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WINSHIP Bancroft Library

University of California, Berkeley

"Charles, 1850, master of the 'Betsey'.

Jonathan, 1806, master of the 'O'Cain', a famous trader and smuggler on the coast 1806-1812

Nathan, 1806, brother of Jonathan, mate of the 'O'Cain", master of the 'Albatros' 1807-12

Bancroft's History of California, v. I 1542 to 1800

p. 545 "American Sailors"

At the end of 1798, four sailors who had been in Baja California--

In August 1800, the American ship 'Betsey', Capt. Charles Winship, obtained wood and water at San Diego.

Bancroft's History of California, v. II

p. 25 "Another visit by an American vessel in 1803-04 was that of the 'O'Cain'. Capt. Joseph O'Cain inaugurated a new system of venture on the coast. O'Cain had been mate on the 'Enterprise', touching at San Diego in 1801, and was also supposed by Arguillaga to have sailed in the San Blas transports. The vessel was owned in part by Abiel and Jonathan Winship, the latter being on board when she sailed from Boston Jan. 23, 1803, arrived at Sitka probably September. There he succeeded in persuading Baranof, chief manager of the Russian American colonies, to furnish a company of Aluets with their bidarkas (two-man kyaks) under the direction of Sheetzof.---take orders on shares. Sailing from Kodiak on Oct. 1803--said to have done some trading and hunting along the coast of Alta California, but there is no definite record of this, except that he touched San Diego Jan. 8, 1804.

p. 39 "One of the released captives--reported that there was another vessel hunting otters by the aid of northern Indians (this was poaching against Spanish decree, so a ship was captured) This vessel (the one alluded to, not the one captured) was perhaps the 'O'Cain', since the vessel was under a new commander Jonathan Winship, with his brother Nathan as mate. Winship sailed from Boston Oct. 1805 with 30 men including officers, touching at the Sandwich Islands. He was welcomed at New Archangel (Sitka) April 1806 by chief director Baranof, who was willing enough to make a new contract for otter hunting on the south. On or about May 23, with 100 Aleut hunters, 4 Russians, 12 women, and 50 bidarkas, the 'O'Cain' set sail for the south and on June 10th anchored just off of Trinidad Bay, where Washington Sound, now Big Lagoon, was discovered, named, and partially explored. Winship remained in Trinidad Bay for 12 days. Fish were very plentiful and many skins were obtained, both by trade and by hunting. But the natives were numerous and hostile. All operations had to be conducted under the ship's guns. Field pieces had to be landed

to protect the camp on the bay shore. Once a fight occurred in which a savage was killed, consequently it was deemed best to quit this region on June 22nd.

Then having sighted the Faralones on the way south, the adventurers reached Cedros Island on June 29th. Parties of hunters were distributed on the different islands while the ship cruised from one to another with supplies and water, spending also some time at Todos Santos and San Quentin, where a profitable trade was carried on with the missionaries.

After 2 or 3 months, Winship, leaving his hunters until his return, sailed by way of the Hawaiian Islands to Kodiak, where he arrived on Nov. 9th with skins valued at \$60,000 (note, this book was published in 1886--imagine what that sum would be today). He (made ready) for a new trip in completion of his contract.--- The Russians state that Winship returned in September with 5000 otter skins for sharing. He had quarled at Cedros Island with the chief hunter --- (a Russian)--who later purchased an American schooner, possibly Hudson's 'Tomana', renamed the 'Nicoli'; and arrived home by way of the Hawaiian Islands in August. ---

After Rosanof's return to Sitka, there seemed to have been no intercourse between the Russian settlements and California for some time, and thus we may so regard the otter hunting expeditions of Americans made under contract with Baranof--O'Cain, Winship, and Campbell.

