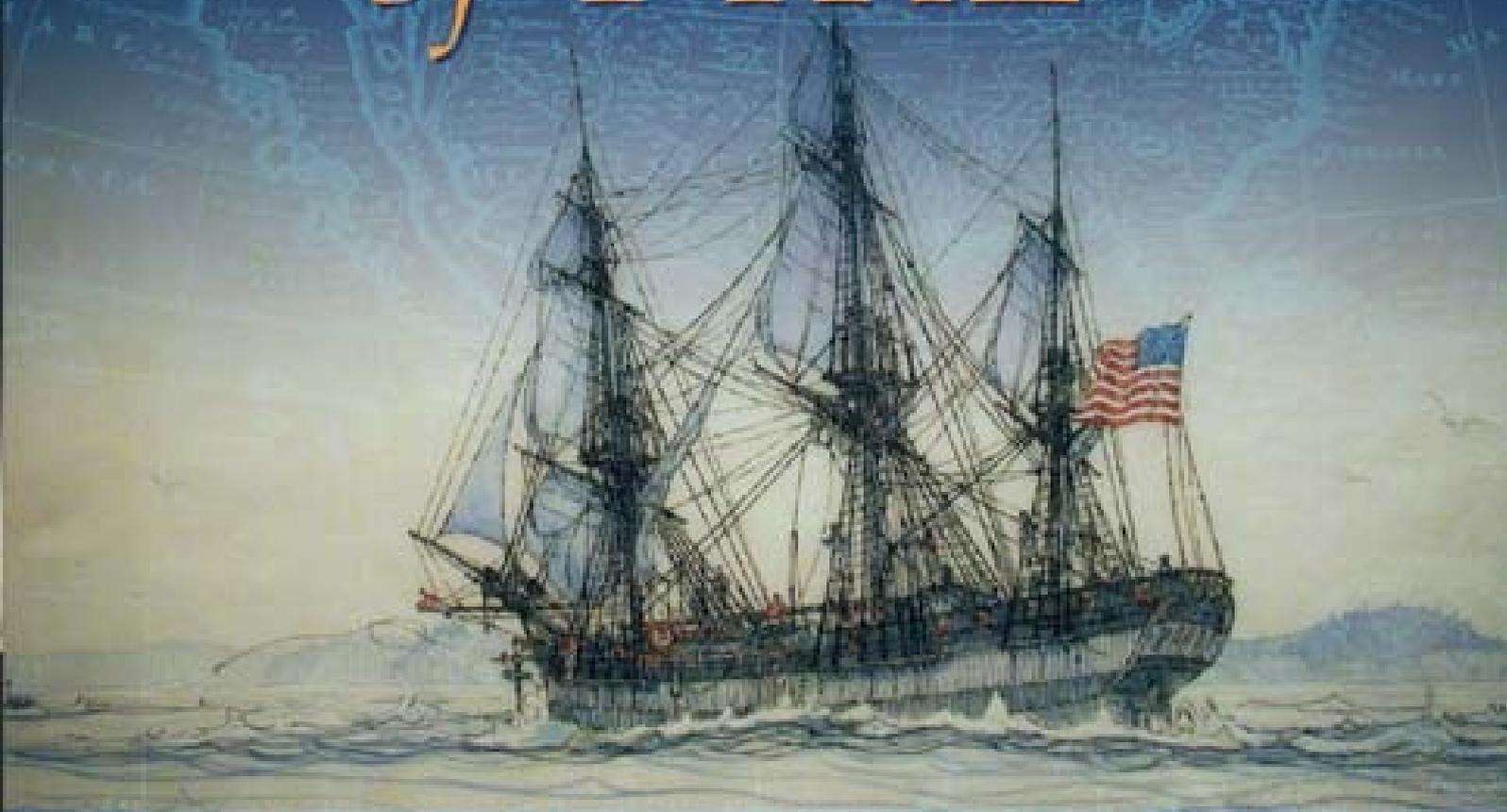


JOHN KENDRICK'S
DARING AMERICAN ODYSSEY
IN THE PACIFIC

MORNING
of FIRE



SCOTT RIDLEY

Morning
— of —
Fire

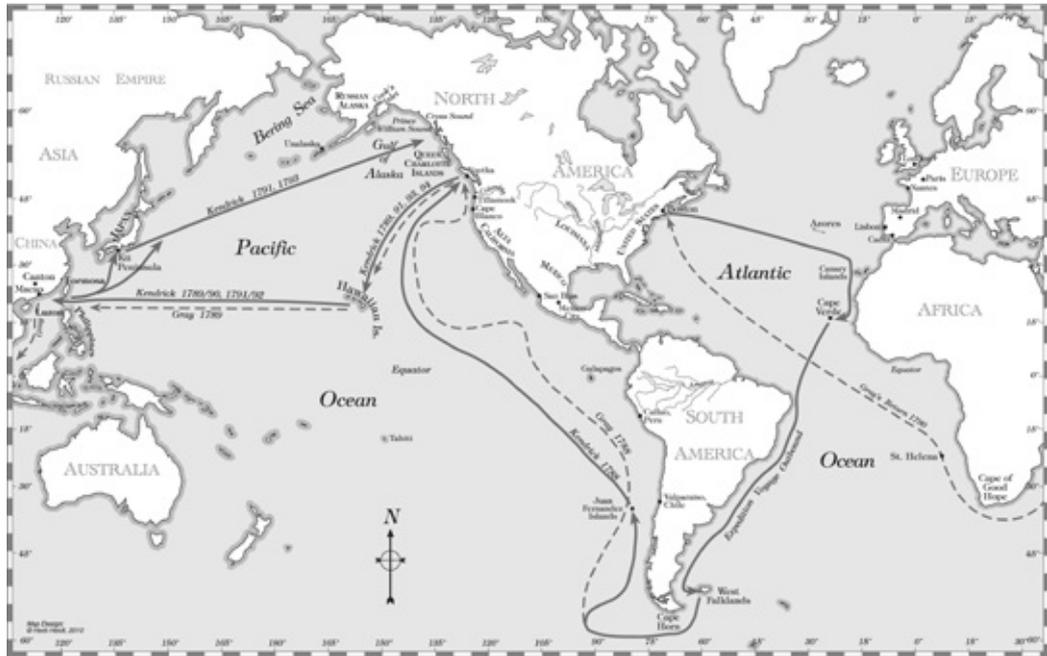
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A voyage of such enterprise might truly be deemed a novel undertaking from a Country but so lately emerg'd from the ravages of a long, inhuman and bloody war...

—JOHN HOSKINS, BOSTON



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PROLOGUE

Morning of fire

MARCH 4, 1788—through a gray, cloudy morning and against a rising wind, two small American ships made their way off the coast of Staten Land near the tip of South America. The *Lady Washington*, a sixty-foot sloop carrying eleven men, and the *Columbia Rediviva*, a snubhulled brig of eighty-three feet with a captain and crew of forty, scudded west like specks in the vast ocean. Under the rising wind the seas were running high and irregular, setting a strong current from the southwest. The ships were headed around Cape Horn and arriving late for this passage. Storm season had begun, and gales could appear out of nowhere, whipping swells to monstrous heights. For the next fifteen hundred miles, they would be in one of the most treacherous stretches on earth.

Beyond that danger lay the immense realm of the Pacific, the worlds of native people completely alien to them, and the enmity of the Spanish, who would soon issue orders to seize these ships. Although they seemed to be alone at a remote end of the earth, they were caught in a volatile tide of events from which there would be no turning.

THE LATE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY was a time of global turmoil. For three hundred years, a papal edict had largely prevailed as a backdrop to territorial treaties and agreements. In 1493, seeking to settle a conflict over the discoveries of new non-Christian lands, Pope Alexander VI had divided the globe, granting the seas and new lands in the Eastern Hemisphere—Cape Verde through Africa, India, and Asia—to Portugal, and the Western Hemisphere—ranging from the Americas to as far as the Philippines—to Spain. By the late 1780s, Portugal's fortunes had faded, and the overstretched Spanish Empire was

starting to disintegrate. Driven by the ambition of merchants, a renaissance in science, and new philosophies of freedom and self-government, the myths and superstitions that held the Old World together began to fall away and modern nations started to stir.

