

A New England Merchant in the War of 1812: What a Long, Strange Trip it's Been

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Background

During the 1803-1814 Napoleonic War, Great Britain and France took aggressive steps to stifle each other's economy by restricting maritime trade with neutral countries. The French November 1806 Berlin Decree declared that all neutral ships trading with Great Britain were legally liable for seizure. The British responded in November 1807 with Orders in Council that prohibited all neutral vessels from trading with French-dominated Europe without first passing through British ports and paying British transit fees. Any neutral ship violating these Orders was subject to seizure by British warships. France reacted the following month with the Milan Decree, which mandated that any ship that touched at a British port, paid British tariffs, or allowed itself to be searched by a British vessel was a legal prize, either at sea or upon entering a French port. As a result, neutral trade with Europe became virtually impossible.

These actions fell most heavily on American merchant shipping, which carried the bulk of the neutral trade across the Atlantic. The United States took particular exception to the British Orders in Council, since the Royal Navy had control of the seas and, unlike the French, was able to enforce the restrictions. Great Britain refused to address the American diplomatic complaints about the Orders, so the United States declared war on June 18, 1812. This tense diplomatic situation was further stymied by one to two months communications delays between Europe and North America. Thus, after Great Britain independently revoked the November 1807 Orders in Council on June 23, 1812 they were confused when they received the U.S. declaration of war in late July. They were certain that it would be retracted when the U.S. became aware of the revocation of the Orders, but were mistaken in that assessment.

Initial Sanctions against American Shipping

President James Madison began preparing for war well before the actual declaration of war. On April 4, 1812, he imposed a 90-day embargo on American shipping that was intended to confine merchant ships to home ports or neutral ports for the duration of any hostilities.

Madison's embargo was very unpopular with American shippers, especially those in New England. One such merchant, Captain Samuel Longfellow (uncle of the famous poet Henry Wadsworth Longfellow), rushed to leave Boston, Massachusetts before the American embargo was enforced there. His escape and subsequent encounters with the British are chronicled in this article through his correspondence with his family in Maine.

Samuel Longfellow's Long, Strange Trip

On April 6, he hurriedly left Boston with a cargo of fish aboard the brig *Ellen* and dropped anchor in the outer harbor. When U.S. revenue cutters arrived in the harbor to confine all vessels in Boston on April 10, he slipped anchor and escaped to sea. His was one of the last ships to leave Boston. His brother Stephen described the narrow escape in a folded letter datelined "Portland [Maine] April 13th 1812" that was carried privately to their father in Gorham, Maine,

...he sailed [from Boston] on Monday the 6th Instant about two o'clock p.m. Apprehensive of the Embargo, they made great exertions to get away & for these last few days worked day and night – this accounts for Samuels not writing to you...The Embargo took place in Boston on Friday [April 10]. When it arrived a number of Vessels lay in the outer harbor & a cutter was dispatched to bring them back, several slipped their cables & put to sea, but three or four were stopped, among which was one belonging to Lt. Gov. Gray...The Embargo is enforced here [Portland, Maine] today...

Pleased to have evaded Madison's embargo at Boston, Samuel sailed without incident to Gibraltar on May 18. During his voyage, however, events were unfolding that would greatly affect his voyage. Recognizing the embargo as a precursor to war, the British Admiralty responded on May 9, 1812 with an order that conditionally targeted American shipping. It directed all naval captains "to attack, take or sink, burn or destroy, all ships or vessels belonging to the United States or to the citizens thereof" but to avoid action until there was an actual declaration of war.

Official notice of the declaration of war reached Halifax on July 4, 1812 and London, England on July 29. Unofficial notice was received on June 23 by the British 36-gun frigate HMS *Belvidera* when she was attacked by the 44-gun USS *President* off the American coast. The *Belvidera* escaped to Halifax on June 27 and took several American merchant vessels as prizes along the way, in conformity with the May 9 Admiralty order. Samuel's first letter from Gibraltar just happened to be on one of those prizes and is illustrated in Figure 1.



Figure 1. May 19, 1812. Gibraltar via Gloucester to Portland, Maine.

This folded letter was datelined "Gibraltar May 19th 1812" and was carried by the brig *Pickering* to Gloucester, Massachusetts, as reported by the July 9 *New York Evening Post*,

Extract of a letter from Salem dated July 6. Arrived this day the brig *Pickering*, Davis, __ days from Gibraltar; was taken a week ago last Saturday [June 27] by the frigate *Belvidere* and a prize master and 8 men were put on board, and ordered for Halifax; was retaken by the crew, within about 6 miles of Halifax Light, and the men brought into Gloucester...

