scotia Privateers, 1793-1805**

Ship	Year	Crew	Tons	Guns	Rig	Prizes	Home Port
<i>C.M. Wentworth</i>	1798-1800	80	130	16	ship	11	Liverpool
<i>Nymph</i>	1799	90	169	18	brigt	3	Halifax
<i>Nelson</i>	1799-1801	80	140	16	brigt	12	Shelburne
<i>Duke of Kent</i>	1799-1805	100	196	20	ship	8	Liverpool
<i>Fly</i>	1799	40	71	10	schnr	3	Liverpool
<i>Lord Spencer</i>	1799	58	N/A	12	schnr	1	Liverpool
<i>General Bowyer</i>	1800-1803	80	135	14	ship	4	Halifax
<i>Nymph</i>	1800-1801	100	130	18	ship	2	Liverpool
<i>Rover</i>	1800-1804	60	100	16	brig	8	Liverpool
<i>Eagle</i>	1800	65	148	14	schnr	1	Halifax
<i>Earl of Dublin</i>	1800	80	100	10	schnr	5	Halifax
<i>Frances Mary</i>	1800	50	N/A	10	sloop		Liverpool
Averages:		45.8	138.8	11.6			

*Notes:* Average crew = 45.8; average tons = 138.8; average guns = 11.6; total prizes = 56.

*Sources:* National Archives of Canada (NAC), RG 8/4/139-140, Vice-Admiralty Letters of Marque; Public Archives of Nova Scotia (PANS), RG 1/172, 224, Lt. Governor's Records; and C.B. Fergusson (ed.), *Diary of Simeon Perkins. IV: 1797-1803* (Toronto, 1967).

Appendix 2  
Privateering Losses, 1793-1805

<b>Date</b>	<b>Vessel</b>	<b>Losses</b>
<b>1799</b>		
March	<i>C.M. Wentworth</i>	Thomas Roberts and prize crew lost at sea in prize
March	<i>C.M. Wentworth</i>	Navy deserter pressed and recaptured
May 29	<i>C.M. Wentworth</i>	George Forbes Vaughan dies ashore after cruise
July 7	<i>C. M Wentworth</i>	One crewman pressed by frigate HMS <i>Castor</i>
July 17	<i>C.M. Wentworth</i>	Nathan Freeman killed attacking Spanish fort
Late July	<i>C.M. Wentworth</i>	Thomas Freeman and five crew captured by Haitians
August	<i>Nelson</i>	Several killed and wounded attacking twenty-gun French ship
September	<i>C.M. Wentworth</i>	Sickness aboard; Peter Frude dies, forty others sick
December 29	<i>Lord Spencer</i>	Three wounded in fight with French privateer
December 24	<i>Nelson</i>	Battle with French privateer: two dead, five wounded
<b>1800</b>		
January 15	<i>C.M. Wentworth</i>	HMS <i>La Unity</i> presses nine men
February 2	<i>C.M. Wentworth</i>	Translator Peter Brown sickens, left ashore
February 6	<i>C.M. Wentworth</i>	Spanish overpower prize crew, injuring two
March	<i>Lord Spencer</i>	Vessel wrecked on reef, crew all saved by <i>Nelson</i>
June 8	<i>Duke of Kent</i>	Officer James Hopkins sickens dies in Saint John, NB
July	<i>Francis Mary</i>	Crew of 40 taken by Spanish, exchanged, pressed
September 7	<i>Duke of Kent</i>	HMS <i>Neired</i> presses 20 men
December 15	<i>Duke of Kent</i>	John Hume lost overboard
<b>1803</b>		
November	<i>Rover</i>	Prize crew jailed in US for illegal capture
<b>1805</b>		
June 10	<i>Duke of Kent</i>	Spanish overpower prize crew, two die
June 11	<i>Duke of Kent</i>	Spanish capture prize crew of ten
July	<i>Duke of Kent</i>	William Atwood pressed
August 3	<i>Duke of Kent</i>	HMS <i>Jason</i> presses four men

Source: PANS, MG 20/215/10; NAC, RG 12; Great Britain, Public Record Office, Admiralty 1/495/160-163; *Perkins Diaries*; and Halifax Newspapers, 1798-1805.

