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LETTER

ACCOMPANYING THE GIFT OF A PHOTOGRAPH OF THE BRIG "BOXER."
BY FRITZ H. JORDAN.

Read before the Maine Historical Society, May 28, 1885.

PORTLAND, May 27, 1885.

Mr. H. W. Bryant, Secretary Maine Historical Society:—

I PRESENT to the Society herewith a framed photograph of the brig "Boxer" as she appeared when entering the port of Marseilles in 1815. With the exception of some slight changes rendered necessary in fitting her for the merchant service this is, I think, an accurate representation of this famous brig, which was captured by the United States brig "Enterprise" a few miles to the southward and eastward of Seguin in the memorable action of Sept. 5, 1813, that, to quote from the inscription on the tomb of the gallant commander of the latter vessel, "contributed to increase the fame of American valor."

The "Enterprise," while notoriously a dull sailer and a poor working vessel, had always been a very fortunate one. She was originally built in 1799, and was then a schooner of one hundred and thirty five tons, carrying a battery of twelve six-pounders and a crew of ninety men. In the war with Tripoli she engaged and captured a Tripolitan cruiser of twice her size; and later formed a part of Commodore Preble's fleet at the blockade and bombardment of Tripoli. Previous to the war of 1812 she had been rebuilt, enlarged and rigged as a brig. She then measured one hundred and sixty-five tons, was classed as a vessel of fourteen guns; carried fourteen eighteen-pound carronades and two long nines, and was manned by a crew of ninety men. After the action with the "Boxer" she was employed as a guard ship at Charleston, South Carolina, and was lost at Little Curacoa, West Indies, in 1823. The early records of our custom house having been destroyed by the burning of the Exchange in 1854, I have been unable to

learn the exact tonnage of the "Boxer," but she is thought to have been about two hundred and twenty-five tons register.

Our older citizens tell me that she was a very able, weatherly vessel and a fast sailer; qualities which her picture would seem to indicate. Her armament consisted of twelve eighteen-pound carronades and two long sixes. The "Enterprise" was commanded by Lieutenant William Burrows, a young man twenty-eight years of age, and was on a cruise on the coast of Maine. She entered Portland harbor the third of September, 1813, and sailed again the morning of the fourth. The next morning, at day-break, being Sunday, September 5, she saw the "Boxer" at anchor under Pemaquid. After maneuvering for some time to learn each other's size and armament, the two vessels engaged each other at three P.M. They were well matched. The "Boxer" was superior in men, tonnage and sailing qualities. The "Enterprise" was twenty-one pounds heavier in the weight of her broadside. The action lasted but forty-five minutes and was decided, as in the frigate actions of the same war, by the superior gunnery and seamanship of the American vessel; for, while the "Enterprise" was hulled but once and with the exception of some slight repairs to spars and rigging was ready for another action, the "Boxer" sustained very severe injuries. Captain Hull, who came here to represent the federal government, wrote to Commodore Bainbridge that she had eighteen round shot and an innumerable quantity of grape-shot in her hull and that her spars, rigging and sails were completely riddled. The "Enterprise" had two men killed and seven wounded. One of the former was her gallant commander; and two of the latter died of their wounds. It is not known how many were killed on board the "Boxer," as some of the bodies were thrown overboard during the fight. Among the killed, however, was her commander, Captain Blythe, who was cut in two by a cannon ball early in the action. He was twenty-nine years old, and had but a short time before been a pall-bearer at the funeral of the gallant Lawrence at Halifax.

The two vessels arrived at Portland harbor the next day; and on Wednesday, the eighth, the two captains were buried with the honors of war. Portland has seen few sights more impressive than this funeral pageant. The procession formed at the

court house at nine o'clock A.M., with Robert Ilsley and Levi Cutter, assisted by twelve others, as marshals and proceeded to Union wharf. The vessels lay in the stream and the bodies were brought on shore in barges of ten oars each, rowed by masters and mates, rowing minute strokes, minute guns being fired from Forts Preble and Scammell. The procession was formed as follows: The escort consisted of three companies of militia, Captain Atherton of the Rifle Company being senior officer, then preceded by the marshals and the reverend clergy came the body of Lieutenant Burrows, with Captain Isaac Hull, of the frigate "Constitution" as chief mourner, and followed by the officers and crew of the "Enterprise," then the body of Captain Blythe followed by the officers and crew of the "Boxer," then the selectmen, judges, consuls, officials of all kinds and citizens generally. The route of the procession was up Union wharf through Fore and Pleasant streets to High street and thence through Main and Middle streets to the Second Parish Church, where the funeral services were conducted by the Rev. Dr. Payson, and from thence to the Eastern cemetery where the bodies were entombed.