Postmarked "GLOUCESTER Ms JUL 7," the letter was rated for "Sh 14^{1/2}" cents postage due, consisting of 12^{1/2}¢ postage for the 90-150 miles to Portland, Maine plus a 2¢ ship fee. Samuel reported to his brother Stephen that,

I have only time to inform you that I arrived here yesterday after a pleasant passage of 38 days from Boston [left on April 10]. I find positive orders left here for me to proceed immediately to Naples, and shall sail the first wind. I think from the circumstance of the Ship *Baltic* of Boston whose papers & clearance were exactly similar to mine that I shall meet with some difficulty...The *Baltic's* cargo was seized by Government and there is every probability to think mine will share the same fate...I think there is a great risque in going to Naples and if you can get insurance done on my adventure for 10 or 12 pr. ct. please to insure 231 dollars...

Since the May 9 Admiralty Order was not yet effective at Gibraltar, Samuel quickly prepared the *Ellen* and left on May 22 for Naples. Five days into the voyage across the Mediterranean, his ship was damaged by a storm, so he was forced to put into Alicante, Spain on May 29 for repairs. While there, he was detained by a British warship that suspected *Ellen* of carrying a contraband French cargo. Samuel reported this to his father in a letter datelined "Alicante June 13th 1812" and illustrated in Figure 2.



Figure 2. June 13, 1812. Alicante, Spain via Cadiz and Salem to Gorham, Maine.

This folded letter was carried across the Atlantic by the brig *Eliza and Mary* which left Cadiz, Spain on June 18 and reached Salem, Massachusetts on July 29, as reported by the August 4 *Salem Gazette*. It was postmarked “SALEM MS JUL 30” and rated “SHIP” “14½” cents due for the 12½¢ postage to Gorham plus a 2¢ ship fee. His father received it on August 4 per an arrival docket. Samuel wrote,

No 1...You have doubtless been advised...of my intention of sailing for Naples; which took place on the 22nd of May; on the 27th of the same month, then a little to the eastward of Cape De Gatt [Cabo de Gata] I took a strong gale from the southward attended with a heavy swell from the eastward in which I carried away my fore topmast and sprung my foremast. The brig made bad steerage without head sail; therefore that it prudent to make the nearest port to refit, and put away for Alicante. On my entering this Bay, I was boarded by an English Man of Wars boat; taken out of my vessel and carried on board the Frigate (then lying at anchor) where I was kept six hours, all this time the officer from the frigate was searching my vessel...thinking to find some french papers ...they informed me that it would be a long time before I could procure a mast and make the necessary repairs to my vessel. I found that my cargo was very much damaged and daily growing worse; that if they were not soon disposed of I should be obliged to heave them all over board...therefore determined to make the best sale of them in my power. I have landed about 1400 quintals and hope to get the enormous price of \$5 dollars per quintal [100 lbs]; the duty on fish brought here in American bottoms amounts to nearly 3 dollars, which is almost a prohibition. I find that I can do nothing but take a cargo of Barilla to Belfast in Ireland on which I hope to make 40 dollars per ton and shall get away from this nasty, lousy, dusty, flea-bitten place as soon as possible; which may be in one month but I fear it will be two...

Four days later, Samuel wrote to his brother in Portland. This letter was carried in the same mail as Figure 2, so it carries the same postmarks. Samuel described a further risk for merchant ships in Europe,

...I have been obliged to keep my former destination [Naples] secret as there has been a late Spanish Decree by which had I have been taken by the Spaniards should have been a good prize...I shall leave the Brig in Ireland if my wages are not raised; it is not a pleasant business to sail a vessel of this kind for nothing...

Still at Alicante, Samuel sent an update to his father in a folded letter that is shown in Figure 3. Datelined “Alicante July 9th 1812,” Samuel arranged to get it to Gibraltar, where it was placed on the ship *Victory*, which left on July 26 and reached Newport, Rhode Island on September 17. Upon arrival, it was postmarked “NEWPT RI SEP 18” and rated “Sh 19” cents due, representing 17¢ postage for the 151-300 miles to Gorham plus a 2¢ ship fee.

