

Mersey Built

The Role of Merseyside in the American Civil War

Robert Thorp

Vernon Series in World History



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For Jacqueline and Carolyn

and

Our Children's Children's Children

*This book is also dedicated to the fond memory of
Ethel Trenholm Seabrook Nepveux (1923-2016)*

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Acknowledgements

The initial seeds of inspiration for this book were sewn some fifty years ago when, as a lad of twelve years old, I first met Miss Christina Duguid. Aunt Chrissie, as I knew her, was the grand-daughter of Captain James Alexander Duguid: a famed blockade runner and cotton smuggler during the American Civil War. She was also a cousin to my grandmother. Aunt Chrissie's house in Holland Road, Wallasey, was packed with maritime memorabilia from the four corners of the world and its walls were covered with paintings of ships, stern looking men and strange tapestries. It was like an Aladdin's cave to a small boy and could not fail to pique my curiosity about our shared maritime ancestry. Aunt Chrissie beguiled me with stories of Captain Duguid's exploits as a blockade runner and she generously gave me his portable writing-desk, complete with secret compartments – guaranteed to thrill a young lad with an active imagination. She also gave me a faded photo of a painting of the commerce raider, C.S.S. *Florida* and another of a paddle steamer, which I was later able to identify as the blockade runner *Lucy*. Sadly, Aunt Chrissie passed away before I was old enough to fully appreciate the importance of our family connections to these two ships or to properly tap her fund of knowledge on the finer points of the good captain's adventures commanding them; however, she deserves a large vote of posthumous thanks for getting me hooked on the subject and for starting me down the road to authorhood.

Another relation, who has been enormously inspirational and supportive over the years, is my own cousin, Richard Harris. Richard studied the *Alabama* Claims as part of his university degree. His research into that subject and all things related to the American Civil War at sea has been legendary; as has his generosity in sharing with me many of the new facts and details that he continues to unearth. Perhaps the greatest gift that Richard has given me, was an introduction to Mrs Ethel Trenholm Seabrook Nepveux of Charleston, South Carolina.

Ethel is the great-grand-daughter of George Alfred Trenholm, who became Secretary of the Confederate Treasury towards the end of the civil war. She is the author of several books about George Trenholm and of numerous articles on the ships and captains employed by the Trenholm companies. Some years ago, I had the privilege of staying with her and her delightful husband, Felix, in their Charleston home and was given access to Ethel's extensive private library, along with a large helping of Southern hospitality. I am forever indebted to Ethel for sharing her knowledge so freely and also for introducing me to her like-minded Charleston colleagues, including Charles Peery, Priestly Coker, Russell Horace, the Westendorfs, the McDonalds, the Andersons and several members of the Charleston Civil War Round Table. Through participating with Ethel in delivering a joint paper on the C.S.S. *Florida* along with John Ellis of Mobile, I have been

fortunate enough to meet many key members of the American Civil War Museum in Richmond, Virginia and have special thanks for John Coski, chief historian, and Sam Craghead, public relations manager, for their encouragement and example.

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I cannot mention Liverpool without expressing my thanks to Bob Jones, who was an irrepressible enthusiast on the Confederate connections within that city. Sadly, Bob passed away in 2015 and will be sorely missed. Through Bob's Confederate events in and around Liverpool I have met several notable authors who share my interest in the Confederate marine and who have been helpful to me with advice and information: men like Walter Wilson, Gary McKay, Andrew Bowcock and, in particular, Stephen Chapin Kinnaman whose friendship and guidance over the past few years have had an enormous influence on this book.

The post-Civil War era led to a number of redundant blockade runners being snapped up by the Brazilian Navy for employment in the War of the Triple Alliance. Tracing them has required the help of a Brazilian interpreter in the person of my good friend and colleague, Luciana Duarte Plint, who earns my gratitude for her liaison work with the Brazilian Navy's history department on my behalf.