This action was a source of much pride to our nation and has been commemorated in several seamen's songs, one of which beginning with

There was an enterprising brig
and with the refrain

We boxed her into Portland,
We boxed her off the town,

is well known.

Coming so soon after the capture of the "Chesapeake" by the "Shannon," in Massachusetts bay, it, in a measure, counteracted the despondency caused by her loss, and restored the prestige previously gained by the capture of the "Guerriere," the "Macedonian," the "Frolic," and others.

The "Boxer" was sold at marshal's sale, November 12, 1813, and was bought by Thomas Merrill, jr., for five thousand, six hundred dollars. He also bought ten carronades of her armament and many articles of her inventory, some of which are still in possession of our family. The carronades are thought to have been sold to Bryant & Sturgis of Boston, and to have been put

on board the privateer "Hyder Ali," which was built for them near the foot of High street, Portland.

In 1814, there being danger of a British descent on the coast, the shipping in the harbor was taken above Vaughan's bridge; guns were taken from the Portuguese ship "San José Indiano" (a prize to the privateer "Yankee"), and mounted on the "Boxer," which latter vessel was moored to protect the shipping and was manned by the Rifle Company. Happily the descent was not made. In 1815, the "Boxer" was refitted for the merchant service, went to New York and from thence sailed under letters of marque for Marseilles, under command of Captain William McLellan, father of our Ex-mayor Jacob McLellan. At Marseilles, Captain McLellan had the water-color painting made of which this photograph is a copy. This painting is now the property of Captain Jacob McLellan who has kindly allowed me to have it photographed. The name of the painter is unknown. He was, however, apparently an artist of no mean merit, and as it is known that he made accurate measurements of the vessel and spars, it is probable that he has given us a correct representation of her as she then appeared. He has represented her as under top-sails, top-gallant sails, and jib with main try-sail scandalized, royal yards across and foresail and mainsail brailed up. She is on the starboard tack, with the walls and fortifications of Marseilles and a Mediterranean polacre in the distance. Her hull does not differ greatly in appearance from vessels built in the north of England twenty-five years ago. Her bowsprit is very long, her foremast stepped well forward and standing nearly straight, her mainmast rakes aft, peculiarities common at that day. Her waist is low, her deck is apparently flush. She shows seven ports on a side. At her peak is an American ensign of fifteen stripes, at her fore the private signal of Thomas Merrill jr., blue, white and blue in three vertical stripes. From the letter of Captain Hull, it is known that she had hammock nettings and a top-gallant forecastle; these were, without doubt, removed when she was refitted, as they do not now appear; her high cat-heads and knight-heads, however, still show. Her bottom is apparently wood-sheathed, probably to cover up plank injured by shot.

This photograph has been much praised by several of our older

shipmasters on account of its accuracy and life-like appearance and from its recalling to them many nautical appliances long since gone out of use. Her topsails are single, the weather leeches being hauled flat by fore and maintop bowlines, her cables are hemp, her anchors stowed well aft, her long boat is carried on deck amid-ships, she is apparently steered by a tiller.

In connection with the repairs made to the vessel there is a curious tradition in our family. Much of the material was of course unfit to use again and Mr. Merrill had some of the condemned wood hauled to his house for fuel, when an old Scotch serving-woman employed as a domestic peremptorily refused to use it because it had human blood upon it. How the matter was settled is not known. After the "Boxer" returned from this voyage she was sold to a Portuguese house and was employed by them for many years as a mail packet between the Cape de Verde islands and Lisbon.

Capt. Jacob McLellan tells me that in 1825 he was second officer of the ship "John" of Portland one hundred and seventy-five tons, employed in the African trade. On the outward passage they made the Cape de Verde islands at dusk, and on entering the harbor of Port Praya, after dark, were passed by a heavy brig outward bound; this vessel they learned the next day was the "Boxer." What was her final end is not known, but she is thought to have been lost on the Brazil coast.

Very respectfully,

FRITZ H. JORDAN.