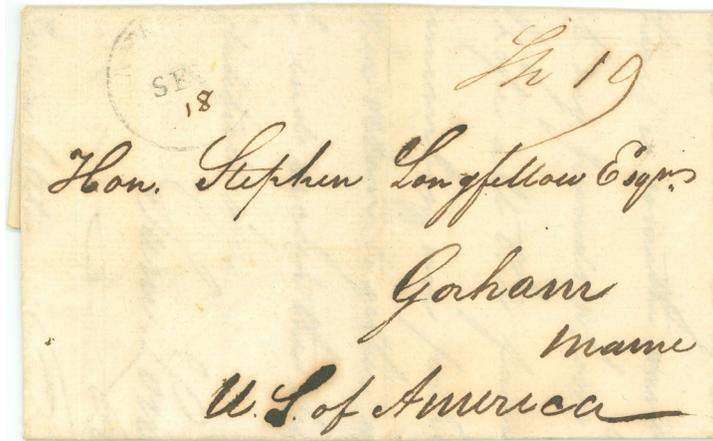


Figure 3. July 9, 1812. Alicante, Spain via Gibraltar and Newport to Gorham, Maine.

Samuel wrote,

No. 2...I have only to inform you that I have discharged all my cargo, and have taken onboard 20 pipes wine and forty bales Barilla [sodium carbonate, or soda ash - a plant extract used in glass manufacturing]. Expect to take in about 20 pipes more of wine & proceed to Torrevieja (a small place about 9 leagues to the southward of this) and fill up with Barilla for sweet Belfast...

Unbeknownst to Samuel, the perils to his ship were increasing dramatically during this period. After receiving notice of the American declaration of war, July 31 British Orders in Council ordered that “commanders of HM’s ships of war and privateers do detain and bring into port all ships and vessels belonging to citizens of the United States.” It also prohibited American shipping “in any of the ports, harbors or roads within any part of His Majesty’s domains.”

Samuel finally left Alicante August 2 in the *Ellen* with a cargo for Belfast. Only aware of the lifting of the November 1807 British Orders in Council, he stopped at the British colony of Gibraltar on August 7, where he wrote the letter illustrated in Figure 4 to his father.



Figure 4. August 8, 1812. Gibraltar via Cadiz and Providence to Gorham, Maine.

This folded letter was datelined “Gibraltar Aug 8th 1812” and, after a long delay in forwarding, was carried by the brig *Hector* from nearby Cadiz per the February 20, 1813 *Providence Gazette*, “The brig *Hector*, Capt. Hetherington, is arrived in the river from Cadiz, which place she left on the 25th of December.” It was

accordingly postmarked “PROVIDENCE R.I. FEB 22” and rated “Sh 19” cents due for the 17¢ postage to Gorham plus a 2¢ ship fee. It was received on March 1 per an arrival docket. Samuel wrote,

No. 3...I arrived here last evening in five days from Alicant loaded with Barilla and wine bound to Belfast. I have come this far without a convoy and shall be under the necessity of proceeding on without as there can none be obtained here without waiting some time; I shall therefore sail the first wind...By the by, the Orders in Council & French decrees are removed [on June 23, effective August 1]...

Before he could sail, however, Samuel’s ship was seized by the 44-gun HMS *Lavinia* on August 8 in accordance with the July 31 British order to seize American shipping. He reported this to his father in the letter shown in Figure 5.



Figure 5. September 1, 1812. Gibraltar via Cadiz and Providence to Gorham, Maine.

This folded letter was datelined “Gibraltar Sep^t 1st 1812” and carried by the same ship from Cadiz to Providence, Rhode Island as Figure 4, so it bears the same postal markings. Samuel wrote,

I arrived here on the 7th ultimo [August 7]; my object for putting in here was to obtain a convoy and proceed to Belfast with my cargo, consisting of wine and Barilla. On the 8th was detained by his Brittanick Majesties Ship *Lavinia*, in consequence of our declaration of war. They have completely dismantled my vessel, taken my people all out except the Mates & boy and put them onboard a gard Ship. I still have the Liberty of the town, but am obliged to be on board every evening at sunset. There are many American vessels now here and they are coming in every day, many of them that have British Licenses and are bound to England will be allowed to depart with the first convoy; I believe none of will be permitted to sail without. In all probability I shall proceed to my port of destination in a month or more, at any rate as soon as some documents can be procured...Give yourself no kind of uneasiness about me; altho it is not very pleasant to be a prisoner to be sure...After I have discharged my cargo in Belfast, I shall proceed directly to L_ [Liverpool] that is if the war continues and I can get permission. You will if enquiries are made respecting me only say that I am detained in Gibraltar and that it is probable that I shall be sent to England with many others for trial; not a lisp of anything else...Some great villain may open this before it reaches you. In this account I shall refrain from putting my name to it...

Samuel clearly expected to receive a British license to continue his voyage under protections such as the October 13, 1812 Order in Council that instructed the Royal Navy “not to molest American vessels that have taken Grain &c to Lisbon on their return to the United States provided they have License.” Since this constituted collaboration with the enemy, he was understandably reluctant to have that be known back home. He finally got the necessary papers in October and reported this to his father in the letter illustrated in Figure 6. In it, he also commented extensively on the Napoleonic Wars in Europe.



