

Florida Historical Quarterly

Volume 69
Number 2 *Florida Historical Quarterly, Volume
69, Number 2*

Article 5

1990

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Recommended Citation

Willoughby, Lynn (1990) "Apalachicola Aweigh: Shipping and Seamen at Florida's Premier Cotton Port," *Florida Historical Quarterly*: Vol. 69: No. 2, Article 5.

Available at: <https://stars.library.ucf.edu/fhq/vol69/iss2/5>

APALACHICOLA AWEIGH: SHIPPING AND SEAMEN AT FLORIDA'S PREMIER COTTON PORT

by LYNN WILLOUGHBY

A PALACHICOLA in the 1840s was Florida's busiest port. It also was a town that cotton built. To its north lay the Apalachicola, Chipola, Flint, and Chattahoochee rivers which together comprised the longest riverine system east of the Mississippi. Along those waterways lay thousands of cotton fields, and from as far away as Columbus, Georgia, planters dispatched their crops in steamers and pole boats to the Gulf of Mexico by way of Apalachicola.

Visitors to the town, including officers and crewmen of the vessels that serviced the cotton trade, described it as beautiful. The city wharf rested on the west bank of the Apalachicola River just north of its juncture with the bay. To the east, away from the town's commercial district, steamboats crowded the dock, and past them lay the wide Apalachicola estuary. To the south was Apalachicola Bay, or St. George Sound, which measures seven miles at its widest point and thirty-eight miles from east to west. Beyond the bay St. George Island, with Dog Island to its east and St. Vincent Island to the west, protected the bay and port from turbulent gulf seas.

Nineteenth-century sailors passed from gulf to sound either through West Pass between St. Vincent and St. George islands or East Pass between St. George and Dog islands. Lighthouses located at the western ends of St. George and Dog islands marked the passages. The westernmost of the two burned intermittently in a yellow hue while the red beacon at East Pass beamed continuously.¹ With their aid, seamen had little trouble

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1. In addition to the two lights at Apalachicola, other north Florida lighthouses were located at St. Marks, St. Joseph's, and Pensacola. E. Blunt and G. W. Blunt, "The North Coast of the Gulf of Mexico from St. Marks to Galveston" (New York, 1844). A copy of the map is in the Phillips Library, Peabody Museum, Salem, MA.

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distinguishing the passes after dark, but larger vessels still required a harbor pilot to steer a craft safely to moorings several miles from town.² Only shallow-draft boats could pass over the sand bar near the mouth of the river in order to reach the municipal wharf.

Sailors who pulled shore leave found Apalachicola a lively place, particularly considering the size of its population.³ There were a number of bars, hotels, oyster bars, a bowling alley, a Masonic lodge, a library, four churches, and a private school.⁴ The heart of the port, though, was its commercial district. By 1840 forty-three identical brick and granite warehouses, each thirty feet wide and three stories tall, faced the city wharf.⁵ During the business season which peaked between December and May, the streets were cluttered with cotton bales, draymen, stevedores, cotton merchants, and sailors. By the end of the 1844 business season, for example, sixty-two craft had entered Apalachicola Bay from New York alone. Other American boats had arrived from Mobile; Point Petre, Georgia; Key West and St. Marks, Florida; Charleston; New Orleans; Boston; Baltimore; Providence, Rhode Island; Galveston; Portsmouth, Massachusetts; and Portland and Waldboro, Maine. Foreign vessels arriving in Apalachicola that season hailed from Havana and Matanzas, Cuba; Puerto Rico; Liverpool, England; Le Havre and Marseilles, France; St. Thomas, Virgin Islands; Turk Is-

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- 2 . *Gleaner* ship log, February 4, 1843-April 3, 1844; *Moro Castle* ship log, February 23, 1860-January 17, 1861; Journal of Mrs. Henry Moulton aboard the bark *Kepler*, October 14, 1859-March 20, 1860; *Sarah Parker* ship log, January 28, 1837-January 31, 1840; *Henry Ware* ship log, March 11, 1851-November 29, 1851. All of the above are in the Phillips Library.
 - 3 . Apalachicola's year-round residents in 1840 numbered just over 1,000, but during the cotton marketing season the population usually doubled. Manuscript returns of the Sixth United States Census, 1840, Franklin County, FL, schedule I (population).
 - 4 . Harry P. Owens, "Apalachicola Before 1861" (Ph.D. dissertation, Florida State University, 1966), 165-67, 173; *Apalachicola Star of the West*, October 25, 1848. See also Owens, "Apalachicola: The Beginning," *Florida Historical Quarterly* 47 (January 1969), 276-91, and "Port of Apalachicola," *Florida Historical Quarterly* 48 (July 1969), 1-25.
 - 5 . George L. Chapel, "Walking and Driving Tour of Historic Apalachicola," brochure, Apalachicola Chamber of Commerce (n.d.). Generally, boats calling at Apalachicola departed by July each year and did not return until mid-December when the rivers again were high enough to transport cotton to the port.