At the heart of that change, the fledgling United States faced a future that was fragile and uncertain. The Revolution left the new nation weak, divided, and deeply in debt. Although America had won an impossible war against one of the world's superpowers, independence was not yet secure. Britain had largely shut down American trade. The economy was cash starved, and internal dissent was rising. In 1788, America's first ambassador to Britain, John Adams, headed home from London, frustrated that he was unable to break the British stranglehold. The prevailing opinion of the British court was that America's experiment with democracy would soon fail and the devastated colonies would come clamoring to rejoin the empire.

THE VOYAGE OF THE *LADY WASHINGTON* and *Columbia Rediviva* was a desperate bid to break the British stranglehold on trade and gain an American presence in the Pacific. It marked America's first expedition of enterprise and discovery. The commander, John Kendrick, had been a charismatic captain of privateers during the Revolution. A master navigator and visionary, he was a man fate had a habit of casting into the middle of events. In a historic letter to the Continental Congress in 1778, Benjamin Franklin informed the anxious delegates that France had at last decided to join the United States in its rebellion against Britain. As evidence of France's sincere faith, Franklin wrote that King Louis decided to grant Kendrick and another captain four hundred thousand French livres for capturing two prize merchant vessels. The award and stories of Kendrick's daring eventually made him a well-known figure on the Atlantic seaboard.

While no known portrait of John Kendrick exists, contemporaries describe him as being physically impressive and possessing great strength—a bold thinker, a trusted captain, a man who plunged into the unknown wilderness

and, according to some, turned into a renegade and leader of a “banditti of renegadoes.” Born of a stock of blueeyed Yankee farmers and sailors, Kendrick had a clear gift to charm potential adversaries and win the loyalty of his men. His dry sense of humor easily took in more serious gentlemen and puzzled historians. The favor he showed his crews, at times over his officers, grew from his own rise from below deck and an egalitarian sense of humanity backed by a hatred of tyrants. In a time of stiff-necked and whitewigged ship’s officers, Kendrick was the rare commander who was unafraid to break rules or protocol or to adopt the dress and learn the languages of the people he came among. His generosity and ability to entertain made him the favorite of native people. But he also possessed a patriarchal seriousness that could give way to fury. And sometimes that fury turned deadly. Although not strict in his religious beliefs, Kendrick was deeply ingrained with the sense of sacrifice and determination of his Congregational forebears. Through years of voyaging, he maintained an uncanny ability to persevere despite setbacks and fierce odds. Somewhere in him was a blind faith and an iron constitution that allowed him to survive the disease and deprivation that wasted many other men. He also possessed a subtlety that made him a surprisingly good strategist and frontier diplomat. From that generation which had achieved an unimaginable victory in winning independence, Kendrick remained dedicated throughout his life to what was known as the “glorious cause” of liberty. Franklin, Jefferson, and John Adams knew of him, as did George Washington. In time, other presidents would come to know his name as well, as they attempted for nearly fifty years to probe the events and claims left in his wake.

KENDRICK’S LIFE AND HIS LANDMARK VOYAGE embodied that harsh morning that was the turn of the eighteenth century. Born in 1740 on a small hilly farm in East Harwich, Cape Cod, John Kendrick was the third of seven children of Solomon Kendrick and Elizabeth Atkins. Their home bordered lands known as “Potonumecut” that stretched east along Pleasant Bay and held the remnant native tribes of the outer Cape: the Pamet people, the Nauset, the

Monomoyick, the Saquatucket. Kendrick grew up among these native people and a close-knit group of relatives along the marshy shore. To the south was the farm of wild Sam Crook, a Monomoyick who ran his own whaling vessel. To the west were his cousins, the Snows. To the north on Tar Kiln Creek lived his uncle Jonathan Kendrick, the local physician. At the edge of Round Cove was the cedar bark *wetu* of old Wahenanun, who still spoke the Wampanoag language and practiced the ways of her people. And a half mile to the south was the grave of the Pilgrim guide Squanto, hidden on the high bank of Muddy Creek.