Figure 6. October 26, 1812. Gibraltar via Cadiz and Providence to Gorham, Maine.

This folded letter was datelined “Gibraltar Oct^b 26th 1812” and carried by the same ship from Cadiz to Providence, Rhode Island as Figures 4 and 5, so it bears the same postal markings. Samuel wrote,

No. 5...Since my last I have received Documents from England, and hope ere long to be allowed to proceed to Ireland. What will be done with my vessel when I arrive there is impossible for me to ascertain. The state of Europe at present is critical; Buonaparte is carrying all before him in the north, the latest accounts we have leave him in Moscow the once capital of the immense empire of Russia...If he succeeds in bringing Russia to his terms, the probability is that he will turn his attention toward the South, and will never rest until his Brother is King of Spain. On the other side Lord Wellington by his skillful maneuvers and soldier like exertions has nearly rid Spain of Frenchmen...I must now leave Europe to fight their own battles and look toward the once happy America. I was hoping the repeal of the [November 1807] orders in Council would cause a happy reconciliation between the United States and Great Britain; but by the American papers the repeal of the orders in council is not noticed and the American Government is still for war...American vessels are daily sent in here. They are direct from America bound to Spain and Portugal loaded with flour; they will be detained until it is known whether the licenses granted by M^r Foster will be respected...

Samuel finally obtained a conditional release on November 30, 1812, which he reported to his father.

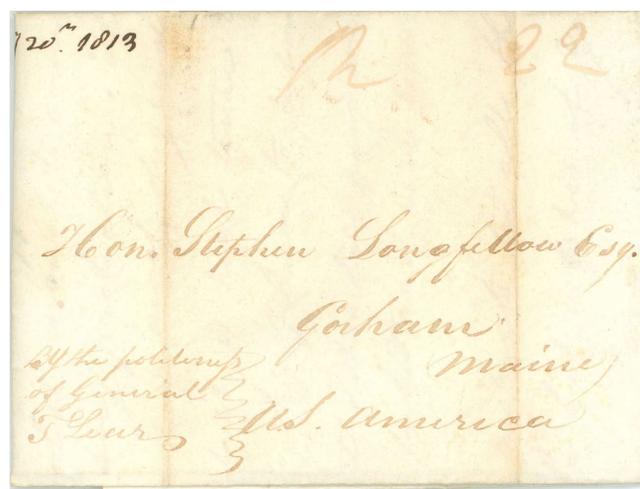


Figure 7. December 1, 1812. Gibraltar via New York to Gorham, Maine.

The folded letter illustrated in Figure 7 was datelined “Gibraltar Dec^r 1st 1812” and endorsed “By the politeness of General T Lear,” who carried it to New York, where it was rated “Sh 22” cents due,

representing 20¢ postage for the 301-500 miles to Gorham plus a 2¢ ship fee. It was received on February 20, 1813 per an arrival docket. Samuel wrote,

After being detained in this wretched place for nearly 4 months, and suffering all the anxiety possible for a man in that situation, you will not be surprised that my spirits are quite revived at the idea of being released. Yesterday my cause came before the court; they determined to allow my vessel to proceed to her port of destination; still houlding a claim for the vessel. I expect to receive my papers tomorrow and shall sail the first convoy for ___ the terms on which I am liberated are that Bonds for the freight and vessel are to be entered into by my consignees...Vessels are daily brought into this Bay from America loaded with flour etc, they have Messrs. Allens & Fosters Licenses; the major part of them are from Philadelphia. It is not yet known whether these licenses will be respected, if they are not, I think it will be a very good thing; for any man who will supply a country with whom his own is at war ought to suffer especially when they are foolish enough to come out under such slimpsey protection. This licenses business is a most degrading rascally thing and it is high time there was a stop put to it.

His indignation over the Allen & Foster licenses is ironic, given his own circumstances. Nonetheless, he reported his imminent departure for Belfast under the protection of a British license to his father in Figure 8.



Figure 8. January 22, 1813. Gibraltar via New York to Gorham, Maine.

