

Commodore Thomas Truxtun

1755 - 1822

A description of the Truxtun-Biddle Letters
in the collections of

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By

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NOTE

In 1942 members of the Biddle family presented to The Library Company of Philadelphia a package containing 110 manuscripts, all but 3 of which were letters of Thomas Truxtun (1755-1822) to Charles Biddle (1745-1821). These letters furnish fresh material on the little known figure of the intrepid Commodore, and represent as close an approach as is known to the details of his personal life. Mr. Eugene S. Ferguson has in preparation a biography of Truxtun, and when he studied these letters we asked him to prepare a description of them which would be useful to other scholars. The following account is his more than generous response.

Mr. Ferguson wishes to express his indebtedness to T. Truxtun Hare, Esq., whose own collection of Truxtuniana is extensive and supplied the indispensable background for this description of The Library Company's holdings. Other major collections of Truxtun letters are in The Historical Society of Pennsylvania, The Massachusetts Historical Society, The Navy Department Library; but all put together add up to a much less than adequate record of the man, the sailor, the trader and the patriot.

Commodore Thomas Truxtun

THOMAS TRUXTUN, sea captain, was busily employed in winding up the countless arrangements that had to be made before he could depart again for China. He was captain, navigator, super cargo, and part owner of the Philadelphia ship *Canton*. It was Friday evening, 11 December 1789.

Truxtun called on Robert Morris, then much interested in the China trade, at his fine house on High street out beyond Fifth, and proceeded thence down to Isaac Hazelhurst's. Here he had hoped to find his accounts (from his previous voyage) ready for settlement, but instead he found much work still to be done. Ever punctilious about any transaction, in business or society, Truxtun quickly fell to this task with a will, and the hours passed. So engrossed was he that it was almost midnight when he remembered another transaction: he had promised his good friend Charles Biddle he would be home by eight o'clock. With his pen spluttering mortification, he scrawled a note next morning. "I ask you ten thousand pardons, for not meeting you according to my appointment at my own house last evening."

In the earliest days of the new Republic the young (34) captain and China trader was earning his reputation as master mariner and gentleman, the same reputation which a few years later was to give him the opportunity to inscribe indelibly on the pages of history his name, and to spell it correctly.

Commodore Thomas Truxtun, United States Navy, erst-while privateer, merchant, transporter of the good Dr. Franklin, voyager "over and over the Globe", author, builder and sheriff, had throughout the latter half of his life a steadfast friend and confidant in Charles Biddle of Philadelphia. Biddle might poke sly fun at Truxtun's sometimes

pompous manner, might at times painfully deflate his ego, but he seldom let slip an opportunity to bring to public attention Truxton's talents as a naval commander. It is out of these hundred-odd letters written by Thomas Truxton to Charles Biddle from 1 December 1787 to 21 October 1820, that an important part of the fabric of understanding of Truxton's temperament must be woven. There are some of these letters which one might wish he had never written. They add no lustre to the brightwork of a character which in the year 1800 inspired songs and toasts and Truxton hats "in the Military and Naval style." The letters serve, however, honestly and accurately to describe the man, and perhaps furnish reasons for his failure to attain the first order of greatness; and they portray a critical period in American history as seen through the eyes of the sea captain and commodore.

(1)

China Trader, 1787-1793

[Folios 1-6]

JUST BEFORE THE END of the American Revolution in 1783, Thomas Collins and Thomas Truxton formed a partnership and opened a large dry goods store in "Front street, five doors above the Market" in Philadelphia. They purchased a ship of 20 guns for £16,000 and imported a large stock of goods from London, but the end of war which brought a resumption of trade also brought a decline of inflated prices. The ship was sold for £4,000.

James Collins took advantage of the bankruptcy law, but Truxton did not. The partnership was dissolved early in 1785, Truxton declaring that "not one of the endorsers [of notes] should be a loser by him." He was as good as his word, and his reputation was mightily enhanced by his conduct on four voyages to the fabulous lands of the East. It is amidst the preparations for his second departure (De-

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ember 1787) that the story told by these letters has its beginning.