In 1807, Swift, in the 'Derby', with 25 bidarkas and 50 Aleuts hunted the coast with results which are not known. Jonathan Winship likewise came down from Kodiak in the 'O'Cain' with 50 native hunters, making a very profitable hunt, especially in northern California."

p. 82(Speaks of Baranof sending a ship to California with trade goods for the Californios.) "Kuskof attempted a new expedition to Bodega. He was unsuccessful, was obliged to return--his hunters were attacked by the Indians. Meanwhile Jonathan Winship made an otter-catching contract at the end of 1809--sailed in the 'O'Cain' 1810-11 and brought back over 5400 otter skins to share from the California coast. His brother Nathan Winship of the 'Albatros' also made a contract on October 1810, and brought back 1120 skins.

p. 84 "Jonathan Winship's visit in the 'O'Cain', with his brother Nathan as mate, we are better informed--the Russian records do not mention it---the 'O'Cain' left Kodiak January 16, 1807 with 50 native hunters, and in a month reached the Faralones, the south islands being explored at this visit, perhaps for the first time, and seals being found in great numbers.

Obtaining supplies from the Spanish at San Pedro, Winship hunted otter for a time at the Santa Catalena Islands, where he found

30 or 40 Indians resident who had grain and vegetables to sell. On Marth 6, he was off Tonto Santos Bay for a month to hunt -- extensive, adventurous, and successful -- was prosecuted on the peninsula coastal islands with which both captains and hunters were already familiar.

On April 19th the 'O'Cain' sailed again for the north with 149 Indian hunters on board, beside 12 women and 3 Russians. Reaching New Archangel after a stormy voyage, Winship sailed for China in October with a cargo worth \$136,000 (!). And in the next June the vessel was back at Boston to prepare for another voyage the following year.

(As an aside, about this time the Spanish were getting a little concerned about the Russians, and Moraga was sent forward with expeditions to Bodega Bay and Sonoma.)

p. 92 "I have already mentioned briefly the otter hunting voyages made under Russian contracts by the Winship brothers, William Davis, and George Iries in the 'O'Cain', 'Albatros', 'Isabel', 'Mercury'. In the log book of the 'Albatros', captain Nathan Winship presents many interesting particulars representing the operation of all the fleet of California coast in 1810-11.

Winship went with instructions from a Boston company to form a settlement on the Columbia River in 1809. Doubling Cape Horn and touching at the Hawaiian Islands, the 'Albatros' entered the Columbia May 1810. The attempt to found a settlement was not successful, but the details don't belong here (heck).

The 'Albatros' continued southward, touching at the Santa Barbara Islands where they found many seals and sea otters, which in the absence of the Aleuts apparently could not be caught; but left a gang of hunters at Cedros Island, returned northward and she arrived at Norfolk Sound Oct. 22, 1810.

Repairs were made and a contract entered into with Baranof for 30 bidarkas, and 50 Kodiak hunters. With which reinforcements the Yankee captains sailed on the 16th of November.

At Drake Bay he found the 'O'Cain' and the 'Isabel' and 'Mercury'. ---communication was had with the party on the Faralones, which had already taken 30,000 seal skins (!) and were now reinforced by 6 Kanakas (Hawaiians).

Next, the 'Albatros' repared to sail to San Louis Obispo for wood, water, and beef. A party of hunters took 60 prime otter skins.

At San Quentin the 'O'Cain' was joined by the two Winship brothers, Nathan and Jonathan--carried out a profitable business during the rest of the year by keeping parties of hunters on different islands, and also obtaining furs from the peninsula missionaries.

On April 1, 1811 the 'Albatros' sailed to the north, leaving the 'O'Cain' to look after affairs on the lower coast and returned to the Faralones to leave supplies. Then she went to Drake Bay where she was joined by the 'O'Cain' and 'Isabella' on the 11th of May. Here the two vessels remained a month after communicating with different gangs of hunters by means of boats. In June the 'Albatros' went south again and was occupied in picking up four parties of the hunters and the products of their labors for both ships. On the 19th she sailed for the north, arriving at the Russian settlements in August. After repairing the ship and discharging its Indians, Winship returned down the coast and anchored on the 27th of September at the south Faralones.

The 2nd of October--taken on board all the hunters except Brown and 11 Kanakas. The 'Albatros' sailed for the islands (Hawaiian) so loaded with furs that some water casks had to be broken up and the hemp cables carried on deck.