land, West Indies; and Jamaica.⁶ The previous season had brought 398 boats into the harbor, and 244 vessels arrived in the 1844-1845 season.⁷

Vessels often found the journey to Apalachicola a hazardous one. The passage from a domestic port such as New York was riskier than making a transatlantic voyage since danger usually lay, not on the open sea, but with hazards near the shoreline.⁸ The trip from a northern port to the Gulf of Mexico was more dangerous than the return voyage. When sailing northward, the captain had only to ride the Gulf Stream while the southbound course required following a weaker shoreline current that brought boats perilously close to the shoals off Cape Hatteras, North Carolina.⁹ The most danger, however, involved rounding the tip of Florida. There, in proximity of the Bahamas and the Florida Keys, seamen painstakingly had to guide their way among dangerous reefs and islands often against strong conflicting currents and without the aid of sufficient navigational markers.¹⁰ Between the years 1844 and 1851, 279 vessels were wrecked in the area.¹¹

The ship *Moro Castle* sailed through these waters early in 1860, and its log describes a typical coastwise voyage. Had Captain W. L. Knowles believed in omens, he might never have sailed for Apalachicola. As the tow boat came alongside his ship in New York harbor, the captain found that both his mates were drunk and only four of his sailors were on board. For five hours he attempted to round up his crew. Meanwhile, a gale blew up. Since the tow boat could not make headway against the storm

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6. "Marine Intelligence" column in Apalachicola *Commercial Advertiser*, January 1-June 30, 1844. The extant Apalachicola papers are scattered, and the only shipping season for which a continuous run of newspapers exists is January through July 1844.
 7. Apalachicola *Commercial Advertiser*, January 8, 1844; Rose Gibbons Lovett, "Excerpts and Articles Relating to Apalachicola and Area," 16, in Lovett Family Papers, M77-156, Florida State Archives, Tallahassee. Lovett quotes from *Niles' Weekly Register*, February 7, 1846.
 8. Robert G. Albion, *Square-Riggers on Schedule: The New York Sailing Packets to England, France, and the Cotton Ports* (Princeton, NJ, 1938; reprint ed., Hamden, CT, 1965), 11.
 9. Robert G. Albion, *The Rise of New York Port, 1815-1860* (New York, 1939), 271, 412.
 10. Albion, *Square-Riggers*, 11; Apalachicola *Commercial Advertiser*, December 14, 1844.
 11. *Hunt's Merchants' Magazine* 28 (January-June 1853), 247.

the ship was compelled to anchor until it subsided, and Knowles was unable to commence his voyage until the following day.¹²

Once underway, Knowles's ship averaged about 150 miles per day on its way south. By March 4, 1860, it, had passed safely through the "Hole in the Wall," an often perilous channel between the Abacos and the Eleutheras in the Bahama Islands, and was heading eastward toward the Berry Islands. The following day the captain sighted the lighthouse on Great Isaac Island, north of Bimini. The course among these islands and around the Florida Keys was so narrow that it created a bottleneck for traffic in and out of the Gulf of Mexico. The captain saw many vessels in these waters, some of which he knew on sight. Gentle breezes and the lighthouses at Sombrero Key, Key West, Sand Cay, and the Tortugas aided him in passing safely into the gulf.¹³

The *Moro Castle* fortunately experienced good weather during the trickiest part of its passage. The captain traveled with his wife and daughter, a fairly common practice by 1860, and he noted that they were "quite well and able to do their duty at the table."¹⁴ As the ship rounded Tortugas and turned northward toward Apalachicola, Knowles towed a fishing line astern and caught a Spanish mackerel. After a "fine supper" of fresh fish he wrote: "The day ends very pleasantly. Wife ironing."¹⁵ By morning, though, the ship had encountered a strong north wind and heavy seas. The captain ordered the top gallant sails down. When the winds increased in velocity, he had the top sails double reefed and the mainsail and outer jib taken in. An hour later the crew close reefed the top sails and took in the foresail jib. The captain's family became seasick, and even he admitted the seas were "quite rough." All was not unpleasant, however; he caught another fish.¹⁶

For the next three days deckhands struggled to lower the ship's many sails as the winds continued to howl, and the captain confided to his journal: "I have not a doubt but what we should have been safely at anchor in the harbor of Apalachicola ere this a few days ago. I did not dream of a gale here."¹⁷ After fighting

12. *Moro Castle* ship log, entry of February 23, 1860.

13. *Ibid.*, March 4-7, 1860.

14. *Ibid.*, March 6, 1860.

15. *Ibid.*, March 8, 1860.

16. *Ibid.*, March 9, 1860.

