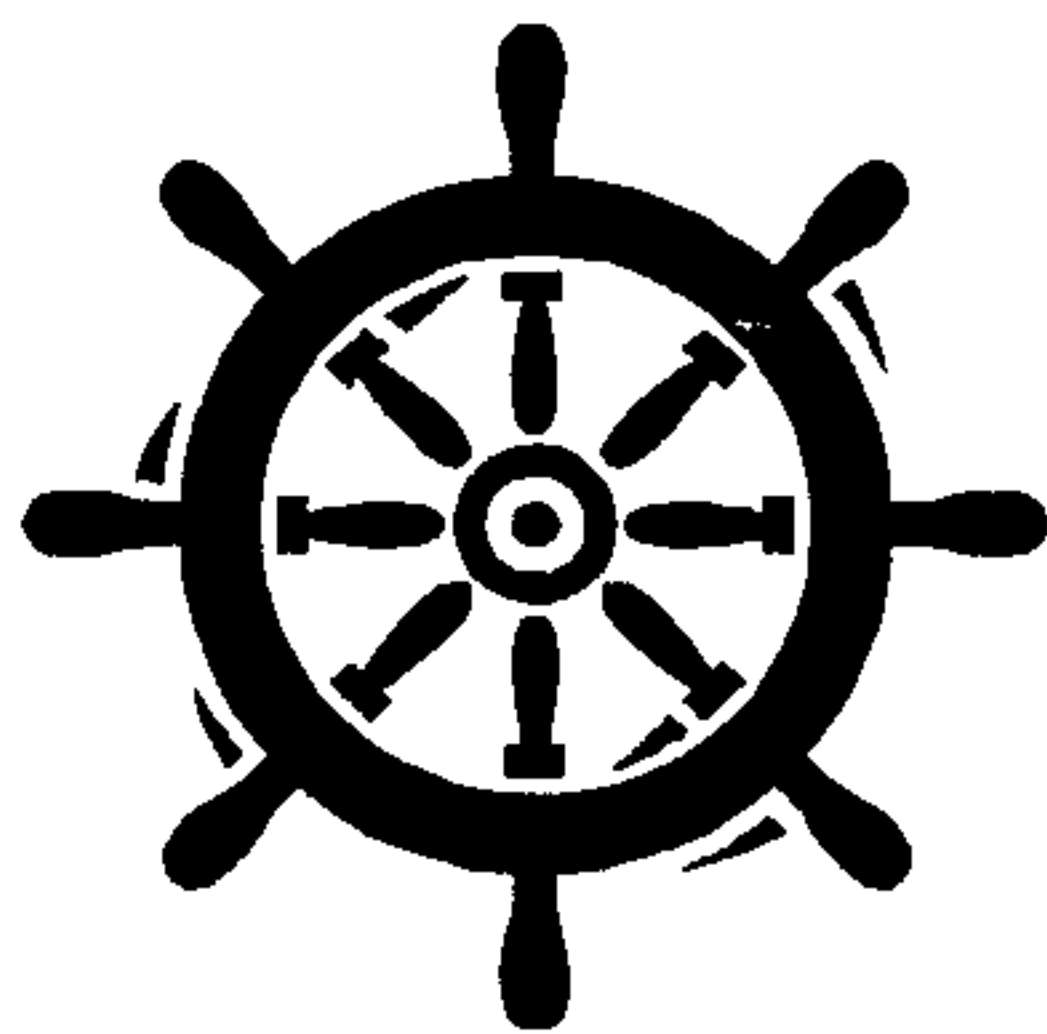