She arrived at Oahu early in November and was soon joined by the 'O'Cain' and the 'Isabella', the results of whose trips were not so fully recorded but which, according to Russian authorities, carried north as the Company's share of the catch 2728 and 1488 sea otter skins respectively.

The three vessels formed a kind of partnership with the intention of returning to California, but after a voyage to China, this plan was abandoned in favor of a sandalwood contract with the king of the Hawaiian Islands. The 'Albatros' accordingly came to California to take off a party of sealers and close up the business. She was at the Faralones in August, and thence went to Drake's Bay where one Jerry Bancroft was nearly killed by a grizzly bear.

Winship was back at the Faralones in October, where the journal ends on October 25th, and where the three vessels were blockaded for nearly three years during the war with the English.

(On page page 267 of this volume, there is a treatment of the contraband trade. In it it cites 1811-12 certain American vessels with bidarka fleets hunting otters under Russian contracts--of the Winships in the 'Albatros' and the 'O'Cain' etc.)

p. 633 (Speaking of Fort Ross says) "One of the officers authorized by the bishop to baptize, bury, and read funeral services-- The food of the masses was largely sea lions and gulls from the Faralones, with fish and game, grain, vegetables, and beef being, as a rule, sold from the northern establishments. The general system and routine observed by the Company in their trading and hunting operations was as their relation to their employees uniform in all of the Russian American colonies is fully treated in my History of Alaska.

From 1812 to 1840 the Russians kept an establishment at the Faralones as well as at Ross. The chief objective was to secure fur seals, 1200 to 1500 skins being taken annually for 5 or 6 years,

though Winship, Gail, Smith and other Americans had taken the cream of this natural wealth a few years earlier.

(Page 148 discusses the somewhat clandestine relationship between the sea captians and the missionaries. "At San Louis Obispo, the southern-most of the missions subject to the military jurisdiction of Monterey, the friars were condemned in 1805 for their cruel reception of of a foreign vessel, probably the 'Lylia Byrd', which came and pretended need of fresh provisions but really in quest for opportunities for illicit trade. Let us grant the missionaries with this fault by the act, and let the credulous of my readers believe, if they can, that such was the reception always given to the traders at San Louis, for there is no record of this decade to prove the contrary say Winship's statement that he obtained supplies for the 'Albatros' in 1810."

(Page 199 speaks of the period in California following the Mexican overthrow of the Spanish regime and the hard times that befell the Mexicans in the far out outpost that the trappers called "destitution". The missions had no more support, no more money, and the California products had no buyers. An allusion again is made to Moraga establishing a settlement at Bodega. "The first temptation was bravely resisted by Arillaga, for there was no trade this year beyond the limited contraband operations of the otter hunters---Iryes in the 'Mercury' and Winship in the 'Albatros', who was a Drake Bay and the Faralones.")

(Page 296, "Russians in California", speaks of Baranof dispatching _____ to Bodega, where he arrived the 4th of March. Few details have been preserved regarding his visit. Otter were not plentiful at Bodega at that time, therefore the 22 bidarkas went to San Francisco Bay where hunting was carried on for some months, accompanied by two other parties of hunters from the 'Albatros' and the 'Isabella', but it was all of 1200 otter skins for _____'s party. The Russians said that though the Spaniards could do nothing at first to interrupt this wholesale poaching, they at last hit upon the expediency of guarding the springs of fresh water and thus forcing the Aleuts to withdraw. The Spanish records rather strongly contain nothing on this topic. During the absense of his hunters, the commander seems to have devoted his attention to conciliation with the natives and to exploration in and around Bodega Bay."

"The Winship log does mention anything about San Francisco Bay. but it is not unlikely that they were there."

(Well, the sum and substance is that the Winships were in effect working for the Russians, having an agreement with them, and in that agreement was outright poaching and moving contraband goods in and out of Alta California.