## NOTES

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1. C.B. Fergusson (ed.), *Diary of Simeon Perkins. IV: 1797-1803* (Toronto, 1967), 27 November 1799. Unless otherwise noted, all references are to this volume of the diary. Perkins noted that more than 232 men departed that day, and that more were already at sea in the brigantine *Nelson*. The 1794 poll tax showed 326 men in Liverpool and the census of 1787 showed 1014 men, women and children; see Public Archives of Nova Scotia (PANS), RG 1/444/9.

2. Carl Swanson, *Predators and Prizes: American Privateering and Imperial Warfare, 1739-1748* (Columbia, SC, 1991), 1-2; John S. Bromley, *Corsairs and Navies, 1660-1760* (London, 1987); and N.A.M. Rodger, *The Wooden World: An Anatomy of the Georgian Navy* (London, 1986), 128.

3. During this period, the diaries of Simeon Perkins, a privateer owner and town official, record the movement of people, ships and money. His account can be compared to the Court Vice Admiralty case files of captures. See also David Starkey, *British Privateering Enterprise in the Eighteenth Century* (Exeter, 1990), 38-42.

4. For examples of the popular view, see C.H.J. Snider, *Under the Red Jack: Privateers of the Maritime Provinces in the War of 1812* (London, 1928); and Thomas H. Raddall, *The Rover: The Story of a Canadian Privateer* (Toronto, 1958). Examples of the dismissive view among professional historians include David Sutherland, "War and Peace," 238; and J.M. Bumsted, "Resettlement and Rebellion," 171, both in Phillip A. Buckner and John G. Reid (eds.), *The Atlantic Region to Confederation: A History* (Toronto, 1994). The most recent work is Faye M. Kert, *Prize and Prejudice: Privateering and Naval Prize in Atlantic Canada in the War of 1812* (St. John's, 1997),

155-156. Kert's work is a legal-economic study. Her observations on social history are limited mostly to evidence in the secondary sources.

5. Kert, *Prize and Prejudice*, 89, calculates that the average size of privateers during the War of 1812 was under 100 tons, far smaller than the 139-ton average between 1793 and 1805. See National Archives of Canada (NAC), Record Group (RG) 8/4/139-140, Prize Files, Letters of Marque; and PANS, RG 1/172/224 and 1/172/250.

6. Elizabeth Mancke, "Corporate Structure and Private Interest: Mid-Eighteenth Century Expansion of New England," in Margaret Conrad (ed.), *They Planted Well: New England Planters in Maritime Canada* (Fredericton, 1988), 58.

7. PANS, RG 1/444. The poll tax was taken in both 1791 and 1792. While omitting women, men under twenty-one and probably many Blacks, Mi'kmaq and transients, it is the best empirical measure of Liverpool society in this era, given the lack of any detailed census for the town between 1787 and 1827.

8. *Perkins Diary*, 16 and 20 June 1796; 4 January, 20 June and 4 October 1797; and 29 April 1798. For a full discussion of the trade and economic factors behind privateering in this period see Dan Conlin, "A Private War in the Caribbean: Nova Scotia Privateering, 1793-1805," *The Northern Mariner/Le Marin du nord*, VI, No. 4 (October 1996), 29-34.

9. Faye Kert, "Fortunes of War" (Unpublished MA Thesis, Carleton University, 1986), 10; and *Perkins Diary*, 2 July 1798. Cannons, loaned, purchased and captured by privateers, proved the most enduring material culture legacy. When privateering finally ended in 1815, dozens remained, planted muzzle down on streets to act as corner curbs. Forty were visible in 1907 and many remained until the 1970s, when the last were removed for street widening. Today several are mounted in different locations in the town. Queens County Museum, Raddall Collection, A 95 22.2, "Privateering Cannons."