17. *Ibid.*, March 10, 1860. Apalachicola often was spelled with two "p"s in the nineteenth century.

the storm for five days the captain finally sighted Dog Island light and, with the aid of the harbor pilot, soon was safely moored inside St. George Sound. After the business of entering the vessel had been attended to, Knowles and his family went into town.¹⁸

While in port, the Knowles family likely met Mrs. Henry Moulton, another seafarer's wife who kept her own journal of travels aboard the bark *Kepler*.¹⁹ Once a vessel had anchored in the bay, captains and their families usually stayed in a hotel while their crews were unloading freight or ballast and reloading another cargo. During that time the wives socialized with one another. Mrs. Moulton enjoyed walks with the other women "out to the store and into the cotton press" and "beyond the wind mill some ways, and round by the beach back to Mr. Hancock's."²⁰ She also visited every church in town, even the black church which was popular among the visitors because of its vibrant music. Almost daily she paid a social call on the wife of one of her husband's associates, and she recorded the comings and goings of other captains and their wives in her journal. "Mrs. Chandler expects to go down to their vessel today," she wrote on March 6, 1860. The next day she noted, "Mrs. Willis went back to their Ship." A week later she mentioned that "Capt. Curtis & wife went down to their vessel."²¹

While the captains and their families socialized, there was much activity back at the ship. The *Sarah Parker* arrived from Liverpool in 1838 with a load of salt. While the captain was ashore, the crew unloaded the cargo via several schooners to be lightered into town. The process of unloading 2,500 sacks of salt was no simple task; averaging 200 units per day, the crew required almost a month to complete the job. Once the ship's hold was cleared a stevedore stowed a new cargo of cotton, and another month was consumed.²²

18. *Ibid.*, March 10-16, 1860.

19. The Moultons were in Apalachicola from January 26 to March 21, 1860. The vessel was wrecked in St. George Sound, and, after salvaging what they could and selling the rest, the couple left the port for the North by river steamboat. Journal kept by Mrs. Henry Moulton, October 14, 1859-March 20, 1860.

20. *Ibid.*, February 3 and March 3, 1860.

21. *Ibid.*, March 6, 7, and 13, 1860.

22. *Henry Ware and Sarah Parker ship logs.*

The sea craft that sailed into Apalachicola Bay were of five types, depending on their size, the number of their masts, and their rigging.²³ Sloops were the smallest of all the merchant vessels. They were rigged with a single mast which supported a fore-and-aft sail (the sails ran in a line parallel to the length of the vessel). Sloops skirted the coastline on their way between New York, Apalachicola, and Mobile, but also occasionally carried cotton and passengers between Apalachicola and St. Marks, the closest Florida port to the east.

Schooners had two or more masts that also were fore-and-aft rigged. They were the workhorses of the coasting trade because, even though they had great storage capacity, the sail configuration only required a small crew and their relatively shallow draft allowed them to pass over the sand bars that blocked the bigger vessels from entry into most gulf harbors.²⁴ For these reasons they often were employed as lighters in loading and unloading the larger craft. The average schooner calling at Apalachicola in 1844 was eighty-eight tons, although they ranged in size from the forty-nine-ton *Cape Cod* to the 149-ton *Octavia*.²⁵ Between January and July of that year, eighty-six schooners docked at the town. About one-half (49. percent) ran between Apalachicola and New Orleans, and 18 percent came from Havana, Cuba. Fourteen percent of all schooners leaving Apalachicola cleared for New York.²⁶

Brigs, which generally were larger in tonnage than the schooners, had two masts but were square-rigged (their sails ran in a link perpendicular to the length of the boat). Brigs calling on Apalachicola in 1844 averaged 211 tons burthen. Seventy percent of the Apalachicola brig trade ran between Apalachicola and New York.

23. Few steam-powered vessels came into Apalachicola before the Civil War; the Apalachicola newspaper noted only four ocean-going steamers entering the port in 1844. During the 1850s at various times three steamers made regular stops at Apalachicola and other gulf ports.

24. John Durant and Alice Durant, *Pictorial History of American Ships on the High Seas and Inland Waters* (New York, 1953), 42.

25. "Vessels in Port," in Apalachicola *Commercial Advertiser*, January 1-June 30, 1844.

26. Statistics on arrivals and departures of all types of vessels were compiled from the "Marine Intelligence" column in the weekly Apalachicola *Commercial Advertiser*, January 1-June 30, 1844.

Next largest in size came the bark, which had three masts with the forward two masts square-rigged and the third mast fore-and-aft rigged.²⁷ About one-half of the barks touching at Apalachicola in 1844 came from and were destined to New York. The next most common destinations for barks clearing Apalachicola were Boston and Liverpool.²⁸

The queen of the sailing fleet was the full-rigged ship which had three masts, all of which bore square-rigging.²⁹ As was the case with the barks, about one-half of the ships that touched at Apalachicola during the 1843-1844 season were en route to or from New York. Only 12 percent of the ships leaving Apalachicola in 1844 cleared directly for Liverpool. If all the larger craft (brigs, barks, and ships) that departed Apalachicola between January and July 1844 are combined, the dominance of the port of New York in Apalachicola's cotton trade is evident. Fifty-nine percent of the departures were to New York compared with only 11 percent to Liverpool. Sixty percent of those larger vessels entering Apalachicola had also come from New York.³⁰