Tracing the histories of some of the key characters involved with supporting the Confederacy during the Civil War has been helped by such people as David Saunders-Davies who shared the Prioleau family tree. Nick Prioleau kindly gave permission for me to use his portrait of Charles Kuhn Prioleau and Sue Sayers equally kindly gave permission for me to use her photo of Henry and Lucy Lafone.

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Lastly, I want to thank my long-suffering wife, Ailsa, who has spent many lonely evenings looking at the back of my head, bent over a keyboard, yet she has been the one to keep me at it with encouragement and kindly chidings to "Get that book finished." Thank you all.

Foreword

The American Civil War evokes images in most people's minds of the well-known land battles—Bull Run, Antietam, and Gettysburg to name a few. But much of the war's hostile action occurred off America's coast. Invisible and out of sight, the United States Navy struggled day and night, in fair weather and foul, over four long years to seal the ports of the newly born Confederacy. And who were their foes? A relentless infestation of swift blockade runners, captained by daring men who risked everything—capture, injury and death—in pursuit of fabulous profits. And where were they from? Almost without exception, they came from Great Britain. Hundreds of fast, British-flagged steamers, and the handful of Southern cruisers that complimented them, were all built in British shipyards and manned by British crews. And of the blockade runners, nearly all of them were financed with money raised by British-organized consortiums.

The details of their aggressive breach of the Federal blockade have remained largely invisible, forgotten acts of defiance in support of the lost cause of a slave-owning republic. And that in part explains why this story of bold, brash entrepreneurs has remained for so long in the shadows. It is often said that the victors write the history, and never was it truer than in the aftermath of America's Civil War. But there was another, less appreciated reason these epic adventures of men risking their all have remained in the background. In pursuing the means to their ends, they skirted the law at every turn. They flaunted Britain's neutrality, built their fleets of fast steamers, organized investments schemes, and craftily managed their ships and crews, all within the letter of the law—as they interpreted it. Their Confederate navy counterparts followed in their footsteps, mobilizing war steamers that cleverly circumvented Britain's foreign enlistment act's arcane language, and then proceeded to destroy American shipping. But the target of these manifold endeavors, the United States of America, viewed their activities very differently. The Federal government was outraged at their blatant violations of American sovereignty and of Britain's proclaimed neutrality—their ships were judged as prizes of war, their crews labeled pirates, and their cargoes condemned. For very good reason, these same enterprising men's desire to boast of their achievements, as spectacular as they were, was understandably suppressed. During the tense years that followed the bloodiest war America ever fought, they kept quiet, both to escape unwanted attention and to avoid criminal prosecution. Their new quest was simply to resume their interrupted lives.

Robert Thorp's new book, *Mersey Built*, has fixed a bright, shining light on the clandestine activities of the men behind the blockade runners and Southern cruisers, and the vast infrastructure that made them all possible. The book's title, keying on the role of Merseyside, gives only a hint of its true scope. But Liverpool

is a well-chosen place to start. It was, as British Foreign Secretary Lord John Russell dryly quipped, “a port specially addicted to Southern proclivities, foreign slave trade, and domestic bribery.” The far-flung sweep of Robert Thorp’s story takes the reader on a journey from the River Mersey to New Brunswick’s Miramichi, from tropical Nassau in the Bahamas to the South’s Charleston and Wilmington, then back to England through many ports in between. And the author has more than an engaged historian’s enthusiasm for the events he relates; he is the lineal descendent of two of the most outsized characters at the heart of his wonderfully crafted tales—William Cowley Miller, a cerebral, calculating ship builder, and his son-in-law, James Alexander Duguid, a daring but supremely competent sea captain.