Other sources on the Russian presence along the Pacific coast of North America make it cleaf that these colonies were doomed

from the outset, and although perceived by the Spanish as a threat, really were not. The colonies were doomed by mismanagement, conditions of climate, and an impossible logistics problem in obtaining support from Russia--a problem that was both real and the result of indifference from the heart of mother Russia, so far away. Also contributing to the failure was the choice of most of the Russian occupants, who were a low class of Siberian serf (there is a special name for them) who were treated quite badly and not even considered "Russians" by colony management. Weather conditions in the north prevented any meaningful farming, and many of the colonies were constantly harassed by the fierce Indians of the north. Provisions were so bad that a large portion of the colony inhabitants were too ill to work--if not too drunk. So these colonies, with the possible exception of Fort Ross that became more or less self sufficient--were at a bare subsistence level. Another contributing factor was that the Russians were barred by the Chinese from any port except one on the Russia-Chinese boarder, far from the wealthy and royal Chinese who wanted the fur; while the Americans, and English, sailed unhindered to Canton and bargained for much higher prices for fur. Another problem for the Russians was their inhibition to take action without Company authority, while the Yankee and English sea captains were entirely unfettered spirits who seized instantly upon any opportunity that presented itself, including selling munitions to the Indians who were beseiging the Russians.

So, it is little wonder that the Yankee sea captains became the unwanted and uncomfortable allies of the Russians, on whom the very existance of the Russian colonies depended.

When the otter and sea lion kill played out, the Yankees and English sailed off to engage in other ventures. When the Mexicans overthrew the Spanish and secularized the missions of Alta California, the only organized agricultural activities stopped, thus a source of supply for the Russians. (Despite the ban on trade between the Californios and the Russians, including closing of the port of San Francisco, there is no question that a significant trade existed. The Russians offered metal goods made mostly in the colonies to the Californios who had not even a blacksmith in all of Alta California, according to one source. This closing of the port of San Francisco explains the anomaly of the traders using Drake's Bay and Bodega Bay, even anchoring at sea off the Faralones. Yet the Spanish had no seagoing strength to oppose the Yankees, so the Spanish authority was generally flaunted.

The decree to secularize the missions was issued in 1829, but the process dragged into the 1840's. In 1841 the Russians found it to their advantage to sell Fort Ross to John Sutter, who dragged the Fort's cannon off to his fort at Sacramento, where they rested without ever firing a shot in anger.

The entire matter of the Russian colonies came to a close when Secretary of State William Henry Seward, under president Johnson, bought all of the Russian claims in Alaska for \$7,200,000 in 1867--"Seward's Folley" it was referred to at the time.

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Untrue!
Exaggeration!
→

Sutter only
got one
cannon, a
"show piece" →

WINSHIP -- Post Script

Before leaving the presence of the Winships on the Pacific Coast, another source has Charles Winship sailing his ship "Betsey" into San Diego harbor in 1795, as the first United States ship to do so.

The Winship brothers were only some of the Yankee sea captains to engage in the fur trade. The foregoing document makes it sound as if they were the only, or the predominant ones--quite naturally because I was specifically seeking out the activities of these Winships. I did that because I happen to have a heavy Winship ancestry, but I do not descend from these brothers.

The Winship brothers mentioned fit into the Winship family thusly. History of Cambridge, Mass., page 699, tells us that Jonathan Winship, who married Sarah Richardson 4 May 1767, had issue Abiel, bpt. 1769, Jonathan, and Nathan. Charles is not to be found in this source, but rest assured that he was a close relative, or was simply omitted as issue of Jonathan and Sarah. Another child of this couple was Anna who married a Dana. No doubt the reader is aware of a book entitled Seven Years Before The Mast, written by Charles Henry Dana about the hide and tallow trade the occurred between the Californios and the Yankees. Without researching it, I'd lay odds that Charles Henry Dana was the son of Anna (Winship) Dana.

Now, let's tuck the Winship brothers into the family tree.

Abiel, Jonathan, and Nathan Winship were sons of:

Jonathan Winship who married Isabel Cutter in 1741, he son of:

*Edward Winship III who m. Sarah Buck about 1705, he son of:

*Edward Winship II who married Rebecca Barsham in 1683, he son of:

*Edward Winship I who married Elizabeth Parke about 1651, son of:

*Lyonel Winship who died in 1637 at Walden, Ovington, Northumberland, England.

* I descend from the indicated Winships, and have a considerable store of information about them.

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