This folded letter was datelined “Gibraltar Jan^y 22^d 1813” and endorsed “By the politeness of M^r Allen” at lower left. He carried it to New York, where it was postmarked “NEW-YORK 16 MAR” and rated “SHIP” and “22” cents due for the postage to Gorham plus a 2¢ ship fee. It was received on March 24, 1813. Samuel wrote,

I have the pleasure to inform you that my vessel was liberated on the 30th Nov^r last, but with all the exertion I was able to make could not get my papers to sail with the convoy which left here on the 7th Dec^r. I am now already for sea and shall sail with the convoy the first wind for Falm^o. From thence I expect to go to Belfast...This place is full of Americans which have been taken bound to Cadiz loaded with flour under Allens licenses; in a severe gale of wind experienced in this bay on the 28th Dec^r 11 of them went on shore and some of them with their cargos have been totally lost. By the last account we have here from Russia we learn that the french have been completely routed in that part of the world; the account states that they have lost 30,000 horses which died with the cold. The French and English appear to be very quiet in this part of the world, neither of them appear to be doing much. I sincerely hope our differences with Great Britain will be settled before long, as it is in my opinion a very unnatural ill-natured piece of business...

Samuel left Gibraltar aboard the *Ellen* on January 22, 1813 and reached Belfast, Ireland on March 5, according to the March 12 Lloyd’s List. The ship was quarantined there until March 13, as Samuel reported to his father in Figure 9. This folded letter was datelined “Belfast April 7th 1813” and docketed as received on July 4, 1813. In normal times, Samuel would have taken this letter to the local post office, paid the one shilling one penny packet postage plus the domestic postage to Falmouth, and his letter would have been carried to New York

by a Falmouth packet. The packets had been discontinued due to the war, however, so his only option was to send all of his letters in a package to a forwarder in London. That forwarder took the package to the London Ship Letter Office and paid the one shilling one penny per half-ounce outgoing ship fee. The post office then placed the package on a secure ship to the United States. Once there, U.S. domestic postage was also charged on the package, so the letters in it bear no postal markings.



Figure 9. April 7, 1813. Belfast, Ireland to Gorham, Maine.

Samuel wrote,

I sailed from Gib. [Gibraltar] on the 22^d Jan^y and after a boisterous & fatiguing passage arrived here on the 5th of March but kept under quarantine until the 13th. Since that time my papers have been in the hands of the Commissioners at Dublin who overhaul all papers of this kind. After I get my papers and discharge I shall proceed direct for L Pool [Liverpool] and if the nonimportation act is repealed in the United States, shall immediately take a cargo for that country. With the Blessing of God I hope to see you in June...Please to keep this a secret as it might be a disservice to me when I return to have it known where I have been...

Nine days later, the Irish Commissioners ordered *Ellen* to be seized at Belfast, but ironically for reasons unrelated to the war with the United States. Samuel reported this in a letter datelined April 17, 1813 to his brother at Portland, Maine. Like Figure 9, it carries no postal markings. Samuel observed that the tribulations encountered in his voyage had become hard to bear,

...Yesterday an order came to seize the Brig & Cargo for importing in to this Country wines and Barilla which the Atty General has been pleased to call Pot Ash [potassium carbonate] the growth of Spain which are not allowed as he says under penalty of forfeiture. In this it commands the Collector of this place to inform the parties so that they may memorial Government to grant them relief. On receiving this immediately wrote my owner who will undoubtedly succeed in procuring my release. There seems to be a fatality attending me some how or other but I comfort myself that the tide does not always set one way, and bear these things with Christian fortitude...

Four months later, Samuel left *Ellen* behind in Belfast and traveled to Liverpool, where he wrote the letter illustrated in Figure 10 to his father. This folded letter was datelined "Liverpool August 29th 1813" and endorsed "pr Ship Rob^t Burns" at lower left. As instructed, it was carried by the cartel ship *Robert Burns*, which left on August 29 and reached New York on October 7 per the October 8, 1813 New York *Columbian*,

The cartel ship Robert Burns, captain Parsen, arrived at the Hook yesterday afternoon, and captain Parsen reached town last evening in his boat, but did not, we are sorry to say, bring up any of his newspapers or letters. He sailed from Liverpool on the 29th of August, and brings London papers to the 27th and Liverpool to the 29th...The R.B. has a large sealed letter-bag, addressed to the Secretary of State: of course, they will have to go to Washington for examination. In the channel, the Robert Burns was boarded by the Grass-Hopper [18-gun sloop HMS *Grasshopper*]. On the Banks was boarded by the Hyperian frigate [32-gun frigate

HMS *Hyperion*] – and, off the Hook by the *Plantagenet*, of 74 guns [74-gun HMS *Plantagenet*]...copied some articles from a London paper of the 27th August, and then dismissed the ship.



Figure 10. August 29, 1813. Liverpool, England via New York to Gorham, Maine.