Mersey Built encompasses the myriad threads of the South’s struggle for life. Selecting but a few of the episodes, one reads of the origins of Fraser, Trenholm & Co., the Liverpool bank that financed the Confederacy’s operations in Europe; the gripping story of *Emily St Pierre*’s near single-handed escape from capture by the Union navy; accounts of diligent Southern agents, the army’s Caleb Huse and the navy’s James Dunwoody Bulloch; the life and death of the Southern spy, Rose O’Neale Greenhow; the story of how the deadly Confederate raiders *Florida* and *Alabama* got to sea; the convoluted legal imbroglio that was the *Alexandra* affair; and of the very real threat of the Laird rams, powerful armored turret-ships that brought the United States and Britain to the brink of war.

The engineer in Robert Thorp is also on full display throughout the pages of *Mersey Built*. Technological triumphs enabling faster and stealthier vessels are frequent companions to the sheer excitement of the chase. The advantages of lifting screw propellers, feathering paddle wheels, telescoping funnels, compound steam engines and perhaps the first application of camouflage paint, are all well-documented. Many of the blockade runners were custom-built ships, each pushing the envelope of shipbuilders’ knowhow. The first steel vessel to cross the Atlantic, the blockade runner *Banshee*, was constructed with hull plates as thin as $\frac{1}{8}$ inch, and not surprisingly, nearly sank before she left British waters. Other vessels, originally designed for benign coastal service, were flung across the Atlantic and relentlessly raced in and out of Southern ports, often dodging gunfire from Federal cruisers. The wonder is not that so many were lost or captured, but that so many survived. Anyone with even the most rudimentary mechanical bent will take delight at the technical virtuosity and operational abandon of the blockade runners’ builders, owners and captains.

In summary, *Mersey Built* presents a welcome addition to the history of the American Civil War at sea. It delivers a rousing tale of cloak and dagger adventure, all of it superbly researched, and all of it true.

Stephen Chapin Kinnaman
Chappell Hill, Texas
June 2017

Introduction

The American Civil War (1861-1865) is characterised by the major land battles that were fought between the two sides. Bull Run, Vicksburg and Gettysburg are just some of the battlefield place names that ring on down through history. Merely speaking these names conjures up visions of serried ranks of infantry: the blue and the grey advancing grimly towards each other, staunchly holding formation through artillery bombardments until they were within range of rifle and musket. Then they would stop to form firing banks, two standing and one kneeling, with a thousand gun barrels loaded, primed and ready to let loose a hail of lead on the order, "Fire!" The men would disappear in clouds of powder smoke as volley, after volley was poured into enemy ranks; then, bayonets fixed, they would run the last closing yards yelling their battle cries at full pitch to meet head on with steely points dealing the last grim hands of death. The fighting was ferocious and the casualties horrendous being roughly estimated, after the war as 620,000 dead with many more wounded. We will never know the exact numbers or the exact split between Confederate and Union casualties. Suffice it to say that the numbers were huge and American society was changed irrevocably, because of the conflict.

While the physical war raged across the country, there was another war being fought in parallel. This was an economic war which suffered very few casualties, yet arguably had even greater consequences than the land war. Soon after the outbreak of the conflict President Lincoln ordered a naval blockade of the whole Southern coastline with the intention of cutting the Confederacy off from the outside world. Without foreign trade the South would not be able to equip or feed their armies. They would soon have to capitulate and the war might be won within six months. Naturally, President Davis had other ideas and ordered retaliation with the intention of destroying as many Union merchant ships as could be found on the high seas. Both could play the game of crippling the other's ability to trade outside its borders and both sides desperately needed that trade.

Then of course, there was the outside-world view of Lincoln's blockade. On 30th March, 1856, there had been international agreement, when 55 nations - excluding the United States - ratified the Treaty of Paris. This treaty had been negotiated following the Crimean War and laid down certain principles of maritime behaviour that should henceforth be adhered to by all of the signatory nations. Arising from the treaty was the Declaration of Paris, part of which was to agree the principle that blockades, in order to be obligatory, must be effective. In other words, it was one thing for Lincoln to declare a blockade, but unless he could make it stick, it would be fair game for any foreign trader wishing to deliver goods to a so-called blockaded port to attempt to run the blockade into that port.