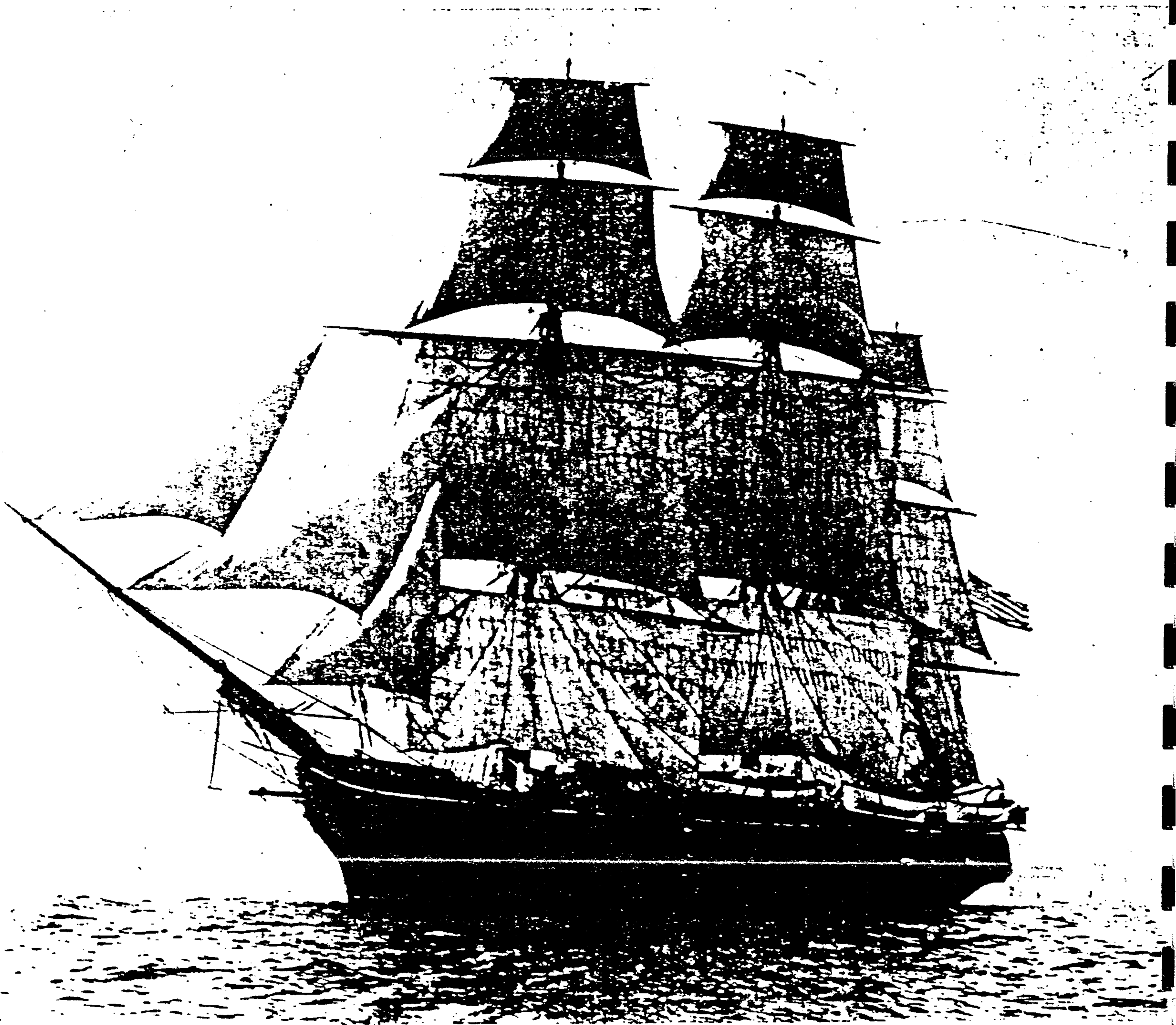