Charles Biddle from this time forward assumed responsibility for Truxton's interests whenever he was away from Philadelphia, and always stood ready to supply "what Mrs Truxton wants for Family Use." [Pol. 2]

From his privateering adventures during the war, Truxton had credits due him in the West Indies and in Charleston. From his British trading after the war he had a number of transactions with London merchants in varying stages of settlement. In Philadelphia, he had loaned a thousand pounds to Joseph Harrison, and that debt now looked none too secure. All of these matters, and many others, were left with Charles Biddle when the *Canton* departed from Philadelphia early in December, 1787.

Truxton's loan of £1007 3d to Joseph Harrison had been made on the recommendation of Harrison's character by Trench Coxe, financier and part owner of *Canton*. The note had soured early, and evidently Coxe had gone so far in his recommendation as to indorse the note. Two years later (in 1789) as Truxton again prepared for a voyage, he left Biddle the injunction: "with respect to that Scoundrel Trench Coxe, I hope you will do your utmost to recover from him, the amount of Harrison's note, for which I some time past brought suit—. You well know, that Coxe is a very Cunning, artfull and deceitfull general, though dam him, I do not believe him to be a brave one, but as he is a great proficient in manuvering, he . . . without fighting, may defeat my whole army of lawyers." [Pol. 4]

Sailing eastward during the early months of the year in order to arrive in the China seas during the southwest monsoon, returning with the northeast monsoon in the following year, Truxton ranged over half the world for eight years, settling old debts and building up an estate for his—in spite of absence—rapidly growing family. His solicitousness on behalf of his children was now fresh and real; in

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later years it became an obsession which followed him to a troubled grave. He gave instructions in 1791 to recover from the "late partnership of Clement Biddle & Co. and Randolph Teller" as much of his debt of \$5000 as possible to be invested in "lands (belonging to the late Bankrupts) the best situated, and judged the most fertile and valuable, for the joint account of my Children, namely Sarah, Mary, Thomas, Elizabeth, Evelina and William Truxton." This was done "for the security of these poor children, whose happiness and future situation in life you well know depends upon chance, owing to my repeated misfortunes and losses." [Fol. 5]

That note of misfortune runs through these letters almost with the pattern of a chant, swelling to tremendous proportions when Truxton finds himself unemployed, and subsiding almost to nothing when he is busy with other things.

The Yellow Fever of 1793 sent Truxton packing off to Perth Amboy, "with his affairs much deranged." He was not alone in his flight, however. The federal government had left the city; President Washington moved to Germantown; the War Department possibly held the distance record by moving west as far as Downingtown. Close behind—and ahead of—the Government was the populace; some twenty thousand people were driven by panic and good sense to find a safer spot. Now Truxton was master of a fine new ship, the Humphreys-built *Delaware*. He had sailed her once to Calcutta and had brought her back to London. At the time of his departure for London, where he would again join his ship, the Yellow Fever moved him to write, "I am always, I am afraid, to be unfortunate in America, for I never come into it, without, meeting some disagreeable rub or other—which is not the case elsewhere—but I have too often misplaced my confidence." [Fol. 6] That projected voyage to India never took place, for war between England and France broke out anew, and America

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was in a fair way to become embroiled. *Delaware* sailed home to Philadelphia in May 1794, and its master-owner Truxton arrived just a few days before his appointment as Captain in the United States Navy was publicly announced.

Astern lay almost 27 years with the merchantmen, nineteen of those years in command. Ahead lay opportunities for honor, more prized than all the fine teas and silks of the East.

(ii)

Captain, USN, 1794-1802

[Folios 7-49]

THE UNITED STATES NAVY was launched in the halls of Congress in 1794, for the express purpose of improving the treaty terms exacted by that arrogant pirate the Dey of Algiers. If a peaceful settlement with the Algerine was reached then the Navy was to revert immediately to its previous status, a nonentity.

Thomas Truxton was the fifth captain in order of rank to be commissioned, and he was the only one who had not held a congressional commission in the Navy of the Revolution. John Barry, senior captain, and Richard Dale were Philadelphians, Silas Talbot was the New Englander whose rank eventually was the cause of Truxton's first resignation from the Navy. Work was begun shortly on six U. S. frigates, and each captain was assigned to superintend the building of a ship. There were four ships to mount 44 guns each, and two 36. Truxton was sent to Baltimore in 1795; his ship was to be a 36, eventually named *Constellation*.