The Confederacy sent agents to Europe - principally Britain and France - to purchase arms, equipment and food for their armies and ships for the navy. Private individuals and corporations on both sides of the Atlantic sourced fast steamers with which to run much needed supplies through the blockade and into Confederate hands. The Confederacy sent cotton, tobacco and turpentine out on the return voyages to raise the money they needed to prosecute the war on land and to finance the commerce raiding cruisers they would put to sea. It has been estimated that the Confederacy's success in the economic war allowed them to carry on the physical war for two more years than would otherwise have been the case. It was also true that American merchant shipping would take eighty years to recover from the devastation wrought upon it by the Confederate commerce raiders.

The land war was controlled mostly from the two seats of government: Washington, DC for the North and Richmond, Virginia for the South, while the heroes in the field were Grant and Sherman for the North with Lee and Jackson for the South. The economic war centred on Europe with Liverpool as the hub for the Confederacy. Liverpool was the main port for landing Confederate cotton and the primary home of the cotton brokers who traded it. Liverpool was the base from which the Confederate Navy's senior procurement agent operated, having been given office space in the Anglo-American company which acted as overseas bankers to the Confederacy. Liverpool was at the heart of the logistics system that kept the Confederacy supplied, yet Liverpool is rarely mentioned in context of the Civil War and there are no heroes of the economic war remembered in the same way as Grant, Sherman, Lee and Jackson.

For most of the civil war period the Southern government was happy to leave the import and export of goods through the Federal blockade largely to private enterprise. Entrepreneurs on both sides of the Atlantic seized the opportunity for massive profits as scarcity in supply with burgeoning demands sent prices for almost everything soaring to dizzy heights in the Southern States. Large consignments of arms and domestic goods were shipped from ports in England and Scotland to Saint George's in Bermuda and to Nassau in New Providence Island, both of which were British colonies. They were sent over in British registered ships with British registered captains in the belief that cargoes being shipped across the Atlantic between one British port and another on British flagged vessels should, in theory at least, be immune from U.S. Navy interference. Once safely in St. George's or Nassau harbour, the large shipments were broken down into smaller lots to be loaded onto fast steamers for the run in through the blockade. Wilmington in North Carolina, Charleston in South Carolina and Savannah in Georgia were the favoured east-coast destinations. Havana in Cuba was also used as a staging post for shipments through Galveston, New Orleans, and Mobile on the Gulf of Mexico coast, but Havana was not as secure a destination as the British ports and was not as widely used. Similarly, the little

Mexican port of Matamoros was used as a landing point from where to smuggle goods across the Rio Grande into Texas.

It was not until 1864 that the Confederate government decided to take a more direct hand in blockade running by ordering a number of new ships to be built on Merseyside. These were to be operated by the Confederate Navy, but they had left it too late. The war was over, before many of these ships could be brought into service and a number of builders were left with part finished vessels on their hands for which they would no longer be paid.

The commerce raiders operated by the Confederate States Navy were built in equal numbers on the Mersey, the Clyde and the Thames. The most notorious of these were the C.S.S. *Alabama*, built by John Laird and Sons of Birkenhead, the C.S.S. *Florida* built by W.C. Miller and Sons of Liverpool and the C.S.S. *Shenandoah* built by Alexander Stephen & Sons of Govan, Glasgow.

The state of South Carolina played a leading role in the conflict, being the first to secede from the Union and the first to start the fighting. The first shots of the war were fired by the guns of Fort Moultrie in Charleston harbour and Charleston was among the last cities to surrender to Federal troops at the end of the war. During the whole of the conflict, one man, a native and resident of Charleston, stands out as the prime facilitator of the Southern war effort. That man was George Alfred Trenholm: rumoured to be the richest man in the Confederacy at the outbreak of the war and thought by some to be the real life hero on whom Margaret Mitchell based her fictitious character, Rhett Butler, in the novel "Gone with the Wind".