New York's dominance over Apalachicola's trade is curious since Apalachicola's exports almost exclusively were cotton, and New York had no textile industry. From New York, however, the cotton was transshipped to New England or European mills. The city had been the first American port to establish transatlantic shipping on a regular basis. As early as 1818 the Black Ball Line sailed between New York and Liverpool, keeping to an advertised schedule that was a welcome innovation. The certainty of their arrival and departure dates made these line ships popular, and their success inspired competitors to enter the lucrative trade as well.³¹ Operators of these packet lines found their east-bound cargoes unprofitable because Europe did not need or want New York's local products. They soon came to depend on southern cotton to fill their vessels. Southerners also relied

27. Durant and Durant, *Pictorial History*, 43. The average bark that served Apalachicola in 1844 was 364 tons.

28. Nineteen percent of the barks departing from Apalachicola in that season cleared for Liverpool, and 17 percent went to Boston.

29. The term "ship" technically can be applied only to this type of vessel. Schooners, barks, and brigs are not "ships."

30. When other European ports are included with the Liverpool figures, 14 percent of the brigs, barks, and ships leaving Apalachicola in 1844 sailed directly to European ports.

31. Albion, *Square-Riggers*, 20, 38.

on New York as a financial center. Marine insurance and commercial financing, for instance, were arranged more easily there than in any other port. Southern cotton destined for the mills of Manchester or Massachusetts thus was detoured through New York by fleets of coasting vessels.

Reliance solely upon shipping figures to determine where Apalachicola cotton was exported can be misleading. Though only 14 percent of the bigger vessels sailed directly to Europe in 1844, the volume of cotton destined there probably was much greater since the largest vessels with superior cargo capacity dominated the transatlantic trade. Tables One and Two tabulate where Apalachicola cotton was exported in the years for which statistics are available. On average about 40 percent of Apalachicola cotton went directly to Europe in the 1840s and 1850s, while New York receipts from the Florida port averaged 24 percent.³²

Since 60 percent of the larger boats that sailed into Apalachicola either had come from or were destined to New York and one-quarter of Apalachicola's cotton was shipped directly to New York, the bonds between these two ports obviously were strong. The neighboring gulf port of Mobile did not share this association with New York. An early scholar of the New York packet lines concluded that Mobile's cotton "did not travel to any extent by the way of New York."³³ Instead, during the 1850s Mobile sent between 35 and 50 percent of its cotton directly to New Orleans.³⁴ Apalachicola and Mobile, given their proximity to each other, had different trade patterns. Also, there was little contact between the two ports.

While Mobile was a strong trading partner of New Orleans, Apalachicola contributed very little to the Crescent City's receipts. New Orleans received less than 7 percent of Apalachicola's exports on average during the fifteen years prior to the Civil War. This amount is even more remarkable considering the number of vessels that sailed between the two ports. During the 1844 commercial season, thirty-nine schooners (46 percent of all schooners entering Apalachicola that year) arrived from New Orleans and forty-two (49 percent) cleared

32. Direct shipments to Liverpool averaged 31 percent.

33. Albion, *Square-Riggers*, 60.

34. Harriet E. Amos, *Cotton City: Urban Development in Antebellum Mobile* (Tuscaloosa, 1985), 24.

TABLE 1. APALACHICOLA FOREIGN EXPORTS*
Percentage of Total Bales of Cotton Exported

Year	Liverpool	Havre	Antwerp	Other	Total Europe
1843					46%
1845	31%	2%		8%	41%
1846	35%	5%		1%	41%
1847	27%	2%		4%	33%
1848	34%			6%	40%
1850	23%		7%		32%
1851	32%	7%	5%	2%	46%
1852	28%	1%	6%	6%	41%
1853	29%	3%	3%	3%	38%
1857	35%		4%		39%
1858	37%				37%

*Percentages were tabulated based upon a statistical year, August to July. See Apalachicola *Commercial Advertiser*, January 8, 1844; July 21, 1846; October 6, 1847; July 22, 1848; and March 10, 1858; Apalachicola *Commercial Advertiser Prices Current*, April 14, 1851; May 9, 1853.

Apalachicola for New Orleans.³⁵ Since so many boats were engaged in the New Orleans to Apalachicola shuttle, and so little of Apalachicola's exports moved to New Orleans, the east-bound leg of this round trip likely was so lucrative that it compensated for meager returns on the west-bound trip.³⁶ In fact, the account books of one schooner captain who sailed regularly between the two towns during two different seasons demonstrate that at least one vessel often lost money on the Florida to Louisiana run.³⁷

Between January and June 1851, Captain Robert Norris's schooner *General Clinch* ran between Apalachicola and New Orleans eight times. On each trip Norris tallied both his expenses and his income on freight. By season's end the vessel had made \$2,170.62 on the four east-bound runs, but had lost a total of \$145.88 on the voyages out of Apalachicola. The next year the deficits on the Apalachicola to New Orleans run were greater; he lost \$457.51 on the west-bound leg of his journeys. On one voyage to New Orleans Norris found no freight at all in

35. "Marine Intelligence" column, Apalachicola *Commercial Advertiser*, January 1-June 30, 1844.