As might have been anticipated, the Dey of Algiers made peace; but the President, who saw wider political horizons than the Congressmen, secured the passage of a bill to complete three of the ships. The ship at Baltimore was one of

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those to be completed, and in *Constellation*, during the naval war with France at the turn of the century Truxtun captured the French frigate *L'Insurgente* and vanquished *La Vengeance*.

Constellation was launched in September, 1797; cruiser warfare in the West Indies commenced in the summer of 1798. *Constellation*, 36, Truxtun, was not the first ship to depart in search of French national ships and privateers (Captain Richard Dale in *Ganges*, a converted Indianan, got to sea almost a month earlier) but for aggressiveness and success in finding enemies to conquer, and for conquering them, none in this quasi-war with France even approached the fame *Constellation* and its commander achieved. In the uncertain light of public adulation the behavior of Truxtun, the public and private individual, must be examined. That he habitually sulked and asked for pity is not a happy discovery, but that his life showed ugly scars of intended and supposed wrongs cannot be denied. Shortly after his capture of *L'Insurgente* in 1799, he first found a member of his expanding family circle unworthy of a trust with which he had been charged.

Henry Benbridge, son of a Philadelphia portrait painter, married Truxtun's daughter Sarah in 1796. He was, in the propitiatory language of Charles Biddle, "a good young man but not prudent." Truxtun gave \$10,000 as a suitable dowry, and that sum was invested to set young Benbridge up in the grocery business. When the cruise of *Constellation* began to show signs of success, Truxtun had "Harry" designated as prize agent for the ship. From the West Indies he remitted some \$4500 from the sale of smaller prizes, but from Harry himself came no word of acknowledgment. Truxtun was suspicious.

Biddle confirmed his fears of imprudence on the part of Benbridge, and Truxtun wrote back immediately [fol. 10]:

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United States Ship *Constellation*
Hampton Roads 29th June 1799.

DEAR SIR,

I have received your kind favor of the 21th curt and I thank you for your candid information contained therein. I am the most unfortunate man alive—every attempt even, to serve a child, turns out to my disadvantage. If Harry Benbridge is not however lost, to every sense of honor, to every sense of Gratitude, to the common feelings of a man, towards a young helpless family, he will surely secure me, what he is indebted to me . . . and let him reflect, on my conduct subsequent to leaving Phila last—I have appointed him the agent for the ship, and got him consignment in the West Indies, for which I am accountable.

Show him this letter, and tell him, to do me justice, and tho' he would not take my advice and confine himself to the Grocers business in Phila I will forgive him . . . for god sake do all that I require or I must quit the *Constellation* on my arrival at New York, and that will be a pretty business . . .

I am your Distressed friend,
THOMAS TRUXTUN.

CHARLES BIDDLE, ESQR.

In another two weeks Truxtun was again in Philadelphia after bringing his ship around from the Chesapeake to New York. With Biddle he left private instructions concerning the business of prizes. "You will act as the agent of myself & crew's of the *Constellation* and *L'Insurgente*—instead of Harry Benbridge Jr whoes private affairs, appear in such a deranged state, that I have thought it imprudent to trust him in his unfortunate situation; with any business of importance—But at the same time, as it would effect his character in the fleet, should his misfortunes be known, I shall be glad of having it avoided, by stating to the officers and men, should any inquiry be made, that you and he act in conjunction in the agency business . . ." He suggests that Biddle "inquire of Leamy & Crawford, what commission they have charged, as Barry's agent in prize cases, according to their nature, and you must charge in all cases the same, one half per agreement to go to my credit."

[Fol. 12]

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Again, the wayward Benbridge and his "infernal neglect" elicited lament: "I am fearful of something improper—now I pray you not to say I am a suspicious man—I wish to god I had been a thousand times more so—and I should not have been so often rented assunder—see, look, how I suffer everywhere—" [Fol. 15]