George Trenholm was the senior partner in the Charleston shipping and trading firm of John Fraser and Co. with sister companies in New York and Liverpool. The New York branch traded under the name of Trenholm Brothers Inc., while the Liverpool branch was titled Fraser, Trenholm & Co. In addition to his interests in these three companies, Trenholm was a director of the Bank of Charleston and a major share-holder in one of the railroads running out of Charleston to the hinterland. In short he was something of a genius when it came to finance and logistics.

When the war started, the Confederacy had no 'Federal Reserve' with which to equip and pay its armed forces. Despite taking loans from various banks, the government was unable to quickly put its hands on the cash needed to purchase the requisites of war in Europe. George Trenholm immediately stepped up to the plate to offer the services of his companies and his ships. He offered the government credit through Fraser, Trenholm & Co. in Liverpool who acted as bankers to the Confederate procurement agents working in Europe, advancing them whatever money they needed to buy arms and ships. Trenholm charged a small commission on these loans, but took most of his repayments in government-owned cotton, smuggled out of the South, which his company could then sell in the Liverpool markets. In the final year of the war Christopher

Memminger, the Secretary of the Confederate Treasury, resigned his post. Although he was somewhat reluctant to take it on, George Trenholm agreed to take over the role and saw it through to the end. When the war was lost, Trenholm did whatever he could to ensure that the government's creditors were paid a fair share of whatever little money was left.

Partnering George Trenholm in the shipping and banking empire was a younger man named Charles Kuhn Prioleau. He was another native of Charleston, but a few years, before the outbreak of the war, he moved to Liverpool as managing director of Fraser, Trenholm & Co. He married a local woman and, in 1860, became a naturalised British subject, signalling his intention to remain in England for the long term. Charles Prioleau was every bit as energetic as George Trenholm in facilitating the activities of Confederate agents working out of Britain and every bit as active, if not more so, in managing the company's fleet of blockade runners. The firms of John Fraser and Co. in Charleston and Fraser Trenholm and Co. in Liverpool bought numerous ships to run the blockade throughout the war and provided the finance for a number of other private enterprises to have their own ships built for the same purpose. A number of those were built to order by Mersey shipbuilders both in Liverpool and in Birkenhead. The Confederacy could not have survived for as long as it did without Trenholm and Prioleau and yet they are both relatively obscure, forgotten heroes of the conflict.

This book recounts the part played in the American Civil War by Mersey-built ships and the companies who built them. Where possible it tells something of the brave captains who risked life and limb to dodge the Yankee blockading fleet, though unfortunately, many of them have left little or nothing in the way of historical records. The story is told against the background of the wider Confederate procurement effort that was centred on Liverpool and London and the efforts of the Federal spies and diplomats who did their best to confound that activity. Given the central role played by Fraser, Trenholm & Co. there is no better place to start than to shine a light on how that company came to be and what roles its various members had to play.

Chapter 1

Fraser, Trenholm and Company

John Fraser and Company had been trading out of Charleston, South Carolina for over fifty years, before the outbreak of the American Civil War.¹ The firm had been built on strong foundations by the father and son team of the John Frasers, senior and junior, backed by Fraser family money. After John Fraser senior took his retirement, the enterprise expanded and diversified under the leadership of George Alfred Trenholm. It eventually became a Trenholm family firm when both the Frasers passed away and their widows sold out their interests. For reasons best known to George Trenholm, he kept the name of John Fraser and Company, despite there being no Frasers left within the partnership. By 1854 Trenholm's business acumen and vision had led to the establishment of two branch subsidiaries: Trenholm Brothers of New York and Fraser, Trenholm & Co. of Liverpool.² The company future looked set for further success and expansion until South Carolina's secession in December, 1860, and the war that followed a few months later. That war would prove to be the company's nemesis.