Kendrick's grandfather, Edward Kendrick, had arrived in Harwich around 1700 and married Elizabeth Snow, the granddaughter of Nicholas Snow, a holder of extensive lands and one of the "old-comers" from Plymouth who first settled the Cape. Kendrick's father, Solomon, born sometime during the winter of 1705/6, was master of a whaling vessel who was famous in local lore for having his boats attacked by a whale they had wounded far offshore on Georges Bank. "Tis a wonder they were not all destroyed," a contemporary account read, "for the Whale continued striking and raging in a most furious manner in the midst of them," destroying one boat and killing a man. Kendrick's boyhood was spent in his father's formidable shadow. Following local tradition, Kendrick went to sea with him by the time he was fourteen. By his late teens, he was sailing with crews of men from Potonumecut. In 1762, he came ashore briefly at the end of the Seven Years' War to serve under a cousin, Jabez Snow, on a militia mission to the frontier of western New York.

As trouble with Parliament and the king mounted in the 1760s, his father moved off to Nova Scotia where he became one of the proprietors of the town of Barrington.

Staying behind, John Kendrick came of age in the defiant atmosphere of the coffeehouses and taverns of Boston. Here, he was in the midst of the firestorm of opposition to Parliament's Stamp Act of 1765 and the hated Townshend Acts, which usurped local authority and levied an array of onerous taxes. As strife increased on the waterfront, he may have been involved in the

widespread boycott of British goods and the burning of Boston's customs house, or riots over seizure and impressment of American sailors for British ships.

During this time, Kendrick also frequented the south coast of Massachusetts, where talk of liberty and independence was rife and smuggling was rampant. Perhaps through his grandmother Atkins's family on Martha's Vineyard, he met Huldah Pease, the daughter of an Edgartown seafaring clan. Shortly after Christmas in 1767 they married and settled for a time on the island. Subsequent colonial records show that Kendrick mastered the whaling brig *Lydia* to the grounds off Cape Verde, and took the schooner *Rebecca* into the Gulf of Mexico, where he negotiated his way out of being seized by the Spanish *garda costa*.

Family tradition holds that on the rainy night of December 16, 1773, John Kendrick was part of the legendary band that boarded two East India Company ships at Griffin's Wharf in Boston and dumped 342 chests of tea into the harbor. Thumbing his nose at the British shortly after, he is said to have been master of the brig *Undutied Tea*.

At the outbreak of the Revolution, Kendrick may have smuggled powder and arms from the Caribbean with the sloop *Fanny*, whose owners were under contract with a secret committee of the Continental Congress. In May 1776, the *Fanny* delivered a cargo of muskets, double-bridged gun locks, and cannon and pistol powder for the secret committee. In December, the owners applied to the Massachusetts Council for Kendrick to embark on the *Fanny* as a privateer. Onshore at Dartmouth (New Bedford), Kendrick made the sloop into a brigantine by adding a second mast and rerigging her sails. On July 10, 1777, he departed with 104 men for the English Channel and the French port of Nantes, where American privateers gathered. Here the *Fanny* became known as the *Boston*, and his crew the "Boston men."

His first large prizes were the West Indiamen *Hanover Planter* and the *Clarendon*, which Kendrick and the *General Mercer* out of Cape Ann took after a battle with two twenty-eight-gun frigates. The prizes were carrying rich

cargoes of muscovado sugar and rum from Jamaica to London, and tried to disguise themselves as vessels from a neutral port. Brought into Nantes in mid-August 1777, the captured ships caused an international stir. France had not yet entered the war, and Kendrick's prizes tested French neutrality and engaged Benjamin Franklin in correspondence with King Louis XVI and Congress. Discussion of the prize ships among the king's ministers helped to precipitate the entry of France into the war. In the fall of 1778, Kendrick returned home a hero and was initiated into St. Andrew's Lodge of Freemasons, which owned the Green Dragon Inn where the Boston Tea Party had been planned. Members of the lodge included Paul Revere and many of Boston's revolutionaries. With his prize money from the French king, Kendrick bought a house, wharf, and store at a riverfront site called the Narrows in the village of Wareham on the south coast of Massachusetts and built the first public school there.