The sale and settlement of a prize frigate was no small matter. Joshua Humphreys appraised the ship at \$84,500, and Secretary of the Navy Benjamin Stoddert accepted the figure as reasonable. Strictly according to regulations, Truxtun's share, as Captain and Commodore, should have been three twentieths, not quite \$13,000, but he had, or thought he had, enough additional money to his credit to enable Biddle to purchase for him insurance stock in the amount of "\$30,000—which I wish in one certificate." [Folio 11.] Charles Biddle could not scrape together the \$30,000, however, and told Truxtun so. He was soon informed that "I never contemplated any risk, to be run by you, of laying out money beyond my share of the Prizes and Coms together with those men marked run [deserters]—and if you cannot on Examining the Prize Roll, safely purchase \$30,000 of stocks purchase \$20,000 of the 8 Per stock, which you can do at least and with safety—" [Folio 15.] The Navy captain's pay of \$75 a month and six rations (equivalent to an additional \$45 per month), or even the money derived from prizes, did not account for all of Truxtun's income. His fifteen years spent in trade had repaid him with comfortable wealth.

At the Tontine Coffee House where New York merchants leavened business with the pleasures of company, Truxtun was given an elegant dinner celebrating his victory over *L'Insurgente*, and later "at the same place, I was entertained by the military, a Beautiful painting of the action with L'Insurgente on silk was displayed on [an easel] at the head of the table and two other figures suitable on such a complimentary occasion, was at the other end of the

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Table—at this last Dinner, a Quaker presided—the Venerable Mr. Murray. Little Genl Hambleton [*sic*] was present, the Mayor, Gouverneur Morris, and every man of distinction, in the City & we spent cheerful and pleasant days." He was pleasantly stimulated by such tributes: "The high marks of attention shown me at Norfolk and this City, will for ever leave an impression of Gratitude on my mind, toward the inhabitants of those cities tho I assure you I detest much parade on any occasion, but it seems I must submit, to one frolic more in Jersey before I embark, and then Sir for another Insurgente if they please to come in the way of the Constellation." [Folio 14.]

Only three days later, in Perth Amboy, the frolicking warrior mentioned in an offhand manner the decision which would occupy most of his time for the rest of the year 1799. "It is not unlikely that I may be soon in Philadelphia—having resigned my Commission in the Navy—in consequence of a Decision of the President, giving Talbot rank over me." [Folio 15.]

President Adams had not erred in his decision, but only in making it unaided. The rank of the first five captains, Barry, Nicholson, Talbot, Dale and Truxtun had been fixed with the consent of President Washington in 1794. All were immediately employed as ship superintendents, but as the building of only three frigates was prosecuted, the two displaced captains were dropped from the rolls. A little later the first commissions, signed by George Washington, were tardily issued to the remaining three captains numbered 1 (Barry), 2 (Nicholson) and 3 (Truxtun). When the Navy was again expanded in 1798, Talbot and Dale were restored to service, and with reason expected to resume the rank which they formerly had held. Straightway there arose a delicate question of relative ranks: neither Talbot nor Truxtun would consent to be junior to the other. Secretary Stoddert favored Truxtun, especially since his action with *L'Insurgente*; but Adams gave Talbot rank over Truxtun.

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A baffling enigma is the real cause of this dispute over rank. Truxtun and Talbot each seemed filled with anathema toward the other. No substantial reason was advanced by either for such feelings. The opinion of almost any tribunal might have satisfied both contenders, but the venerable Adams did not submit the question to any tribunal; his decision was reached in the remoteness of Braintree. Truxtun's decision to resign his commission was prompt, much too prompt. It would take a tactful Biddle, a friendly Stoddert, and a sympathetic Adams to get *Constellation*, 36, Truxtun, to sea again, late in the year 1799.

The summer of 1799 wore on, and Truxtun and Biddle became increasingly concerned with *Constellation*. Biddle was administering the distribution of prize money from the capture of *L'Insurgente*, Truxtun was attempting to convince a friendly public that his resignation was submitted because he could not with honor do otherwise. But if his peremptory decision had satisfied his pride at the moment, a little reflection convinced him that the result was not all he might have wished. He was eventually moved to "confess that it mortify's me to be Idle—in a moment like the present, when every mind and every hand should be employed, to save our Country." [Fol. 21] By the middle of October he wrote again from Perth Amboy.