Trenholm Brothers in New York was on the wrong side of the border between North and South when the fighting started. The position of a Confederate company based deep in Union territory quickly became untenable and that branch of the firm had to be hastily abandoned. When the war ended in 1865, Fraser, Trenholm & Co. in Liverpool was owed some £170,000 by the disbanded Confederate government. That sum is equivalent to about £14,000,000 in 2015 money. Despite claims and counter claims between Charles Prioleau and the United States government, the company had no chance of obtaining recompense and was declared bankrupt in 1867. Back in Charleston, the United States Treasury placed spiteful demands on John Fraser and Company for unpaid import taxes on all the goods and military equipment they had shipped into the country during the four years of war. The company's assets were stripped in order to pay what little portion of that bill they could muster the cash for and the then worthless company was wound up.³

For his part as latter-day Secretary of the Confederate Treasury, George Trenholm was jailed and his personal property confiscated. He was later pardoned and released during the reconstruction period and returned to business in Charleston, but John Fraser and Company was never resurrected.

John Fraser and Company of Charleston and Fraser, Trenholm & Co. of Liverpool played such pivotal roles in facilitating the Confederate war effort that it is worth spending a little time to examine the background history of the firm and to

understand how the various characters involved came together. The roots of the company stretch right back to the early days of Charleston's colonial history and, as was typical of those early colonial days, they have English, Scottish and French connections.

The first of the families to arrive in Charleston were the Prioleaus who went there to escape from religious persecution in France. Elias Prioleau⁴ had been the pastor of a Protestant church in the town of Pons in the Saintonge region of southwest France when, in 1685, King Louis XIV passed the Edict of Fontainebleau declaring Protestantism to be illegal. Protestant services were forbidden: all existing Protestant children were to be educated as Catholics and any new-borns were to be baptised in the Catholic faith. At the same time emigration was prohibited; so, on paper at least, there was no escaping the fact that if you were a Protestant in France you were compelled to stay in France and convert to Catholicism or face the consequences of disobedience. The Edict of Fontainebleau encouraged Catholic persecution of the Protestants, or Huguenots as they were disparagingly called, which frequently boiled over into violence. Many of the Protestant churches were destroyed and thousands of Huguenots were driven from their homes. Many more simply fled the country by any clandestine means they could find. Eventually Hundreds of thousands of French Protestants made their way to safe havens such as Britain, Holland, Prussia, and as far afield as South Africa. After a brief stay in Britain, some four thousand of them were encouraged to move on to the British colonies in America.

On 15th April, 1686, Pastor Prioleau's church was attacked by a Catholic mob and was burned to the ground.⁵ He managed to escape unharmed, but the destruction of his church was a clear enough signal that it was high time for him to take his wife and daughter away from there to somewhere safe. It is not known quite how they made their getaway from France, but it is known that they arrived in England in late April and stayed there for a little over a year until given permission and a grant of £8 from King James II to immigrate to the British colony of South Carolina. They arrived at the port of Charles Towne (modern day Charleston) in late 1687 where they settled down to live among the other 1,800 or so inhabitants. When the Prioleaus arrived in Charles Towne there was already a small Huguenot community established with numbers estimated at between 55 and 60 souls. A Huguenot church had been built in 1681, but needed a bespoke Pastor. Elias Prioleau fitted that bill perfectly and soon after his arrival he took over the ministry. He also conducted services at the small church in the parish of St. Thomas, between the Cooper and Wando Rivers to the north of Charles Towne.

After living happily in the British colony for ten years, Elias Prioleau and his family gave up all thoughts of ever returning to France and applied for British citizenship⁶ which was granted on 14th June, 1697. Having made the decision to stay in Charleston, Elias purchased about 140 acres of land on which to build a comfortable home for his family. Later generations of Prioleaus expanded the

plot to 1,258 acres⁷ and established a thriving cotton plantation, thereby securing their position among the elite dynasties of young Charleston.