36. The only other Apalachicola exports to New Orleans during the 1843-1844 commercial season amounted to 150 sacks of cotton seed, sixteen bales of cotton fabric, three bales of gunny bags, 238 sacks of coffee, and twenty-five cords of firewood. The piece goods undoubtedly were manufactured in Columbus, Georgia, at the head of river navigation. Apalachicola *Commercial Advertiser*, January 1-June 30, 1844.

37. Robert Norris Accounts, Manuscript Department, Perkins Library, Duke University.

Apalachicola, so he bought 150 bags of salt there for fifty cents each, transported them to New Orleans, and resold them for sixty-five cents. Even with the captain's enterprising efforts, the profit on the trip after lighterage and commissions amounted only to \$7.57.³⁸

As far as exports from Apalachicola were concerned, the port of Boston was a more significant trade partner than was New Orleans. Boston received an average of 20 percent of the cotton exported from Apalachicola in the years for which data exist. Francis Cabot Lowell, the Massachusetts textile pioneer, bought a large portion of the raw cotton he needed for his Boston factory from agents in Apalachicola.³⁹ A good deal of cotton moved northward from Apalachicola in the holds of Boston-based vessels. Ten percent of the larger vessels clearing the town in 1844 ran to the New England port. According to Samuel Eliot Morison, New Englanders also had an interest in cotton bound for New York, either by virtue of owning the cotton or the vessels.⁴⁰ The port of Providence, Rhode Island, also received a substantial amount of Apalachicola cotton. During seven of the ten years for which export figures exist, that port received more Apalachicola cotton than did New Orleans.

Apalachicola truly was a cotton port. It exported little else other than a few items used to fill vessels when enough cotton was unavailable. During the 1843-1844 shipping season, cotton exports totaled 105,934 bales.⁴¹ Other than the approximately 54,000 bales exported to New York in those months, vessels clearing Apalachicola for the northern port carried twenty-nine boxes of tobacco, several barrels of beeswax, one box of tallow, ten tons of iron, 4,806 "sticks" of cedar, 4,114 feet of cedar, sixty-two mahogany logs, and thirty-one cords of firewood. The iron and mahogany likely were being transshipped from another port as the river's hinterland did not produce them.

38. Norris began and ended each shipping season in New York. Cotton cargoes from Apalachicola to New York were so profitable that together with the proceeds from the New Orleans to Apalachicola runs, the vessel earned \$2,834.98 in 1851.

39. Charles Rogers to Francis C. Lowell, April 6, 1839, and Thomas L. Mitchell to C. H. Dabney, February 23, 1843, Niles Schuh private collection, Panama City, FL.

40. Samuel Eliot Morison, *Maritime History of Massachusetts, 1783-1860* (Boston, 1941), 228.

41. This figure was derived by adding all the cotton exports listed by vessel in the Apalachicola *Commercial Advertiser* between January 1-June 30, 1844.

TABLE 2. APALACHICOLA COASTWISE EXPORTS*
Percentage of Total Bales of Cotton Exported

Year	New York	Boston	Providence	New Orleans	Other	Total
1845	26%	17%	6%	6%	4%	59%
1846	32%	12%	7%	2%	6%	59%
1847	22%	17%	7%	15%	6%	67%
1848	32%	19%	5%	2%	2%	60%
1850	22%	24%	10%	7%	5%	68%
1851	24%	16%	4%	8%	2%	54%
1852	27%	20%	4%	1%	5%	59%
1853	16%	35%	6%	2%	3%	62%
1857	14%	34%	6%	1%	6%	61%
1858	25.5%	9.5%		24%	4%	63%

*Percentages were tabulated based upon a statistical year, August to July. See Apalachicola *Commercial Advertiser*, July 21, 1846; October 6, 1847; July 22, 1848; and March 10, 1858; Apalachicola *Commercial Advertiser Prices Current*, April 14, 1851; May 9, 1853.

Coasting schooners that year transported 150 sacks of cotton seed, sixteen bales of cotton fabric, three bales of gunny bags, 238 sacks of coffee, and twenty-five cords of firewood to New Orleans. Ships bound for Liverpool carried 154 "sticks" of cedar. Vessels sailing to Boston hauled 4,001 pipe staves, in addition to the usual cargo of cotton. Firewood and a few head of cattle went to Key West, and Havana received 525 empty barrels, thirty-one empty casks, and 5,000 staves.⁴² All the remaining cargo leaving Apalachicola was cotton.

If Apalachicola was an important cotton export center, it was a relatively insignificant port of entry. For example, the cotton that was exported from there during the 1842-1843 season had a value of \$3,068,500, while the value of imports totaled only \$44,771.⁴³ The exported cotton was worth about sixty-nine times the value of Apalachicola's incoming freight.