"You will ere this have seen Genl Wilkinson—let me know candidly what the President says—my commission has not been accepted in form—I wish to know how it is considered—& if the President has spoken of any alteration in his decision . . . Will you take a ride to Trenton and see Stoddert the seat of Government had been moved to Trenton because of the recurring yellow fever epidemic. Trenton was a day's ride from Philadelphia and ask him whether the President will make any new arrangement, for I want to have another touch at these Frenchmen—You must not mention if you go to Trenton—anything as coming from me—You will know particularly if my resignation is formally accepted, and advise me also. But under Talbot I can never serve. But suppose both our Coms were of some date, and neither to be superior, and never to act together, but in some case of evident necessity—when the good sense of either, would for the moment wave all difficulty, You can get Hamilton's opinion also from Wilkinson—" [Fol. 20.]

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The commission had not, as a matter of fact, been accepted, but Secretary of the Navy Stoddert had held it until the proper moment, when he could offer Truxtun immediate and promising employment. Before the end of October 1799 the issue had been settled [fol. 22]:

DEAR SIR,

I have had General Wilkinson with me here—he brought me my commission and a letter from Secy Stoddert, who I have written today. Talbot's ever having a controul over me, is out of the question—It must be clearly understood, that he is never to attempt it—and then I accept . . .

My compliments to Mrs B & all your good family.

Yours affectionably,

THOMAS TRUXTUN.

Perth Amboy 26th Octo 99.

Several weeks of activity followed, and on Christmas Day *Constellation*, 36, Truxtun stood out to sea once more. Frenchmen, beware!

He had just time to mention his domestic affairs, including the direction,

"Mrs. Truxtun must have as much money as she gives orders for—she directs with prudence & more economy than I do myself, and shall never have imits from me, in consequence of her Prudence & economy." [Fol. 25.]

There was more time for the Navy, and its organization, and for concern over its political administrators:

"I wish you to sound Bingham, Howard, Ross, Latimer, Martin & of the Senate, and Colo Parker & of the house of Representatives, whether they intend admirals & what sort—one vice & two rear are wanting (if we seriously intend a navy) to cooperate with the Secy in forming a complete system for its organization: our Captains with but few exceptions, want drilling more than the men: and I wish this was seen at head qrs . . . It is impossible for men to discover the defects of Captains—that are not themselves seamen—Stoddert directs his business very well in most matters—but for want of sea information, he is deceived by a variety of people—Humphreys has assumed too much, and taken advantage of him. Decatur the elder is fit for nothing above a Boatswain or Master—still he will talk to the Secy on subjects he is not acquainted with." [Fol. 25.]

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Sixty-two years would pass before an officer of the United States Navy might rank above a colonel in the army; no rank above Captain was authorized until the second year of our Civil War.

The new cruise took *Constellation* once more to the West India station, and eventually, on 2 February 1800, brought her athwart the hawse of a heavy French frigate, *La Vengeance*, of about 54 guns. The action of the preceding February, with *L'Insurgente*, had been both successful and profitable. This encounter, along with the commander responsible for it, has dropped hull down on the historical horizon. But rarely has there been recorded a more savage sea fight. The men were disciplined, the commander ostentatiously calm and deliberate. The Frenchmen aimed at *Constellation's* rigging, the American concentrated on the hull of *La Vengeance*. After five hours of battle, from 8 p.m. to 1 a.m., Truxtun prepared to take possession of the Frenchman, but troubles were fast developing aboard his own ship. All the main shrouds had been shot through, and in spite of some considerable exertions the mainmast finally went over the side. Before the wreckage could be cleared away *La Vengeance* had slipped off into the night.

In recognition of this action, and to take the place of the prize money which might have been, the Congress voted to Truxtun a "golden medal, emblematical of the late action". In a curious addendum, it was further resolved "That the conduct of James Jarvis, a midshipman in said frigate, who gloriously preferred certain death to an abandonment of his post, is deserving of the highest praise, and that the loss of so promising an officer is a subject of national regret." Except for occasional bare references to the events, these actions with *L'Insurgente* and *La Vengeance*, which in a fair analysis must be credited with securing for Truxtun his place in naval history, were not mentioned again in his letters to Biddle.

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The history of the medal can be followed. Its progress was uncertain, its very execution anticlimactic. But then, one cannot but express the thought that all the remaining 22 years of Truxtun's life were anticlimax. With some truth, he wrote "had I died the death of Nelson in my last battle I should now have been out of the way and it would have been for the better." [Fol. 64.] Dead heroes must ever be more glamorous than live ones.