At about the same time that the Prioleaus fled from France, the Boyd family from Bordeaux also made their escape.⁸ Magdalene Boyd, the daughter of the family, seems to have been in Scotland visiting a Scottish cousin of her father's by the name of James Fraser. The Franco-Scottish connection is of no surprise given that the Scottish Frasers were originally from the Normandy region of France. The name Fraser is an anglicized version of the French name Fraiseur, meaning 'strawberry producer'. The original Fraiseurs moved into England shortly after the Norman Conquest of 1066 and over time, moved north to settle in Scotland where they achieved power and wealth through services to the crown. The modern standard of clan Fraser is a flag displaying three strawberry flowers to denote the Fraiseur roots of the family. Jean Boyd senior had sent a letter to James Fraser via Magdalene beseeching his help to smuggle the rest of the family, namely Jean and his four sons Jean junior, Gabriel, Jacques and Georges, out of France; a request which he appears to have successfully fulfilled. Like the Prioleaus before them, the Boyds spent a year in London, before most of them took ship to Charleston. For some unknown reason, Georges did not accompany them, but stayed in England for a while, before returning to France. Magdalene also stayed in London and married a fellow French exile there by the name of Hector Francois Chastaigner de Cramahe who was a Captain of Cavalry.⁹

Soon after their arrival in America Jean Boyd junior wrote a long letter home to his sister Magdalene describing what they had seen in South Carolina.¹⁰ He wrote about the land, the flora and fauna, the native Indians with whom there were good relations and of the steady trade in animal hides that existed at that time.

The settlement at Charleston grew very rapidly. A census taken in 1672 recorded close to 400 people living in the village. In 1680 the Royal Navy ship H.M.S. *Richmond* arrived, carrying 45 Huguenot refugees. Her captain later reported that there were between 1,000 and 1,200 settlers living there and that there were sixteen ships in the harbour.¹¹ As we have seen, by the time the Prioleaus and the Boyds arrived in 1687 the population was close to 1,800 and the community was thriving.

Jean Boyd's description of Indian produce must have fired the imagination of his Scottish relatives back in Wigton, Galloway, because in 1700 John Fraser arrived in Charleston to join his Boyd relations and to set up an Indian Trading Post there.¹² Some years later the whole Boyd family left Charleston for Ireland¹³ where they eventually settled permanently, but John Fraser and his family stayed put in Charleston.

In the early eighteenth century deer skins, bear skins and other hides were in great demand in Europe and the American Indians were more than happy to provide them in exchange for manufactured goods: especially guns, lead and

gunpowder. Some 90 percent of the hides that left Charles Towne went to Bristol and London. The quality of British manufacture attracted the bulk of the trade as the Indians seemed to value British goods above their French or Spanish counterparts. John Fraser made sufficient money from the trade in hides to buy a large plot of land on the southern bank of Goose Creek which he called Wigton, after his Scottish hometown. He had become a plantation owner as well as an Indian trader.

The hide trade¹⁴ peaked in 1707, when 121,355 deer skins were exported from Charles Towne, but it slumped over the period 1715 to 1717, when the South Carolina Indians turned against the settlers in what became known as the Yemassee War, after the Yemasee tribe who were seen as the instigators of the conflict. Fortunately for John Fraser and his family he had befriended Sanute, one of the Yemassee chiefs, who warned him of the impending trouble and persuaded him to move himself and his family to safety inside Charleston's defences. The Yemassee were in no way alone in the war. The Muscogee, Cherokee, Chickasaw, Catawba, Apalachee, Apalachicola, Yuchi, Savannah River Shawnee, Congaree, Waxhaw, Pee Dee, Cape Fear, and Cheraw all took part in the violence to greater or lesser extent. The reasons for the war were many and varied and included factors such as settler encroachment on Indian lands, with the forests they relied on for game being cleared by the settlers for rice and cotton plantations, abuses by the traders who the Indians saw as profiteering on the hide market and the practice of selling Indian captives into the slave trade.