Cartel ships like the *Robert Burns* carried official correspondence under a flag of truce, which made them exempt from capture by British warships. They also carried private correspondence, which made them a safe and preferred alternative for letter writers.

Samuel's letter was postmarked "NEW-YORK OCT 15" and rated 20¢ due for the postage to Gorham (no ship fee was assessed). It was received on October 19. Samuel wrote,

I have only time to say that I am here and am very well. I expect to leave this for Gotthenbourg [Sweden] in few days. My prospects are very good and if I succeed I shall be making something handsome for myself. The ship that takes this is now underway and I must conclude...The next time you hear from me I shall probably be nearer you.

As reported, Samuel left around September 1 for Gothenburg, Sweden, where he arrived on September 9. He reported this to his father four months later in the letter illustrated in Figure 11.



Figure 11. January 6, 1814. Gothenburg via Boston to Gorham, Maine.

This folded letter was datelined "Gothenburg [Sweden] Jan^y 6th 1814" and carried through the British blockade of New England to Boston per the June 21 *Marine News*,

Port of Boston, June 21...A fishing boat which sailed from this port on Sunday for Provincetown, was brought to next morning [June 20] about 9 leagues fr. Boston Light, by a sloop tender, and ordered down to the *Nymph* frigate [38-gun HMS *Nymph*] – she was detained several hours by the latter, and then given up, after having a number of letters put on board, taken out of the Swedish ship *Fortuna* from Gottenburg, 53 days passage [April

28], laden with iron, ordered off...The boat left the frigate on Monday [June 20] afternoon 8 leagues fr. Boston Light. When within 3 or 4 miles of Boston Light, was boarded fr. a small schr. Not knowing whether a privateer or a tender. The boat's crew were politely treated by the above.

Notice of the British blockade of New England had been published in London on May 31, 1814. *Fortuna* had left Gothenburg a month earlier than that and was therefore not subject to seizure by the 38-gun HMS *Nymph* according to the rules regarding the prior notice to neutrals of the blockade. Instead, she was turned away and her mails were brought into Boston by a fishing boat. Accordingly, this letter was postmarked "BOSTON MS. JUN 22" and rated "SHIP" and "14½" cents due, representing 12½¢ for the 90-150 miles to Gorham plus a 2¢ ship fee. It was docketed "Rec^d June 24th 1814" at upper left. Samuel wrote that,

It is with pleasure I inform you that I arrived here on the 9th September last, and you will undoubtedly be a little surprised that I have not written you since my arrival in this country, but it has been owing to my being daily in expectation of proceeding to the United States. The season has now so far advanced I have given up the idea of proceeding until Spring...I presume it will be no news to tell you, the North of Europe has for some time past been the most shocking scene of carnage ever witnessed by the eyes of man. The last battle which has been fought between Buonaparte and the allies of any importance was on the 18th & 19th of Sept. last at Leipsic [Leipzig] in which the French were defeated at all points, and have since been compelled to re-cross the Rhine...But the best news I have to communicate is; the Allies have offered to treat with Buonaparte on the preliminaries of a Peace and he has accepted of their proposal. It is thought here that a General Peace is not far distant...

Napoleon's defeat convinced the American government to enter into peace negotiations to end its war with Great Britain. Henry Clay and Jonathan Russell of the U.S. peace delegation left New York on February 25, 1814 under a flag of truce aboard the 28-gun frigate USS *John Adams* and arrived in Gothenburg, Sweden on April 11, where they joined John Quincy Adams, Albert Gallatin and James Bayard. The delegation first met with the British in June and then moved the talks to Ghent, Belgium in August. Samuel's letter to his father illustrated in Figure 12 described Clay and Russell's arrival in Gothenburg.



Figure 12. April 13, 1814. Gothenburg via Boston to Gorham, Maine.

This folded letter was datelined "Gothenburg [Sweden] April 13th 1814" and carried through the New England blockade to Boston on June 20 per the June 7, 1814 Boston *New England Palladium*,

Port of Boston. Monday, June 6...Arrived, Russian ship Neva, Capt. Christianson, from St. Petersburg, Oct. 31, and from Landscrona [Sweden], April 19, where she wintered...Took her departure from the Orkney Islands April 27. Has not seen a vessel on the passage, until this forenoon, when she fell in with two frigates in Boston Bay. One of which stood for her for about 3 hours, and ran close in to the Light-house. The Neva did not hear of the blockade until she took a pilot within the Light-house.