"The design of the medal which I now return you is badly executed indeed—the profile shameful—I enclose you another profile taken some time ago tho' better executed is in my opinion no great likeness,"

he wrote on one occasion.

"The position of the Ships on the reverse side is proper enough & the hulls are very well—But the rigging & masts not regular—the *Constellation's* fore top sail & fore top gallant sail shou'd be more shattered—the *Vengeance* shou'd have her mizen & fore top mast over the side and main top sail yard on the cap—this was the state of things when the *Constellation* lost her main mast. The *Constellation's* Ensign staff shou'd rake aft and not be so high." [Fol. 38.]

The matter dragged on for many months, and not until two years after the event was the medal finally delivered. Its delivery to Truxtun almost coincided with the decision which cost him his place in the Navy.

Truxtun had been given command of *President*, 44, a brand new frigate built in New York, and he spent the winter of 1800-1801 in the West Indies, in command of a squadron. The year 1801 brought peace with France, the ending of a war which never assumed a title because it had never been declared a war at all. The end of the war spelled the end of active employment for Truxtun, at least temporarily. He returned to Perth Amboy. It was reported in Philadelphia that he was going on a voyage, but he was quick to comment, "This I shall never do again—In a squadron I may sail by & by but in pursuit of Commerce Never no more from this land." Still, his eyes were on Washington; he begged for news of any concern to the United States Navy. [Fol. 41.]

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He had a word for Captain Thomas Tingey, who was to serve nearly thirty years as commandant of the Washington Navy Yard. That he had, upon the election of Jefferson, "turned a violent Democrat" was of no consequence in itself, but now this "Tory", this "Englishman", this "time server" was trying to keep Truxtun in the background. "Tingey knows that if I get foul of those Barbary pirates, or any other pirates enemies to our country, if I have anything like equal force I will bang them into submission—this is what he is afraid of, and wishes *Barry who to me he calls an old wife*, to go up the Mediterranean—because he is I am told wonderfully afraid of my clashing with some of his projects at Washington." [Fol. 42.]

The opportunity to get foul of the Barbary pirates presented itself in short order. From Norfolk where he was preparing *Chesapeake* for the voyage to the Mediterranean he wrote in March 1802: "I am sick of the insubordination of our navy and am at this moment ready to relinquish my command in it to any body." [Fol. 43.] Before the month ended he had done just that. He was humiliated, a little puzzled. And of the consequences he had as yet no inkling. He described the episode to Biddle:

Previous to my leaving home to take command of the Squadron destined for the Mediterranean, I stated to the Secretary of the Navy the necessity of a Captain in the commanding ship, as Commodore Dale now has, the propriety of which had been long since seen by the Government, and acknowledged to me in a letter from the Department of the Navy signed by Mr Dearbourn, which lays now on my table before me: and on my leaving home to proceed hither, and after I had reached Philadelphia on my way down I wrote to my friend Mr Stoddert the late Secretary of the Navy Department, to see Mr Smith the present secretary, and to have it clearly understood that I would not proceed on the station assigned me without a Captain, or a Lieutenant Commandant to act as a Captain. . . . On my arrival at the Navy office at Washington there appeared no objection on the part of Mr Secretary Smith. . . . after this we went to see the President who received me with cold politeness tho' a short time after I had made my visit, he sent me a card to dine with him two days after (on Wednesday the 25th of February) and altho' I had a very severe cold which I had got on my journey and in fact was in a Situation much more proper for my chamber than to be one of a guest at a dining party:

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I went to prevent anything like an appearance of disrespect to the Chief of Magistrate, but I was again received with coldness and in a conversation he asked me (the President) which way I was traveling whether to the Northward or to the Southward, and in the course of the afternoon never broached the subject of the Service, on which I was going, nor of the Barbary powers." [Fol. 45.]

The flag captain was not appointed, and in an unfortunate moment Truxtun wrote to the Secretary of the Navy the sentence which gave the Administration the cue for which it was looking. "I should consider myself wanting in that duty which I owe to myself and to my family if I was to proceed without being placed in a situation similar to the Commander of the Squadron now in the Mediterranean and if this cannot be done I must beg leave to quite the service."