42. No cotton was exported to Havana during the period under study. The Cuban port supplied groceries to Apalachicola, and return vessels from Florida carried only empty containers. In 1844 Havana exported to Apalachicola 233,400 pounds of coffee; 69,646.5 gallons of molasses; 237,000 and twenty-two boxes of cigars; eight boxes, one barrel, and forty-three hogsheads of sugar; twenty-five cases of sweetmeats; five cases of cheese; and unspecified amounts of fruit and merchandise. These statistics were compiled using the 1844 season of the Apalachicola *Commercial Advertiser* which recorded the contents of most of the vessels clearing and entering port.

43. Apalachicola *Commercial Advertiser*, January 3, 1844.

Antebellum economic historians debate the degree of self-sufficiency attained on southern farms and plantations and the dimensions of the trade in foodstuffs and provisions flowing from the West to the Cotton South.⁴⁴ Some authorities have noted that southern plantations were so specialized in the production of cotton that the planters were compelled to import most of their food, a factor considered an important impetus to the development of the West.⁴⁵ Other scholars have concluded that the rural South was largely self-sufficient, and its imports of food really were negligible.⁴⁶

While Apalachicola imported quite a lot of western products, the river valley virtually was self-sufficient. For example, during the 1844 shipping season when the entire river valley received its supplies through Apalachicola, 117,488 pounds of corn were imported from New Orleans.⁴⁷ This sum seems rather large until one considers the size of the population, 146,000, of the river valley in that year.⁴⁸ If the importation figures are accurate, the per capita importation of corn in 1844 amounted to only .8 pounds. Even if the data published in the local newspaper were incomplete or inaccurate, the same conclusion can be reached by quadrupling the estimate of corn importation. The same was true for the importation of meat into the river valley. During

44. The term "western" included goods also raised in the border states. Although economic historians are interested in whether "western" products actually were grown in the western states, that issue is beyond the scope of this inquiry and, therefore, when used in this context the term refers to any commodities raised or made outside the Cotton South but which passed through New Orleans.

45. Louis Schmidt, "Internal Commerce and the Development of the National Economy," *Journal of Political Economy* 47 (December 1939), 798-822; Douglass C. North, *The Economic Growth of the United States, 1790-1860* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ, 1961), 101-03.

46. Robert E. Gallman, "Self-Sufficiency in the Cotton Economy of the Antebellum South," in William N. Parker, ed., *The Structure of the Cotton Economy of the Antebellum South* (Washington, DC, 1970), 5-24; Diane Lindstrom, "Southern Dependence Upon Interregional Grain Supplies: A Review of the Trade Flows, 1840-1860," in *ibid.*, 101-13; Albert Fishlow, *American Railroads and the Transformation of the Antebellum Economy* (Cambridge, 1965), reprinted in part in Stuart Bruchey, ed., *Cotton and the Growth of the American Economy: 1790-1860* (New York, 1967), 98-107.

47. This figure was compiled using ships' manifests recorded weekly in the Apalachicola *Commercial Advertiser*, January 1-June 30, 1844. Calculations were made using the following equivalencies: one bushel of corn equals fifty-six pounds; one sack of corn equals three bushels.

48. The Florida counties that relied on the river for transportation included Jackson, Washington, Calhoun, Franklin, and Gadsden. Alabama counties

the 1844 season, the per capita importation of pork and beef collectively amounted to less than one quarter of a pound.⁴⁹

More than any other commodity, salt was the cargo of incoming vessels. From January through June 1844, 2,197.3 tons of salt were landed at the Apalachicola wharf.⁵⁰ Salt and other bulky commodities such as hay, potatoes, and lime were used as ballast by vessels destined for Apalachicola and other southern ports.⁵¹ Ship captains preferred to carry these commodities at cheap rates rather than to procure other ballast that paid them nothing.⁵²

Depending on their itineraries and their punctuality, the vessels calling at Apalachicola could be categorized as either "transients," "regular traders," or "packets." The "transient" boats moved from port to port at the whim of their captains. They picked up a cargo wherever one could be found and carried it to whatever port was required. Often the officers corresponded with each other in care of their home ports. Two letters written from Apalachicola describe the spontaneity required of such vessels. Captain Edward B. Jenkins in 1840 wrote a fellow seaman: "I had the opportunity of loading for this place soon after you left and took in Eleven hundred barrels . . . had a fine

bordering the river included Henry, Barbour, and Russell. The Georgia counties were Baker, Decatur, Dooly, Early, Harris, Lee, Marion, Muscogee, Stewart, Sumter, and Talbot. Altogether, the population of the river valley in 1840, including slaves, equaled 146,160. Manuscript returns of the Sixth United States Census, 1840, Alabama, Georgia, and Florida, Schedules I (population) and II (slaves).