Settled in the Narrows that winter, Kendrick's family was safe from the British fleet that had raided the coast, stripping Martha's Vineyard of livestock and food stores and reducing the population to near starvation. Up the tidal Warnico River, the warehouse and store were also safe from warships shelling the shore and burning ships and fishing vessels where they lay at anchor. Anguished at what was happening, Kendrick sailed off in late winter to command another privateer, the *Count d'Estaing*, which he owned in partnership with the New York patriot Isaac Sears. Southwest of the Azores island of Flores, he encountered a British frigate, the twenty-eight-gun *Brutus*, and her tender with ten guns. Kendrick was forced to strike his colors, and he and his crew were locked below as prisoners on the *d'Estaing* from April 8 to 22. The British captain forced as many prisoners as possible to sign on with him. Finally, impatient with those who held out, he set Kendrick and thirty of his men in a boat. They made a thirty-mile trip to Graciosa—one of the central islands of the Azores—where they were well treated by the inhabitants. After two weeks, they embarked in their boat again for the main island of Terceira, where the governor of the islands hosted them for two weeks and arranged passage on a Swedish vessel to Lisbon, a thousand miles

to the east.

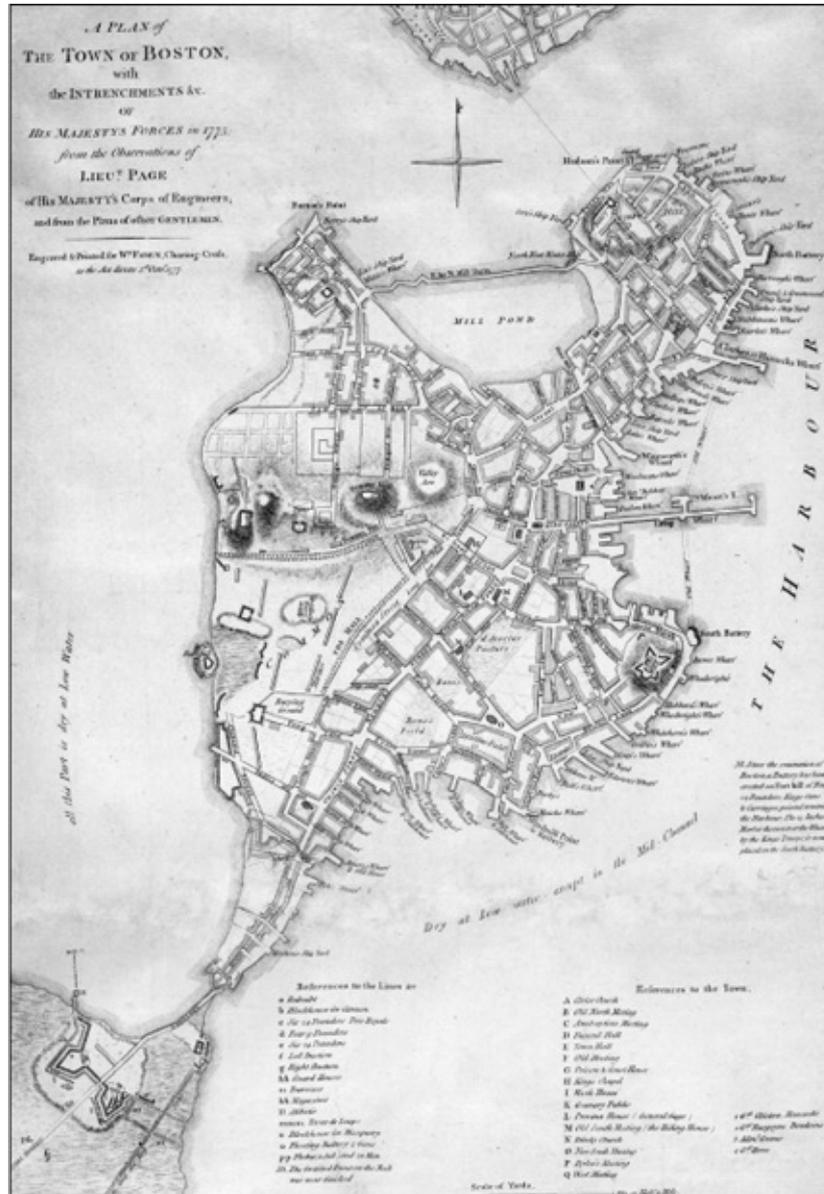
At Lisbon, with no money and only the shirt on his back, the affable Kendrick won the support of a local American sympathizer, Arnold Henry Dohrman, who fed and housed him and his men. On Sunday afternoon, June 13, 1779, Kendrick wrote to Benjamin Franklin from Lisbon reporting the capture of his vessel and praising the kindness of the people of the Azores and Dohrman, “a Sensiar Friend to the Cause of Liberty.” Kendrick said he and his men were setting out that day for Spain, the first leg of a long trek back to France.