10. Great Britain, Public Record Office (PRO), Colonial Office (CO) 217/70/188, Wentworth to Portland, 29 September 1799; Admiralty (ADM) 1/495/164, Vandeput to Admiralty, 8 November 1799; and *Naval Chronicle*, V (February 1801), 176.
11. While large Halifax merchant houses, such as Forsyth-Smith and Foreman-Grassie, bought great quantities of prize goods, they shied away from investing in the vessels, preferring instead the safer speciality of supplying the army and navy. The key Liverpool owners were Simeon Perkins, Ballet Collins, Joseph Barss Sr., Snow Parker and James Taylor. NAC, RG 8/4/139-140; and PANS, RG 1/172; Liverpool officers commanded the Shelburne privateering brigantine *Nelson* and the Halifax brigantine *General Bowyer*; see PANS, RG 1/225/133-142. Sylvanus Cobb, a noted privateersman during the Seven Years' War, was one of the key founders of the town, and Liverpool outfitted six privateers in the American Revolution. James Henry Ross, "Privateering in Nova Scotia During the American Revolutionary War" (Unpublished Honours thesis, Mount Allison University, 1957).
12. See, for example, Bumsted, "Resettlement and Rebellion," 171.
13. PANS, Manuscript Group (MG) 20/215/10, Crew List and Logbook of *Charles Mary Wentworth*. Over eighty percent of the members of this crew can be identified through the *Perkins Diary* and family history sources, such as PANS, MG 1/817-863, T.B. Smith Collection (TBS).
14. A few crew members are identified by only one name, such as "Francis," which could belong to an African, Mi'kmaq or Acadian.
15. *Perkins Diary*, 17 December 1798 and 12 January 1799. Galvin did have sympathy outside the privateer officer corps; Perkins mentions that "many people" in Liverpool took his side.
16. Dalhousie University Library, MS 2/202/Q1, Thomas Raddall Collection, Research Notes on Joseph Barss.
17. Starkey, *British Privateering Enterprise*, 60, noted the consistent double edged-effect of war on shipping communities throughout the eighteenth century.
18. The value of prizes was recorded by the Vice Admiralty Court or Simeon Perkins in about one-quarter of the cases. An approximate value for the others is estimated based on vessel tonnage. The demand on the Overseers of the Poor in Liverpool dropped steadily from £125 in 1797, to £120 in 1799, and £80 in 1801; see *Perkins Diary*. Nova Scotia shipbuilding increased during the privateering era according to Julian Gwyn, "Economic Fluctuations in Wartime Nova Scotia, 1755-1815," in Margaret Conrad (ed.), *Making Adjustments: Change and Continuity in Planter Nova Scotia, 1759-1800* (Fredericton, 1991), 74 and 82. *Perkins Diary*, 25 April and 10 July 1801, records steady shipbuilding but noted that the hulls were becoming narrower. See also PRO, ADM 1/495/158, 163, Parker to Admiralty, 4 November 1800; and Wentworth to Admiralty, 27 October 1800.
19. Brian Cuthbertson, *Johnny Bluenose at the Polls* (Halifax, 1994), 181-182.
20. Alexander Godfrey, letter, *Naval Chronicle*, V (February 1801), 176.
21. The common occurrence of small numbers of women on naval vessels has been documented by several naval scholars, most recently Suzanne J. Stark, *Female Tars: Women Aboard Ship in the Age of Sail* (Annapolis, 1996). References to women in privateering literature are rare, although there are some famous cases of female mariners disguised as men; see Gomer Williams, *History of the Liverpool Privateers and Letters of Marque, with an Account of the Liverpool Slave Trade* (London, 1897), 118-119. The mutinous crew of the British privateer *King George* alleged in 1779 that their unpopular captain took two prostitutes to sea with him; Starkey, *British Privateering Enterprise*, 227. There is no mention of women on Liverpool privateers in the *Perkins Diary*, court documents, or crew lists.
22. Women were mentioned 220 times from 1797 to 1803, compared to ninety-nine times between 1790 and 1796 in the indices to *Perkins Diary*, 513-550; PANS, MG 1/951/646, White Collection, Privateer Crew List and Accounts; and NAC, RG 8/4/33, *Brutus*. Unfortunately the owner argued, apparently successfully, that as the ownership of the privateer had changed, they were not liable for Mrs. Irish's claim.