**VOYAGE OF THE**  
***JAMESTOWN***

**COMMANDER**  
**ROBERT BENNET FORBES**



**Edited and with notes by**  
**John Colhoun**  
**for the**  
**Captain Robert Bennet Forbes House**



USS *Jamestown*, a Sloop of War built in 1844





After passing Fort Independence, it flashed across my mind that my trusty friend and cousin, Joseph Lyman, who had shipped as my private secretary, had not appeared. The tug was close on our port quarter and I hailed her and requested them to go back and get him, but the request had scarcely reached them when I annulled it. I felt very adverse to loosing a single hour of that fine north-west breeze.

Arriving outside of Boston Light about 10:30 a.m., I was asked to heave to for the purpose of putting out Mr. Phillips, our pilot. I declined to do so and told the captain of the tug to come up close to the port quarter: this being done, we put the pilot into a bowline in the port spanker vang, and landed him on the forecastle of the tug.

The members of the committee and the crew gave us three hearty cheers, and we went on our way rejoicing.

We took our departure from the Highlands of Cape Cod at 3 p.m., the fine breeze held on long enough for us to clear George's Shoals, when the wind came out at north with snow and sleet, when our new and stiff hemp ropes became as hard as crowbars, and our rather short crew almost as stiff.

I must pause to give a short account of the condition of the good ship She had recently been fitted with new lower rigging, leaving the old back stays: all the gun deck ports had been planked up, and all but two of the guns taken out: new running rigging had been rove: the launch, with cutter stowed in her, was placed on the gun deck, and the large grating hatch well secured: every space below the gun deck including water tanks, ward room and storehouses, was filled with provisions, excepting a small place chock aft accessible by a scuttle in my cabin, where it was important to get at the tiller and wheel ropes, which worked on the ward room deck, and a small place in the main hatch, where the cable compressors or brakes worked: the pumps still delivered their water on the gun deck --- a good deal of it got in at first at the hawser holes and much more at the rudder port, so that we soon found it necessary to jog the pumps every watch. In order to get rid of the young Niagara entering at the rudder port, we bored holes so as to let the water into the hold.

The first night out we washed away the quarter gallery deadlights, where, as well as at the stern ports, which had not been caulked in, there entered a good deal of water, rendering my cabin very wet and uncomfortable.

March 29. - Wind moderate at west-north-west to north. Thermometer 28 on deck and 38 in my cabin. Set all studding sails, made 198 knots. Latitude 42 34', longitude 65 31'.

The number of effective men to go aloft, including one mate, 31; sick, lame and blind 4.

In view of the heavy ropes and canvas, I ordered a snug reef in the big mainsail, and much of the time we had single reefs in the topsails, with topgallant sails over them, all of which would have been unnecessary had the ship been rigged after my plan. (Captain R. B. Forbes is referring to the "Forbes's double topsail rig.).

There were many ropes unknown to our experiences, such as clew and bunt tackles, boom jiggers, rolling tackles and burtons: there were four heavy tackles at the lower mastheads, which, by the way, we found use for in setting up the lower rigging several times. The topsail sheets and tyes were of rawhide; in short, there were many ropes which were encumbrances. We lost no time in revving suitable tacks and sheets, cutting off royal tyes and sending down many things which we did not require. The boatswain, who had served in men-of-war, thought we were mad.

March 30. - The wind came out east-south-east, decks full of snow and sleet, thermometer 28. Midnight, wind hauled North East by East, we came up to East South East, going 9 1/2 knots pretty close to the wind under top gallant sails, and she makes the water fly, but is quite stiff enough.

March 31. - Light winds at North West, part of the day nearly calm. In the morning the wind came out at South East, at 8 AM going 9 knots, heading about East North East. Thermometer 33 in the water. 4 PM, reefed the topgallant sails. At 5 PM single-reefed the topsails, ship came up to East, a thick fog, fresh flaws and large sea getting up. At the end of the day strong breezes and threatening weather: took in the reefed topgallant sails, and put



another reef in the topsails and spanker, ship going 8 and 9 knots and jumping like an antelope. Latitude 42 37', longitude 59 28'.

April 1. - Fresh gales at South by East and a large sea. Morning made more sail, going 9 knots close at it, fog dense; the wind seems to be nailed between South South East and South East by East. Ends strong breeze at South East. Latitude by Dead Reckoning 43 26', longitude 55 4'.