Hundreds of South Carolina's colonists were killed and many of the outlying frontier settlements were completely destroyed. Displaced settlers fled into Charleston for protection which was virtually under siege and ran short of food. The population came close to starvation and throughout 1715 the town's survival was in serious doubt. It was only saved by the Cherokee changing sides in 1716 to fight alongside the colonists against their traditional enemy, the Creek. The last of the tribes gave up fighting in 1717 bringing a fragile peace to the colony, but, not before some 7 percent of South Carolina's white population had been slaughtered. Fortunately, the Prioleaus and the Frasers were not among that number.

With the Yemassee War over John Fraser and his family were able to return to their home on the Wigton plantation where they resumed their former business. However, the hide trade had been severely affected by the conflict and never recovered to its former glory. The South Carolina trade was also affected by competition from Georgia, when the colony at Savannah was established there in 1733. In 1771, it was reported that 70,000 deer and stag hides were exported from Charleston: just a little over a half of the number that had been shipped in 1707, but by then the market in rice and cotton had become much more important than the hide trade. These commodities along with tobacco and refined turpentine were now the pre-eminent currency of South Carolina.

Three generations of Frasers lived and worked on the Wigton plantation until John Fraser's grandson, Alexander, sold it, in 1834, to Senator Robert Hayne, who had previously served as governor of South Carolina.¹⁵

In 1764 the French Prioleaus and the Scottish Frasers were joined in Charleston by an English family named Trenholm. William Trenholm from Allerton in Yorkshire and his wife Ann from Durham arrived first in New York, before moving south to settle in Charleston. However, in 1775, as the colony slipped into revolt and the War of Independence gathered pace, William, who was a staunch loyalist, could not bring himself to take up arms against his former countrymen and saw fit to remove his wife and six children away from America.¹⁶

They made their way first to Holland and then to the French colony of Saint-Domingue, also known as Santo Domingo, on the island of Hispaniola, which we now call Haiti. The Island was very fertile, producing large amounts of sugar, coffee and cotton. By the 1780s, Hispaniola produced about 40 percent of all the sugar and 60 percent of all the coffee consumed in Europe. It became known as The Jewel of the Antilles and was one of the richest colonies in the eighteenth-century French empire. For all that, it was an unhealthy place with tropical diseases, notably yellow fever, claiming countless lives. Life expectancy amongst the African slave population was so short that numbers could not be sustained through normal reproduction. The ever-increasing demand for slave labour combined with the high mortality rate led to ever increasing rates of importation of slaves from Africa. Between 1764 and 1787, the rate of new slave arrivals rose from around 10,000 per year to 40,000 per year raising the slave population on the island to some 500,000 ruled over by a mere 32,000 Europeans.

Outbreak of the French Revolution in 1789 and publication by the revolutionaries of the 'Rights of Man', declaring all men free and equal spread the idea to Hispaniola that the planters could gain their freedom and take over the island as an independent state. Revolution against the slave system broke out on the island in 1791 led by the mulattoes, François Dominique Toussaint-Louverture and Jean-Jacques Dessalines. The Trenholms were again caught up in a revolution that they wanted no part of and felt the need to move on again. They made their escape back to England, staying a while in London where, sadly, their son George took ill and died.

By 1793 the American Revolution was a thing of the past and peace had returned to a now independent United States. The Trenholms decided to make a second attempt to settle in Charleston and returned there to pick up where they had left off eighteen years earlier. They were initially met with some frostiness as there was a definite prejudice against those who had previously been loyalists, but the Trenholms proved to be good neighbours and, before long, any grievance that the republicans may have felt was forgotten. William Trenholm II, the one surviving son of William and Ann, had been born in Charleston in 1772 during his

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