After surviving a two-month, thousand-mile journey with his remaining crew, Kendrick returned to America with the French fleet. He then left for the Caribbean with the *Marianna* to take at least one more rich prize, a Dutch merchant vessel from the plantations of Surinam carrying five tons of cotton, eight tons of cocoa, and one hundred fifty tons of coffee.

Shortly before the British surrendered at Yorktown in 1781, Kendrick came ashore. In his sporadic visits home he had managed to father six children, and now he buckled down to making his way in the new nation. Like many of those who survived the war, the rich and dangerous life he led seemed to become part of a storied past. He had no idea that his greatest adventures still lay ahead. In the harsh morning that was rising, as much as any major military campaign or act of government, the odyssey he would embark on would spark changes that would shape world history and the future of the new nation.

PART I

The Journey Outward



CHAPTER ONE

Out of a Time of Great Peril

Boston

FEBRUARY–OCTOBER 1787

JOSEPH BARRELL HURRIED along the snow-crueted lane of Marlborough Street in the weak light at the end of the day. It was early February, 1787, and the chill wind off the harbor carried the smell of the tide. Under his greatcoat, Barrell clutched a packet of papers, a detailed plan he had worked out to launch a daring expedition of two ships into a little-known part of the world. The voyage would be America's first across the broad expanse of the Pacific, and shipmasters in the next generation would regard it as one of the most remarkable journeys ever undertaken by the United States. It marked a desperate venture in a perilous time.

After the victorious Revolution and euphoria of the Peace Treaty of 1783, an economic depression had settled over villages and farms. Port cities and their harbors were left reeling from the war. Inflation was rampant. There was no common currency, state governments were weak, and representatives to the Congress of the Confederation bickered over fundamental issues, threatening to secede. Heavy debts owed to Britain for damages in the war were due, and the prospects for international trade and revenue were bleak. In a punishing move, the king had closed all British ports from Canada and the British Isles to the Caribbean to the remaining American ships. France and Spain, likewise, offered no viable trade agreements for their harbors or colonies. Each of those kingdoms wanted the United States as a dependent client nation hemmed in between the Appalachians and the Atlantic.

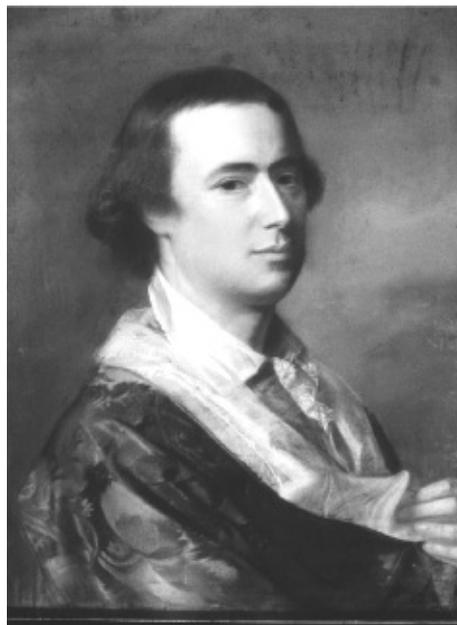
Securing independence was far from certain, and Barrell, a prominent

merchant who had been a member of the clandestine Sons of Liberty, feared along with many others that the blood and suffering of the long revolution might come to nothing. Frustration in the countryside had grown to the point that a popular uprising had broken out. As he trudged along the street, hired militia were hunting through heavy snows in the hills of western Massachusetts, searching for farmers and shopkeepers who had taken arms against what they saw as a corrupt state government. The unrest had been spreading for a year and a half in Massachusetts, Connecticut, Rhode Island, and New Hampshire over high taxes, controversial court procedures, and the taking of farms and homesteads for nonpayment of bills. Courts had been blocked from holding session in order to stop the seizures. And in a violent confrontation on January 25, three rebel regiments totaling fifteen hundred men attempted to capture the Springfield Armory. They were led by Captain Daniel Shays, a veteran who was once honored by the Marquis de Lafayette for his bravery. Some believed a new revolution was brewing.