April 2. - During the night the fog turned to hard rain, with symptoms of a gale: the sky black as Erebus: called all hands at 11 PM; furled the mainsail, and by 1:30 AM got the ship snug. During the middle part the wind came out at West South West with snow squalls: every rope as stiff as January. Thermometer - air 32, water 33. The third mate reports seeing appearances of ice just before daylight. At noon latitude 43 13', longitude 51 18'.

Necessity being the mother of invention, I devised a method of partially warming my cabin, by suspending a grapple and keeping on it four 32 pound shot heated in the galley. The floor of the cabin was kept wet by water oozing in through the stern ports and the quarter galleries.

April 3. - At 1 PM the weather cleared up somewhat and the sea going down, made all sail to eastward. At 6 PM sounded in 45 fathoms. Middle and latter parts the wind was baffling between South and South East; the thermometer in the air 31 and in the water 29 to 32. Later part going 7 1/2 knots close-hauled. Latitude 43 32', longitude 50 24'.

Sunday, APRIL 4. - Commences with a fresh breeze at South East and foggy; going 9 and 9 1/2 close-hauled, with light sails in, heading East 1/2 North, and all hands on the alert ready for tacking. At 7 AM ship heading East by South going 10 1/2 to 11 knots, with the wind one point free. In the morning the temperature of the air changed several degrees, and the water from 32 to 37. At noon the air was 48, a thick fog. Latitude 45 04', longitude 46 52'.

April 5. - Fresh gale at south, ship going 11 to 12 knots. At 2 PM furled topgallant sails and single-reefed the topsails and spanker. In the evening the wind canted South South West. Uncle Sam's hide ropes do not stand like chains. At 10 PM weather threatening; called all hands and got

snug by 1 AM; reefed down to three-reefed fore and main topsails, whole foresail, spencer and reefed spanker; split the fore topmast staysail and saved the jib with difficulty. After keeping about South East to get the canvas snug, we bore away to East North East, a large sea running and the tops occasionally coming over forward of the main rigging: the ship steers beautifully, and could not be easier in her motion. In the early morning the wind moderated; were obliged to haul up to keep her steady, and swiftered in the lower rigging until it could be set up carefully. Latitude 46 21', longitude 42 43'. Made 195 miles.

April 6 - Begins with a fresh breeze at North East, with dark rainy weather. At 9 PM took in royals and flying jib. At 10 took in topgallant sails, the old swell under our lee prevents our carrying all the sail we wish: at 7 AM the wind came out at South West: from 8 to noon ship going 11 to 11 1/2 under single-reefed topsails; reefed mainsail; a large sea rising; the fore truss got adrift, secured it without damage. Latitude by Dead Reckoning 46 21', longitude 39 15'.

April 7 - Commencing with a strong breeze at South West: at 4 PM set the fore topmast studding sail: at 5 going 12 knots; parted more of the green hide sheets and split the main topsail in consequence. Latitude 47 51', longitude 34 12'. Made 265 knots. 10 days 3 1/2 hours out.

April 8 - The fine South West wind continues, ship going 10 1/2 and 11 easily. This is the first pleasant day since sailing. Latitude 48 29', longitude 28 43'. Made 249 knots.

April 9 - First part moderate: evening, ship going 10 1/2 to 11; passed within hail of ship bound west and received three cheers. Made 245 knots.

April 10 - Wind at West South West, ship going 10 to 12. Middle part moderating: speed down to 8 knots, all sail out, including studding sails on both sides. Latitude 49 30', longitude 18 30'. Logged only 177.

April 11 - Sunday - two weeks at sea: throughout moderate at West South West to West, all studding sails set on both sides, the weather cloudy and sometimes rainy. Latitude by Dead Reckoning 50 15', longitude 14 09'. Logged only 178.