49. Apalachicola imported 31,600 pounds of pork and 2,000 pounds of beef during the 1844 season. This calculation assumes that a barrel of meat weighed 200 pounds. Bacon, listed separately in ships' manifests, was not included in the above calculation because it often was shipped in casks which were of varying measure. Apalachicola imported only 214 casks and fourteen hogsheads of bacon in that season.
50. About one-half of this amount came from Mobile.
51. The Irish potato, which eventually became a southern staple, originally was grown only in New England because it was believed the crop could only be cultivated in cold climates. After 1850 the potato commonly was grown in Georgia, but the southern variety had a tendency to rot and, therefore, was not marketable. James C. Bonner, *A History of Georgia Agriculture, 1732-1860* (Athens, 1964), 168. In the 1844 season more than 68,000 pounds of potatoes were imported into Apalachicola.
52. Albion, *Square-Riggers*, 71; George Rogers Taylor, *The Transportation Revolution, 1815-1860* (New York, 1951), 170. Near the western end of Dog Island is Ballast Cove where ballast rocks once were unloaded after coming into St. George Sound. The author found a pile of rocks not native to Florida half-buried in the sand when anchored there in the early 1980s.

passage of two days only from N. O."⁵³ Captain Edmond B. Mallet in 1852 wrote a letter from Apalachicola reporting on his and others' whereabouts: "I am all ready for Sea bound to Boston with a Six thousand dollar freight in the Ship— rather better than I could of don [sic] in New Orleans. . . . tell [Captain Strickland] that Old Crowell is hear [sic] landing for Boston tell Capt. S. I arrived here the Same day Crowell did thirty one days from Havre."⁵⁴

The life of a transient sailor was anything but idyllic. Black sailors were arrested and jailed for the duration of their stay in Apalachicola.⁵⁵ Even white crewmen sometimes were treated little better than slaves. Captain Edward Marshall wrote from Apalachicola in 1843 that he had picked up three crewmen in Boston who had caused him nothing but trouble. The trio refused to work, whereupon Marshall went to town and had them jailed. The captain then discovered that two other crew members had been "stolen out of the Ship by some Boat from Town."⁵⁶

Contrasted with the transient vessels were the "regular traders" that generally sailed between two or more specific ports. Robert Norris's movements aboard the schooner *General Clinch* during the 1851 season are characteristic of a regular trader. He began and ended the cotton season in New York, but during the shipping season he made eight passages between New Orleans and Apalachicola.⁵⁷ Once the cotton season had ended, Norris and other captains found there was no freight to be had at Apalachicola, and for that reason they found work for their vessels elsewhere during the summer. During the 1844 season, the schooners *Lion*, *Seminole*, and *Textor* all ran between New

53. Edward B. Jenkins to Thomas C. Lennan, June 3, 1840, in mss. box 37, P. K. Yonge Library of Florida History, University of Florida, Gainesville.

54. E. B. Mallet to "Friend Thomas," March 15, 1852, mss. box 15, P. K. Yonge Library.

55. Since it was unlawful for free blacks to enter Florida, the captain of any boat that had black crew members was required to post bond and pay any expenses incurred in jailing them. Because this was bad for Apalachicola business, local merchants petitioned the state assembly in 1849 to amend the law. The resulting legislation provided that boats having free blacks aboard must anchor no nearer to Apalachicola than five miles. No communication between them and the crews of other vessels was allowed. *Apalachicola Commercial Advertiser*, January 4 and 25, 1849.

56. Edward Marshall to William Rice, March 1, 1843, in Niles Schuh private collection.

57. Robert Norris Accounts.

Orleans and Apalachicola but cleared for New York at season's end.⁵⁸

Packet liners were the third category of vessel that served Apalachicola. Packets could be of any type of boat from sloop to ship so long as they ran on an advertised schedule. The smallest packet boat to serve Apalachicola was the sloop *Ellen* which left weekly for St. Marks in 1840. It carried up to six, passengers and twenty barrels.⁵⁹ Packet schooners, such as the *Octavia* which ran between New Orleans and Apalachicola in 1844, also were available.⁶⁰ Sailing ships and steam-propelled sternwheelers advertised they would make regular trips between the two points. One steam propeller boat ran between New Orleans and Apalachicola in 1844.⁶¹

Packet service between these two ports continued throughout the 1850s. The steamship *America* made regular trips during the season beginning in 1852.⁶² Ship operations were suspended in January 1854, "in consequence of the high price of coal," but the company promised to resume trade again when the price of fuel had declined "to a living price."⁶³ The ship was back in service in the fall, advertising it would leave New Orleans "about every ten days."⁶⁴ The *America* continued its service to New Orleans for at least four more years.⁶⁵ The Southern Steamship Company also called bimonthly at Apalachicola during the 1857 and 1858 seasons. The Southern line ships *Atlantic* and *Calhoun* sailed from New Orleans and called each day at another port beginning with Pensacola, then Apalachicola, St. Marks, Cedar Key, and Tampa, before reaching Key West and reversing the order.⁶⁶ Another packet line to run between New Orleans and Apalachicola applied for a Florida charter in 1858.⁶⁷

58. The movements of vessels calling on Apalachicola were noted in the *Apalachicola Commercial Advertiser*, January 1, 1844-June 30, 1844.

59. Lovett, "Excerpts and Articles," 56, quoting the *Apalachicola Gazette*, March 21, 1840.

60. *Apalachicola Commercial Advertiser*, November 23, 1844.