It was postmarked “BOSTON MS. JUN 8” and rated “SHIP” and “12½” cents due for the postage to Gorham (no ship fee was assessed). It was received on June 10. Samuel wrote,

...I believe it is thought that a general peace is not far distant. The allies have not advance for some time past and it is supposed they have met with a check. The day before yesterday the U.S. Ship John Adams arrived in 46 days from New York with Messrs Russel & Clay. The British have not yet sent any person here to meet them, but I believe we may soon expect somebody and pray god they may do something altho it is a very unfavorable time to treat. I shall remain here and see the results of the negotiations which are about to take place and if Peace is concluded, I shall return to the United States, as there are many American vessels here without masters...

Shortly after that, Samuel left Gothenburg and visited London in June 1814, apparently undisturbed by the hostilities between Great Britain and his country. He then left from Rotterdam on September 1 aboard the *Ulla Harmans* and reached Amelia Island in Spanish Florida on October 14. He reported his arrival to his father, care of his brother, in the letter shown in Figure 13.

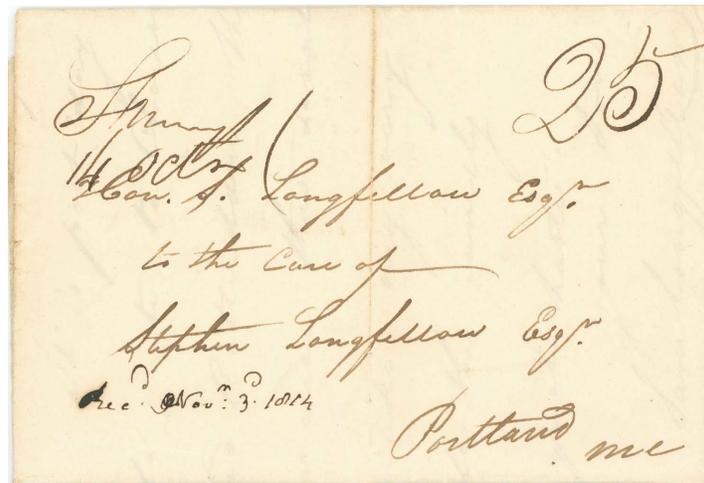


Figure 13. October 15, 1814. Amelia Island via St. Mary's to Portland, Maine.

This folded letter was datelined “Amelia Island [Spanish Florida] Oct^r 15th 1814.” Normally, it would have been taken by a coastal ship to Charleston, South Carolina for further transmission in the U.S. postal system, but was instead carried overland to nearby St. Mary's, Georgia to avoid the British coastal blockade of Georgia and South Carolina. Accordingly, it was postmarked “St Marys 14 Oct^r” in manuscript and rated “25” cents postage due for over 500 miles to Portland. It was received there on November 3. Samuel reported that,

...I arrived here last evening in the Swedish Brig *Ulla Harmans*, in 44 days [left September 1] from Rotterdam. The Brig has a cargo worth from 40 to 50 thousand dollars and is consigned to me. When I last wrote you (from Gothenburg) I was almost at a stand to know which way I should bend my course, but I soon after went to London and was there during the visit of the Emperor of Russia & King of Prussia and many more great personages [June 1814]...You may well suppose that I am very much engaged today, as I am an entire stranger here, have a valuable cargo to dispose of and another to purchase immediately. It is post day and I have letters to write to Charleston, New York and Rotterdam...

He wrote the letter illustrated in Figure 14 to his brother at Portland four days later. This folded letter was datelined “Fernandina Amelia Island October 19th 1814” and carried privately via Georgia to Charleston, thus bypassing the British coastal blockade. It was postmarked “Chalsⁿ SC OCT 27” and rated “25” cents postage due for the overland rate to Maine, where it was received on November 7. Samuel wrote,

You will undoubtedly have heard of my arrival by my letter to my father which was addressed to your care...I came out on the Brigs papers as a Swede and as a sailor before the mast. You may well suppose that I suffered

every thing for fear of being boarded and taken out by a British man of war, not mentioning any thing of being eaten up with fleas & bed-bugs...address your letters to me to care of Guillermo Lawrence Esq. of this place.



Figure 14. October 19, 1814. Charleston, SC to Portland, Maine.

On January 13, 1815, a British amphibious force under Admiral Cockburn occupied St. Mary's, Georgia, cutting off the overland connection with Spanish Amelia Island. They left on February 7. Samuel wrote the letter shown in Figure 15 to his father describing the disruption. This folded letter was datelined "Savannah Feb^y 9th 1815" and postmarked "SAVAN GA FEB 10." It was also rated for "37½" cents due, reflecting the new war rate for over 500 miles to Gorham.



Figure 15. February 9, 1815. Amelia Island via Savannah to Gorham, Maine.