April 12 - Begins moderate and canting West North West, all sails out going 7 to 8 knots. At 8:30 came up with and spoke to a bark 25 days from Philadelphia bound to Liverpool, we being 14 1/2 from Boston. At 11 AM a fine breeze, going 13 knots with the wind on the port quarter. Not having had any good observations for several days, we had during the night kept well clear of the land: hauled up as gradually as the sticks would bear to make land; made it about noon, and hauled up for the Old Head of Kinsale, and ran down for the entrance of Cove of Cork, the wind blowing fresh from West North West, double-reefed topsails. At 2 PM took a pilot, who ran into our port gallery and stove it, and as usual with these fellows demanded indemnity in the shape of beef and pork for breaking his rail. Anchored in the outer harbor at 3:30 PM. We have only tacked once since leaving Boston. While running in with studding sails set and chains bent, enough water came in the gun deck to float a barrel. When we came to anchor with the sails not snugly clewed up, the starboard anchor not fetching the ship up, we let go the port anchor, and in snubbing her the stopper in the main hatch was broken, but fortunately we brought up with a good scope out. Before night we had a visit from Lieutenant Protheroe sent by Admiral Sir Hugh Paget, with a tender of services.

In looking over this record the nautical reader will see that while we did not have a large portion of fair wind, we had winds enabling us to make good slants, and we took advantage of them by letting the ship go good full, and never doing what many navigators do, namely, bracing very sharp and bobbing at a head sea.

I do not hesitate to say, that if the *JAMESTOWN* had been properly rigged before starting, and had not laboured under the disadvantage of new lower rigging fitted in cold weather and old backstays, we should probably have saved a day. And if she had the double topsail rig, I think we should have saved at least two days.

While preparing for sea, I consulted Captain J. C. Delano of New Bedford. He said that on the last days of March we would sail on the very worst day of the year for England, and if we got to Cork in 30 days we ought to be well satisfied.



An incident of our good fortune, which was mainly due to the vigilance of my officers, Messrs. W. F. Macondray and James D. Farwell, I may mention that the clipper ship *RAINBOW*, Captain John Land, left New York a day or two before us, as was proved by laying down her track of my return, was not far from us about 3rd April, near the tail of the Banks. Captain Land took the more prudent course of tacking to the southward instead of running across, as we did, in thick weather. In truth, I felt from the beginning that the *JAMESTOWN* was under the special care of Providence in all things except the bad rig and leaks, and when my officers suggested the danger of running across the Banks in thick weather, I consoled them by referring to that special care, and kept on in fear and anxiety.

When in California in 1870 I met Captain Farwell, and he referred to my remark as to the special care of Providence, and he added "Notwithstanding what Mr. Forbes said about Providence, he made us keep a very sharp lookout and kept all hands on the alert ready for stays."

Having discharged the cargo into Government stores and received about 150 tons of limestone for ballast, I called on the Admiral to express thanks for his active assistance, whereupon he ordered the *ZEPHYR* to take us in tow. I asked how far we might take her and he answered, "Just as far as her coal holds out." We started at 3:30 PM on the 22nd April and soon made sail; and finding that we were likely to outrun the *ZEPHYR* we discharged the pilot and cast off the tow rope.

Friday, April 23 - Light airs and calms all day, and we want steam; many vessels in sight which we outsail easily.

April 24 - Head winds and pleasant weather: getting on very slowly.

April 25 - Begins with strong breezes South West to West North West, latter part a gale, ship under three-reefed topsails, foresail and spencers: the ship making 8 knots close-hauled. At 4 PM heading off to the north, wore ship to South West.

April 26 - From midnight to 6 AM moderating: in the forenoon the wind increased until at 3:30 PM it blew hard at West and squally: a large sea getting up: the wind inclined to the North West., wore ship under three-reefed topsails and reefed spencers: during the evening a heavy gale with

hard squalls: the ship behaves nobly, and ships no water except sprays. I have not seen such a gale since 1832.