23. *Perkins Diary*, 12 September 1799. Judging by the exacting terms of the rental, Mrs. Cobb apparently had business experience: she required a deposit and placed specific limits on the use of her property.
24. Phoebe West opened the tavern with her husband, John, and continued to operate it after his death in 1783. It appears to have been a "middle of the road" establishment, not as fancy as Mr. Phillips', where the Governor dined on visits, but not implicated in the rowdy drinking common at other taverns. *Perkins Diary*, II, 15n; III, 7n and IV, 99, 112, 133 and 139; and PANS, TBS.
25. Wentworth praised the military contribution of privateers in dispatches to London and counted the vessels among his defensive assets against possible French attacks. PRO, CO 217/ 70/188, Wentworth to Portland, 29 September 1799; CO 217/36/179, Wentworth to King, 21 June 1793; and CO 217/36, State of Force at Halifax, 8 May 1794.
26. *Perkins Diary*, 18 January 1801 and 5-6 August 1803.
27. Privateer crews and militias overlapped and officer ranks were in many cases identical; PANS, RG 1/171/132, Return of the Queens County Militia, 1795. Cf. the alarmed response to a strange ship on 10 January 1797 to Perkins' hopeful reaction to another unknown sail on 18 September 1798: "A Brig appears in the Harbour. We wish it a Prize."
28. This is a rough estimate. Six Liverpool privateers made nineteen cruises in this period, but since we lack complete crew lists for all of them, the turnover rate is unclear.
29. These impressment figures are based on *Perkins Diary*, 20 December 1799; 19 March and 2 August 1800; 23 February and 1 July 1801; and 18 August 1805.
30. James Macleod, Robert Millard and Zenas Millard. PANS, TBS; and *Perkins Diary*, 1 July 1801.
31. Marcus Rediker, *Between the Devil and the Deep Blue Sea: Merchant Seamen, Pirates and the Anglo-American Maritime World, 1700-1750* (Cambridge, 1987), 32-33. Merchant voyages to the West Indies in wartime required premiums from twenty to twenty-five percent, while privateers were charged only ten to seventeen percent; PANS, RG 1/1/2, Akins Insurance Ledger, 1803-1809.
32. *Perkins Diary*, 20 July 1799, 17 November 1800 and 16 May and 3 July 1805. See also the letters of 23 March 1798 and 6 August 1805.
33. *Perkins Diary*, 14-16 November 1800.
34. Perkins mentioned drinking and disorder problems on several occasions. See, for example, *ibid.*, 24 January, 12 May, 25 November and 14 December 1799; and 6 July 1800.
35. *Ibid.*, 14 December 1799.
36. *Ibid.*, 14 November and 9 December 1799; and PANS, TBS.
37. *Perkins Diary*, 26 March 1778 and 22 December 1801. It is unclear what became of this pregnancy. Rebecca Freeman appears to have married again in 1804 to a Dr. Heffernan; *ibid.*, 7 October 1804.
38. *Ibid.*, 31 May 1798.
39. Thomas Raddall, *Halifax: Warden of the North* (Toronto, 1948), 136. Royal Instructions left the fate of personal property under \$300 to the Discretion of privateer commanders; see Kert, *Prize and Prejudice*, 95. Privateers also sometimes claimed abandoned personal property, as in 29 September 1799 when the master of *Charles Mary Wentworth* reported to the court that a Spanish priest fled ashore, abandoning his baggage on the *Prize* (PANS, CO 217/70/193).
40. J.M. Bumsted, *Henry Alline, 1748-1784* :1971; reprint, Hantsport, NS, 1982), 182.
41. One-third of those who donated money to Methodist church construction in 1799 were privateersmen (PANS MG 4/79). It is difficult to measure precisely church membership at this time (of devotional flux, but basic indicators are the subscription list of the New Light church in 1794 :PANS MG 4/77) and the Methodist Church in 1798 (PANS MG 4/79). On Hannah Blowers' baptism, see *Perkins Diary*, 8 November 1801.

42. Marc La Terreur (ed.), *Dictionary of Canadian Biography* (Toronto, 1972), X, 190.
43. For basic information on Benjamin Collins, see PANS, TBS, and RG 8/4/31, 44; *Perkins Diary*, 30 October 1800 and 28 September 1805; PRO, CO 217/A37, Wentworth to Bond, 6 April 1804; James F. More, *The History of Queens County, NS* (1873; reprint, Belleville, ON, 1972), 93.
44. Snider, *Under the Red Jack*, index.
45. *Perkins Diary*, I, 70.
46. Thomas Raddall, *In My Time* (Toronto, 1976), 223.
47. For Morine, see *Perkins Diary*, 23 May and 3 June 1804; and Snider, *Under the Red Jack*, 228, 231 and 241. For Dolliver, see *Perkins Diary*, 8 May 1805.