Samuel wrote,

You have undoubtedly heard of the disasters which have recently taken place in this part of the Country. I have been shut up for some time past in Amelia Island owing to the British having possession of St Marys. Immediately on their evacuating that place I started for this place and was obliged to walk as far as Darien, all the horses in St Marys being taken away by the enemy. The whole of this State are in arms, the enormous depredations committed by the enemy has united all parties and the people rise en masse...I am happy to say that we have lost nothing excepting 16 cases...which were taken going from Amelia to Charleston and I have received some information since my arrival here...[that] the vessel is retaken and carried into Wilmington NC...

The ratified December 24, 1814 Anglo-American peace treaty was delivered on February 17, 1815 to the British envoy in Washington, formally ending the war. The treaty stipulated that vessels captured on the American coast would be “good prizes” for only 12 days after ratification, or until March 1. On March 6, the last British blockading ship received news of the peace, ending the blockade. As a result, Samuel began planning his return to Maine, as described in Figure 16.



Figure 16. April 7, 1815. Charleston, SC to Gorham, Maine.

This folded letter was datelined “Charleston 7th April 1815” and endorsed “pr Mail” at lower left. It was postmarked “CHALSON SC APR 8” and rated “37½” cents due for the war surcharge postal rate to Gorham. It was received on April 20. Samuel wrote,

...I am now packing my trunks and shall set out for Savannah tomorrow from thence I shall go to St Marys and return to this. I hope to get back here in a fortnight and as soon as I get all my concerns settled I shall pack up my alls for the “salubrious north” the sweet land of my nativity...

The letters in Figures 15-18 show the application of the new U.S. war surcharge postal rates that became effective on February 1, 1815. These applied a 50% surcharge to the pre-existing postal rates to recoup some of the expenses incurred during the war. They were rolled back just over a year later on March 31, 1816. Meanwhile, Samuel continued to plan his return to Maine, as described in Figure 17.



Figure 17. May 13, 1815. Savannah, Georgia to Gorham, Maine.

This folded letter was datelined “Savannah May 13th 1815” and endorsed “pr Mail from Savannah.” It was postmarked “SAVAN GA MAY 17,” rated for “37½” cents due and received on May 31. Samuel wrote,

...I shall proceed to Charleston by the next packet which will sail in two or three days, shall remain there a few days, and proceed to Alexandria where I have some business to settle on my way home...

Samuel left Charleston in May for New York, where he arrived on June 4, 1815.



Figure 18. June 16, 1815. New York City to Gorham, Maine.

The folded letter shown in Figure 18 was datelined “New York 16th June 1815” and postmarked “NEW YORK JUN 16.” It was rated for “30” cents due, representing the war surcharge rate for 301-500 miles to Gorham. It was received on June 22. Samuel wrote,

I have the pleasure to inform you that I arrived here from Charleston the 4th instant. Tomorrow: wind & weather permitting I take passage to New Port [Rhode Island] where I shall remain a few days, from thence proceed home, home, home taking Boston in my way...you may expect to see me God willing on the 1st of July. I presume you have been expecting me some time & I have been intending to come but something has always retarded my progress, but now I am determined to see you at all events...

Three years and three months after his escape from the Boston embargo, Samuel finally returned home to Maine. During his long, strange trip, he

- Evaded Madison’s April 1812 embargo on American merchant shipping
- Avoided seizure at Gibraltar in May 1812 by leaving hastily for Naples
- Was diverted by storm damage to Alicante, Spain
- Underwent detention and inspection by a British warship at Alicante in June 1812
- Obtained papers to carry a Spanish cargo to Belfast, Ireland in July 1812
- Was detained by a British warship at Gibraltar in August 1812
- Obtained papers to proceed to Ireland with his cargo in October 1812
- Sailed to Belfast in March 1813 and was quarantined there
- Had his ship and cargo confiscated at Belfast for carrying a prohibited Spanish cargo
- Escaped from Belfast to Liverpool, where he took passage to Sweden in September 1813
- Visited London (the enemy!) in June 1814 and left from Rotterdam for Spanish Florida
- Left Florida in May 1815 to return home in July

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- 1) Arthur, Brian. *How Britain Won the War of 1812; The Royal Navy's Blockades of the United States, 1812-1815*. (Woodbridge, GB: Boydell Press, 2011).
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- 3) Frajola, Richard C. "1815 War Surcharge Rates." *Chronicle* Whole No. 119 (August 1983), Volume 35, No. 3, pages 158-167.
- 4) Walske, Steven. *Letter Communications Through the Blockades of North America 1774 to 1865*. (U.S. Philatelic Classics Society, Inc., 2025).