April 27 - To 1:30 PM the gale much the same: the ship lies to like a duck, under main topsail: at 2 PM a little more moderate, set three - reefed fore topsail: at 5 set fore sail and close - reefed mizzen topsail. At 7:30 PM squally, gave her the reefed mainsail. In the morning a brig passed bound east, scudding under only a fore topmast staysail: evening squally, the ship going 8 to 8 1/2 knots with a big sea on, and she makes the water fly. I have a good crew and officers. At 10 PM she came up with a passed close to a large schooner under trysails, in fact lying to. Latitude at noon 49 52', longitude 18 50', only 500 miles on our way and nearly 5 days at sea.

April 28 - Begins with an increasing breeze: at 1 AM took in the mainsail: at 2:30 very squally; a ship passes close to us under short sail, bound East; at 4 AM quite a gale again, took in the foresail, mizzen topsail and spanker; at 5 AM very severe squalls; at 6 AM took in the fore topsail; at 8 AM more moderate, set it again; at 9 AM reefed courses and close - reefed mizzen topsail; at 11:30 AM squally, up mainsail; at 12 AM set it again and let a reef out of the fore and mizzen topsails: ends squally. Latitude 47 45', longitude 19 23'. To the end of the day less squally, the ship going rapidly and jumping lively under two reefs in the topsails, whole courses, spencers, spanker, jib and reefed topgallant sails: broke the main truss and gave Uncle Sam's rigging a good trial.

April 29 - AM, the wind nearly all gone heading off to the South, tacked to West North West. Latitude 45 5', longitude 20 25'. Evening wind light at West South West.

April 30 - First part moderate and pleasant. Wind West South West, then squally, took in royals and flying jib occasionally. PM, breeze fresh and squally, wind canting, tacked to the West South West. Took in and set reefed topgallant sails occasionally.

May 1 - Begins with a fine breeze at North West the ship going 10 closehauled. At 11 AM made a sail on the lee bow and at 3:30 PM came up with and spoke the packet ship *BALTIMORE* from Harve, 17 April, bound to New York, 14 days out to our 9. At 6 PM she is hull down astern. We



have not laid our course for an hour since leaving Cove. Latitude 43 28', longitude 26 22'.

May 2 - Begins wind from the Westward. At 1 AM tacked to the North West, wind springing up. At 6 AM the *BALTIMORE* in sight 4 or 5 miles to leeward; at 10 she was out of sight. Latitude 43 12', longitude 28 12'. 10 days out and no fair wind yet.

May 3 - Wind ahead, middle part strong and squally, from 2 to 3 AM reducing sail, ship pitched considerably. At 3 AM John Hughes was lost off the jibboom while furling the jib, at the time the ship was going 10 to 11 knots; the night very dark and the men who were with him on the boom did not discover he was missing until some time after they came in. In the evening the wind shifted suddenly from ahead in the South West to ahead in the West North West and blew hard in squalls. At the end of the day we are pitched into it under double reels, going 8 and 9 knots. Latitude 43 44' longitude 32.

May 4 - Moderating fast. At 8 AM close-hauled with all sail set going only 4 or 5 knots, and finally at noon only 3 knots. Latitude 41 48', longitude 34 10'. In the afternoon squally, took in royals, flying jib and mizzen topgallant sail. At 4 set them again, at 6 took in light sails and reefed the spanker; at 8 PM going 9 1/2 heading North West, breeze freshening, double-reefed the topsails; before midnight the wind increased to a gale, took in third reef in topsails, reefed the mainsail. We have done more reefing so far than is usual in a whole China voyage.

May 5 - At 1 AM furled the foresail and the mizzen topsail; to 3 AM headed off to the North, wore ship to the South West. From 4 to 7 a hard gale, the ship under three reefed topsails, reefed spanker and spencers. Latitude 42 20', longitude 36.

May 6 - 1 AM a heavy squall, reduced sail; at noon all the reefs are out except a single one in the topsails. Latitude 39 18', longitude 38. At 2 PM made all sail to royals and flying jib, ship going 11 knots easily; this is the nearest approach to heading our course since leaving Cove. At 8 PM quite moderate, the sails scarcely asleep and she goes 8 knots.

May 7 - Begins light head winds.. At 2 PM tacked. At 8 PM heading West going 9 knots. At 10 PM took in mizzens, royals, going 10 knots. Latitude 38 7', longitude 40 31'.