61. The steam propeller *Florida* arrived from New York in 1844. *Apalachicola Commercial Advertiser*, December 21, 1844.

62. *Columbus (Georgia) Enquirer*, November 9, 1852.

63. *Columbus (Georgia) Times and Sentinel*, January 31, 1854.

64. *Columbus (Georgia) Enquirer*, October 24, 1854.

65. *Apalachicola Commercial Advertiser*, March 10, 1858.

66. *Albany (Georgia) Patriot*, May 28, 1857; *Apalachicola Commercial Advertiser*, March 10, 1858.

67. *Columbus (Georgia) Enquirer*, June 22, 1858. Whether the "Apalachicola and New Orleans Steam Navigation Company" ever began operations is unknown.

Apalachicola had a bimonthly packet service to Charleston during two business seasons, but New York packet lines were the most numerous of all.⁶⁸ Elisha Hurlbut, a New Yorker, originated the first New York to Apalachicola packet line in 1825. Service was irregular during the first five years of its existence, but in 1830 Hurlbut announced a bimonthly schedule for the line.⁶⁹ By 1843 the Hurlbut line employed three ships and three brigs and promised to “sail punctually as advertised” during the season.⁷⁰ The following season Hurlbut added a fourth ship to the line, but two of his vessels did not call at Apalachicola.⁷¹

The vessels of the Hurlbut line that shuttled between New York and Apalachicola in 1844 did not follow the “cotton triangle” attributed to its New York/Mobile packet line.⁷² Robert Albion concluded that since Mobile had only cotton to offer as out-going freight, the vessels could find no cargo during the summer months before the new crop of cotton was harvested. Therefore, Hurlbut sent his vessels from Mobile to Liverpool at the end of the season. The ship transported general freight and passengers from Europe to New York, then sailed southward during the cotton marketing season for another cargo of cotton. According to historians, the Mobile packets eventually began to sail the “triangle” twice a year, and direct trips from Mobile to New York became scarce by 1850.⁷³ Hurlbut’s Apalachicola liners did not follow this shipping pattern, however, even though that port had nothing to offer as out-going freight at the end of the cotton season. None of Hurlbut’s Apalachicola liners cleared for Europe in 1844.⁷⁴

A rival packet service, the Star Line, also served as a New York to Apalachicola shuttle service in 1844 without making the triangle. This line advertised that it would use two ships and six

68. *Columbus (Georgia) Enquirer*, April 14 and September 28, 1842.

69. Amos, *Cotton City*, 22.

70. Lovett, “Excerpts and Articles,” 22. The price of passage was \$40, excluding liquors, and all the vessels were coppered and copper fastened.

71. *Apalachicola Commercial Advertiser*, September 9, 1844. The ships *Uncas* and *Emblem* never were mentioned in the *Commercial Advertiser’s* marine intelligence.

72. Albion, *Square-Riggers*, 59, 70; Amos, *Cotton City*, 22.

73. Albion, *Square-Riggers*, 60.

74. The only exception was the ship *Tuskina* that was owned by Hurlbut, but not advertised as being a line ship. It formerly had been a New York/Mobile packet, but sailed the “cotton triangle” after 1839. In the fall of 1844, it arrived in Apalachicola from New York and cleared for Liverpool.

brigs but, like the Hurlbut line, two of the vessels never entered Apalachicola Bay.⁷⁵ The vessels of both lines made one or two round trips between the American ports during January and July 1844, and most were back in operation as the new season began in the fall of that year.

Most of the vessels calling at Apalachicola in 1844 were not packets, nor did they generally follow the "triangle." Of the 14 percent of all the larger vessels leaving Apalachicola that sailed directly for Europe in that year, only one-half of those on which complete information exists made the classic triangular voyage by arriving from a northern American port and clearing Apalachicola for Europe.⁷⁶ Instead, most of the large vessels that called on Apalachicola in 1844 came from and were destined to New York.

The saltwater craft that arrived at antebellum Apalachicola, whether diminutive sloops or tall ships, whether packets that sailed on schedule or transients that followed only fortune, all relied on cotton as their mainstay. They arrived in Florida's premier cotton port at the opening of every commercial season, and they returned there as long as they could count on making a cargo.

Unfortunately for Apalachicola, its golden years were numbered. It thrived during the steamboat era when the people of the southern interior relied exclusively on rivers for transporting their crops to market. But the vagaries of southern rivers made them unreliable for year-round transportation, and they proved no match for the more dependable railroad. Soon, up-river cotton traveled directly by rail to Atlantic ports, such as Savannah, rather than make the circuitous maritime journey around the expanse of the Florida peninsula. Without a healthy cotton market, Apalachicola soon was abandoned by the fleet that once filled its harbor.

75. Apalachicola *Commercial Advertiser*, November 9, 1844.

76. Albion, *Square-Riggers*, 20, 38. These were the barks *Alabama*, *Colossus*, and *Mersey*, and the ships *Blanchard*, *Charlemagne*, and *Manco*. "Marine Intelligence," in *Apalachicola Commercial Advertiser*, January 1-June 30, 1844.