

BY AN OLD HYDROGRAPHER

'As it Was'

The New England Coasting Pilot was the first folio of sea charts of the coast of North America. The work of an English naval officer, they covered the coastal waters from New York to Cape Breton.

Cyprian Southack, son of a naval officer, was born in London in 1662 and arrived at the age of 23 years in Boston, Massachusetts as a naval lieutenant. Here in 1690 he married Elizabeth Foy, by whom he had ten children. He became a competent navigator in New England waters and when war broke out between the French and English in 1689 he was employed at sea to frustrate enemy vessels approaching the coast. For this work he commanded several vessels, including *Mary* and *William and Mary*, reflecting the names of the King and Queen of England.

In 1694 he visited London where he kissed His Majesty's hand and presented King William III with a draft of a chart he planned to make of New England, Newfoundland, Nova Scotia, the River of Canada and the seas and territories adjoining. In consideration of his past services and for his further encouragement the King ordered that the sum of fifty pounds be paid to Southack to buy a Gold Chain and Medal as a mark of His Majesty's Royal Favour.

Back in Boston, Southack prepared a map of the harbour. In 1696 he was in the St John River in the Bay of Fundy with an expedition besieging the French fort of Nachauac, where he was said to have made a survey of the river but of which no copy now exists. In 1697, by royal command, he was appointed to command the *Province*, a galley belonging to the colony of Massachusetts. In this year the Treaty of Ryswick was signed, bringing about a brief peace when Fort Nachauac and other territories recently taken from the French were returned to them. Peace did not last long, for the war of the Spanish Succession broke out in 1701 and the New Englanders were again looking to take French territory.

In 1702 King William died and was succeeded by Queen Anne, daughter of James II. Southack accompanied Sir William Phips, the Provost Marshall of New England, to take from the French their harbour of Port Royal, which faced St John River on the opposite side of the Bay of Fundy. During this campaign Southack gave exceptionally good service, piloting the fleet of attacking vessels into the port, past the fort to a camp-site for a *dépôt*, whence he arranged for the safety of the fleet and the import of mortars, cannon and other necessary stores. Port Royal, when it fell, became Annapolis Royal.

In 1711 Sir Hovenden Walker arrived in Boston to organise an expedition to capture Quebec. He made Southack's home his headquarters and Southack drew a chart for him of the St Lawrence River using the latest available information. Queen Anne had commissioned him to pilot this expedition but he was unable to accept the task, for he had never been in the River and his galley *Province* was much in need of repairs. Sir Hovenden ordered these to be undertaken and Southack to follow the expedition when his vessel was ready.

The force set out in August but was overcome by a great storm at the mouth of the St Lawrence, when eight transports and nine hundred men were lost. The operation was abandoned; as Southack had not taken part in the expedition he did not receive the money promised for the repairs to the galley and it took him two years to recover two-thirds of the cost from the Massachusetts Council. With the Treaty of Utrecht in 1712 the war ended, the *Province* was sold and Southack retired as a seagoing captain, so that he was able to turn his attention to the draft chart he had shown to King William eighteen years earlier.

In the *Boston Newsletter* of May 1718 Southack advertised saying that he had finished his "general chart" comprising eight sections and would welcome at his home any seaman who might have corrections he could suggest before it was engraved as *The Coasting Pilot* in London. However, there were delays in the printing of the charts as a number of subscribers had yet to pay up. Francis Nicholson, the Governor of the Province of North Carolina had already paid nearly half of the £180 to be provided by 85 subscribers who were mainly domiciled in New England and Nova Scotia, with a sprinkling of London merchants and their sea captains, each at one guinea a piece. It is not surprising that Southack dedicated the work to Governor Nicholson. It was not until 1729 that it was announced in the *Boston Gazette* that the sheets of the charts from the Sandy Point of New York to Cape Canso in Nova Scotia were now available.

Subsequently, in 1733, the *New England Weekly Journal* stated that the copper plates had now been imported from England, including a continuation to include Cape Breton and the harbour of Louisbourg, from which a second edition of the work could be printed in Boston. It would appear that *The Coasting Pilot* was published in two editions, the first in 1729 and the second in 1734. The work seems to have had a mixed reception in New England.

In 1739 John Fry wrote, "As for the worthy and ingenious Capt. Southack, I have not heard that he has received any Gratuity by way of Bounty for his great Labour and Pains in serving this most noble Province." This *Coasting Pilot* gives me a just Idea of the coast of his Majesty's Provinces from New York to the Bay of Fundy." John Green in 1755, "Though, for the general, a very coarse and erroneous Draught, yet not without its use." And in 1749 William Douglas, "His large chart of the coast of Nova Scotia and New England being one continued error, and a random performance, may be of pernicious consequence in trade and navigation: therefore it

ought to be publicly advertised as such and destroyed wherever it is found amongst sea charts.

Captain Cyprian Southack's advice was sought on many nautical matters; he served on the Council in Nova Scotia for some years, when he became deeply interested in the fisheries. This was an interest he maintained during his declining years after his return to Boston, where he died in 1745 at the age of 83 years.

Further Reading

- *The New England Coasting Pilot*, Clara Egli Le Gear. *Imago Mundi*, Vol. XI (1954) pp. 137-144.

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