May 8 - Throughout pleasant with a small breeze from North North West; latter part the ship heading her course for the first time since leaving Cove 16 days ago; ship going 7, close-hauled with the sails flapping. At 6:30 set starboard steering sails. The sea very smooth. Latitude 37 5', longitude 44 35'. Made 195 miles with the sails scarcely asleep.

May 9 - Light variable winds in the Western board, the weather dreadfully fine; my patience nearly exhausted. Latitude 36 42', longitude 45 13'.

May 10 - Moderate and pleasant, the wind West South West going from 8 to 9 1/2 close hauled. Spoke English brig *ENTERPRISE* from Barbados for London. Latitude 38 12', longitude 47 11'.

May 11 - Begins breezy with a sharp head sea; 2 AM, took in topgallant sails. At 4 single-reefed topsails. At 5 AM set topgallant sails. At 6:30 the wind came out suddenly from the North North East, put her head West North West. At 9 going 12 1/2 and waiting for the old sea to subside a little so as to set studding sails. At 10 the wind backed to North by West. At 10:30 set the royals and starboard studding sails. At 11 cannot go our course, took in studding sails. At 11:30 ship coming up, set them again. At 12 our fine breeze nearly gone and were obliged to brace up sharp. At 2 PM a dead calm. Latitude 39 29', longitude 50 8'. We have laid our course nearly four hours and have made our studding sails useful only about three hours.

May 12 - Begins calm. At 3 AM a light breeze from West, heading North North West, going from 5 to 8 knots; weather fine and sea smooth. At 8 AM boarded the ship *VIRGINIA* of New York, 27 days from New Orleans, bound to Liverpool; heard of the fall of St. John de Ulloa and Vera Cruz to General Scott. Latitude 39 54', longitude 51 18'. At 9:30 ship going on her course, a remarkable event.

May 13 - Begin dark and cloudy, ship going 9 to 9 1/2 on her course. In the morning set studding sails, going 11 knots. At 5 AM a sail in sight ahead. At 9:30 passed her and read her name *ROBERT BURTON*. At 1 PM



could just see her with all light sails set, including studding sails, the wind about East. Latitude 40 10', longitude 54 40'. Logged 244. This is the first steady fair wind we have experienced, the ship steers perfectly and rolls easy.

May 14 - Throughout a fresh gale at East with rainy weather at 7:30 the water 38, air 42, sounded but got no bottom. Since noon the air has changed from 55 to 42 and water from 62 to 38. Distance made 295. Latitude by Dead Recking 41 40', longitude 60,35'.

May 15 - First and middle parts fresh gale and rough sea, the ship going like a racehorse under single-reefed topsails and reefed topgallant sails. The weather foggy and very cold, air 36 to 42, water 36 to 40. In the morning we are approaching the meridian of Cape Sabel, but we can only guess at our latitude and so we go on carefully sounding every two hours and getting no bottom, we conclude we are to the Southward of our reckoning. At 5 Am hauled up to North West; at 9:30 the sun shinning out dimly. I took 30 sights and our position was 65 10'. At 10 Am hearing a cry of "Sail ho! close on board," I jumped on deck and saw a brig standing to the South East under double reefs. I immediately cried out "Hard a-starboard, call all hands," and whipped the good ship around under topgallant sails and came up close under the lea of the brig, and ascertained that she was directly out of St. John's and she reported latitude 42, longitude 65.

Having thus confirmed the position, we wore around to West North West, and before noon it cleared off sufficiently to give us a good latitude, 42 14'. At 2 PM we are going 12 knots with all muslin spread. At 5 PM speed reduced to 11 and at 6 PM to 10. During the night the wind was North East and pleasant.

May 16 - At 6 AM made Cape Ann bearing North West. At 8:20 AM took on board from the *SYLPH* Mr. Phillips, the same who took us to sea on 28th March. At 8:50 AM passed through Hyprocrite Channel, and at 9:30 AM anchored off the Navy Yard. It was then I realized fully that we had accomplished a remarkable voyage.