Leave to quit the service to which he had been ordered? Permission granted; and with it came leave to quit the Navy also. Argue as Truxtun would, this leave was final. Ahead lay 22 years of retirement and at the end a grave in Philadelphia's Christ Church burying ground.

(iii)

Gentleman, 1803-1822

[Folios 50-110]

FOR ANOTHER THREE YEARS prize money accounts continued to require Truxtun's attention. Certainly Biddle earned his half of the commissions charged. Most of Truxtun's time, however, was idly employed, and such men as Aaron Burr had use for idle gentlemen. Aaron Burr, Vice President of the United States, had just fought his duel with Alexander Hamilton. In New York late in July 1804 Truxtun wrote: "There is the devil to pay in this city about the late duel. . . . I regret the event as much as any man. . . . but the duel was a fair one. . . . why this abominable persecution." [Fol. 53.] He denounced as ludicrous "The bare face proceedings of the Jury—not one of which knew

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Hamilton's corps when it was examined, owing to its having been painted with Lamp black & tar as also the winding sheet, to insure its keeping without being offensive, until the desired arrangements for the procession were made." [Fol. 54] Burr disappeared to the southward, but he would return.

Meanwhile Commodore Truxton was an avid spectator of our Barbary wars, and solicited Biddle to gather information from those who had been there.

"What does Dale think of the Bombardment intended by the frigates—*President*, *Constitution*, *Congress* & *Constellation*, under Barron without the Gun boars & bomb Ketches . . . Although all the accounts extant state that the bar off Tripoli will not admit ships of great draughts of water coming nearer than *barely* within point blank shot of the city and works—yet it appears by O'Brien's letter that the *Constitution*, on the 1th September approached within pistol shot. I wish you would ask Dale who has been there, how near our heavy ships drawing from 21 to 23 feet water can approach the town and works—I have a bet depending—yet I would not have Dale to know that you ask on my request for one thousand dollars—you will serve me by asking the question in a careless manner, and return me an answer." [Fol. 61.]

His lack of employment brought Thomas Truxton many perplexities. For one thing, he decided to leave Perth Amboy, but had no definite plans.

"I wish my Phila house stood in this city [New York] or at Baltimore or Norfolk as either of those places would suit my views better than Phila—but in this world we can have nothing exactly as it is most desirable." [Fol. 60.]

The night before Christmas, 1805, found the aging (50) mariner guiding a quill over the irregular pages, underlining here, interling there and striking out. As so many times, he was opening his soul to his confident and friend Biddle. Aaron Burr was on the march once more.

In Washington and Elizabethtown, in New York and Pittsburg and Cincinnati Burr was fashioning a melodrama; the whole was "Enveloped in mystery." [Fol. 65.] Then the scheme leapt its bounds and Burr was hauled up for treason. The trial was held in Richmond in the spring

of 1807, with Truxton present as an interested spectator. The government wanted a conviction and used extraordinary devices to secure one. It was only natural that Truxton should by stating the truth help to disappoint Mr. Jefferson. The trip to Richmond was for Truxton not without pleasure.

"Richmond I am delighted with, and from the Governour down, throughout the society of 'Worthies', of all policks, I have been at home and had welcome shown me in every house, *most conspicuously*—I Dine every day at ½ past 4, rise at 8 from dinner and be at an evening party at ½ past 8, and in bed at 12—up at 6—go to Court at 10, adjourn at 3." His purpose for being in Richmond was accomplished. He had cleared his name, which had been dragged into the affair by the wretched James Wilkinson. Truxton was correct in his estimate of the situation: "My opinion is they have no testimony worth a cent in the business." [Fol. 67.] He spent several weeks in Richmond, explaining at some length upon his return home his position in the affair. "I wish to know no man that is not a *real & true patriot*—and who does not in sincerity love his country, next to his god, above all other things. Having forever been unconnected with any sort of plots, I write as I feel and carry the flag of defiance at the Main against my ungrateful enemies." [Fol. 69.]

The next few years Truxton spent as a gentleman farmer on "Cranberry Place", near Cranbury, New Jersey. He had time to look about the world, and to reflect. His attention came to rest on major actors, many of whom he knew personally. Jerome Bonaparte, brother of Napoleon, picked as wife the daughter of an old associate, William Patterson of Baltimore.