### Some Comparative Voyages

This absolutely remarkable voyage by Commander Robert Bennet Forbes in the U. S. Navy - Sloop of War - *JAMESTOWN* is very difficult to quantify. The following record passages by Eastbound Clipper Ships should be examined to give one a sense of this accomplishment. It must be remembered that *JAMESTOWN* was a "Sloop of War" and was not built to be a "Greyhound of the Sea" as were the Clipper Ships. Nonetheless, some of these Clipper Ship passages compare very favorably with the voyage of the *JAMESTOWN*. Remember also Commander Robert Bennet Forbes negative remarks regarding the sail and rigging layout of the *JAMESTOWN* and his speculation as to what might have been possible if the rig and sail layout were to his specifications. The following voyages took place 6 years after the dash across the Atlantic by the *JAMESTOWN*. Many refinements had been made in ship design, rig, and sail layout in those few years.

1853 *SOVEREIGN of the SEAS*, New York to Liverpool, 13 days 23 hrs.

1853 *TYPHOON*, Portsmouth, N. H. to Liverpool, 13 days 12 hours.

1854 *RED JACKET*, Sandy Hook to Rock Light, 13 days 1 hour.

1854 *LIGHTENING*, Boston Light to Rock Light, 13 days 19 1/2 hours.

1854 *CHAMPION of the SEAS*, New York to Liverpool, 16 days.



### The U. S. Navy - Sloop of War *JAMESTOWN*

This document would not be complete without some mention of the *JAMESTOWN*. She was named for Jamestown, Va. which was the earliest permanent settlement established by Englishmen in North America. She is the first recorded ship by this name. During her career she was often photographed and painted. She is an extremely handsome 3 masted "Sloop of War" characterized by a very long bow sprit. Very little is known of her design or construction since these records are assumed to have been



destroyed during the Civil War. For a ship of this era of construction she lasted a very long time.

Her dimensions are as follows:

Length - 163' 6''  
Width - 32' 2''  
Depth - 17' 3''  
Stem to Stern - 186'  
Displacement - 1,150 tons  
Armament - 18 32-pounders

The first *JAMESTOWN* was launched in 1844 by the Navy Yard, Gosport, Va.; and commissioned there 12 December 1844, Commander Robert B Cunningham in command.

She departed Hampton Roads 25 June 1845 as flagship of Commander Charles W. Skinner in command of United States naval vessels operating off the western coast of Africa to suppress the slave trade. At the end of her first deployment the sloop arrived at Boston 6 August 1846.

While she was moored at the Boston Navy Yard word reached the United States that for the second consecutive year blight had ruined the potato crop of Ireland, depriving the people of that country of their chief means of subsistence. A joint resolution of Congress approved 3 March 1847 authorized the Secretary of the Navy to place *JAMESTOWN* and *MACEDONIAN* at the disposal of Captains Robert B. Forbes and George C. DeKay to carry food to the starving poor of Ireland. The *JAMESTOWN* sailed from Boston 28 March 1847 and arrived Cork, Ireland, 12 April 1847. After unloading her life-saving cargo, the sloop returned to Boston 17 May 1847.

The *JAMESTOWN* returned to Africa, served off Brazil, again to Africa, had a spectacular career during the Civil War (capturing or destroying 5 ships), and she then chased Confederate privateers in the Pacific. When the Civil War ended she was stationed at Mare Island, California. She returned to duty as a store and hospital ship in Panama, she then joined the North Pacific Squadron at Sitka. After this duty she operated in the Hawaiian Islands as an instructional vessel. Again she returned to Sitka to represent

United States interests. In 1882 she returned to the Atlantic where she was again used as a training vessel. In 1892 she was transferred to the Treasury Department to be used for quarantine purposes in Hampton Roads. She was destroyed by fire at the Norfolk Navy Yard, 3 January 1913, after being returned to the U. S. Navy.