"That Jerome may like his wife better than the Queen forced upon him I can believe—but if she accepts of being a Dutchess of the German Empire with a settlement of \$40,000 per annum to be his Mistress, I shall have a most

contemptible opinion of her. If Oakly would marry her, she ought to obtain a Devorce from Jerome and join hands with him. Oakly, I understand, is the son of Sir Charles Oakly, who I knew when Govr of Madrass in the East Indies—and to be the wife of a man of such connections is more honourable than a Dutchess and Mistress to Jerome. . . ." [Pol. 70.]

For Napoleon he had no good words: "If the Emperour Bonaparte should be taken off by the wise hand of Providence—the powers of Europe may each again possess its own—But while the Usurper lives, there can be no justice—no settled & happy Govt on the continent of Europe. I hope however England will hold her own at least, and bid France & all Europe defiance. And God Grant Madison may act with wisdom & justice towards her as well as to this country—and if he does, his name will be immortalized when our country (now drunk) becomas sober."

The problems of the farm were not sufficient to keep Truxtun's mind occupied completely, and his large family seemed capable of displeasing him mightily at every turn. Two of his daughters made sorry choices when they married, and the others came in for their share of censure now and then; finally the Commodore fell to quarreling with his wife. He placed a public notice in the newspapers to the effect that he would be responsible only for debts contracted by himself, and Thomas Truxtun now poured out invective in interminable sentences; to quiet Mrs. Truxtun Cranberry Place was put up for sale, and then one comes upon two letters written in May 1811 by Mrs. Truxtun to Charles Biddle asking advice. Her words confirm the suspicion that the mariner and his wife, used to long separations, were getting on each other's nerves.

The farm was exchanged early in 1812 for another farm nearer to Philadelphia, and for "631½ acres of *choise lands*" in Otsego County State of New York. "Wood

Lawn', the new farm near Philadelphia, had 42 acres in a handsome and healthy situation, "half a mile from Moors town and 4 from Coles Town Church—within 600 yards of a mineral spring & 4 miles to the newly celebrated Mineral Spring of George Gittings Esqr much resorted to by the Citizens of Phila which spring has a bathing house to accommodate the public &c." The house was "38½ feet by 32½ built of Phila brick, is two stories high, Piazza on the south and a large shed on the East, which covers a pump of superior water. The cellars paved with bricks, plaistered between the joist, and divided into 3 apartments and completely finished from that to the Garrets—4 Rooms with an Entry on the first floor & Kitchin, 5 above and Store Room—Garrets divided in two, venisians [Venitians] to every window above, and close shutters below—Every window raises with pulleys—two handsome parlors on the first floor—a Good Garden with asparagus bed, Raspberries & c&c &c a fine young orchard and other fruit trees." [Pol. 101.]

From piazza and parlour of Wood Lawn Truxtun watched the war of 1812, never doubting for a moment that it was merely an electioneering scheme of its perpetrator James Madison. [Pol. 105.]

It was not without justification that the captain of *Comstellation*, the man who had much to do with the organization of the United States Navy, could write as a summary of his public life:

"From the moment of Mr Jefferson's inauguration as President of the U S, a system of intrigue was set on foot for my distruction, I was early informed *from high authority*, 'You have done your duty nobly in the infancy of the Navy, but you have committed a political sin in doing it—these men must & will punish you, to please the *French Representative* here, and *his master*, they will not dismiss you, because you are too popular, but they will work you out of the Navy, by contrivance."

Knowing the rectitude of my own heart, and that my zeal for my Country's Interest & the Navy, *was not second* to any man, *I certainly* did not profit by the warning I had received and when their system of Intrigue and Contrivances Commenced, it was so artfully carried on, that I had little suspicion of designs, untill their object had been

accomplished, as I had been informed. Nor did they in their rancor stop there, they went on with their system, to set me at variance with every officer of the Navy (and my friends) even those who had been reared by my fostering care, and promoted at my zealous solicitation." [Pol. 108.]

Now the picture begins to fade. The Truxtons moved into Philadelphia when the Commodore was elected High Sheriff to serve from 1816 to 1819; in Philadelphia he remained until his death in 1822. From this period only one letter survives, and that (21 October 1820) proposes to Charles Biddle a trade of Truxton's house in Race street for Biddle's in Mantua, New Jersey. The transaction was not completed.

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