At Mount Vernon, where he had retired after the war, the usually reserved George Washington became apoplectic when he was told there were as many as fifteen thousand disaffected yeomen in New England ready to take up arms. To his friend Henry Lee, Washington wrote, "I am mortified beyond expression when I view the clouds that have spread over the brightest morn that ever dawned in any country.... What a triumph for the advocates of despotism, to find that we are incapable of governing ourselves ..."

A push was on for a new federal government. But without trade, without customs revenue, without taxes, it would be impossible to support a new central government and succeed in securing independence. Shipping was the soul of early commerce, and breaking the Old World stranglehold on American vessels was essential to the survival of the fledgling nation. Barrell's plan held a way to travel beyond the Atlantic ports closed to American ships, open an American gateway to the Pacific, and establish a base for the new nation on the far side of the continent. It was an audacious leap to send two ships and a relatively small crew of fifty men into the largely unknown reaches of the globe.

When he arrived at the home of Thomas Bulfinch on Bowdoin Square, Barrell was brought into the parlor before a warm fire. Among a circle of trusted friends he laid out his plans. Next to Barrell's packet of papers, Bulfinch opened a leather-bound copy of James Cook's journal from his third voyage, which described the exotic and unknown expanse of the Pacific and served as the inspiration for Barrell's expedition. In 1776, Britain's King George III had dispatched Cook to the Pacific with two ships in search of the Northwest Passage, rumored for centuries to be a link between the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans. While Cook didn't find the prized passage, he "discovered" the Hawaiian Islands and a treasure of rich furs on the northern Pacific coast of America. In China, furs that Cook's men had purchased from the American natives in return for trinkets sold for as much as one hundred and twenty Spanish dollars for a single sea otter pelt. This was more than double a full seaman's wages for a year. The prospect of gathering fortunes sent the crews of Cook's two ships into near mutiny to return to the American coast. Two seamen "seduced by the prevailing notion of making a fortune" stole a fixed-oar cutter and disappeared, never to be seen again. Duty and the lash drove the rest of the crew homeward. The fortune in furs was still waiting for those daring to venture out.



Joseph Barrell by John Singleton Copley. Joseph Barrell was a member of a large Boston merchant family

with relatives posted at offices in the Caribbean, London, and India. An ardent federalist, he supported the vision of an expanding nation and later became a prominent land speculator in Ohio, Kentucky, and Georgia.

Barrell had already been involved with the first two American ships sent to China on the established track eastward around Africa's Cape of Good Hope. The *Harriet* had gone out from Massachusetts on an aborted voyage in 1783. And the *Empress of China*, which carried thirty tons of Barrell's New England ginseng, left New York in 1784. Although the *Empress* made a moderate profit, Barrell found that the market for ginseng was limited and Chinese merchants wanted silver and gold coins, which were scarce in the new republic. Reading Cook's journal, he seized upon the idea of using the highly prized furs as a substitute for money. Following the pattern described in Cook's journal, Barrell outlined a triangular trade of New England goods and trinkets for sea otter furs from Pacific Northwest tribes; an exchange of furs for tea, silk, and other goods at Macao; and a homeward voyage laden with rich Chinese cargo. There were two chances at profits, and Barrell worked out costs and contingencies in detail. He concluded that in a short time a rich trade with the East could prove "superior to any the country enjoys at present." To firmly secure this trade, the Pacific expedition would also seek to purchase lands on the Northwest Coast. Barrell wanted to establish an American outpost "at least equal to what Hudson's-bay is to Great Britain," and extend the new nation by claims of possession. And even more dramatic, Barrell proposed that the expedition search for the legendary Northwest Passage. If it could be found, the waterway would unlock the vast interior of the continent and open a new trade route to the East for Americans.

The brazen plan reflected Barrell's personal ambition and his broader desperation for the new nation to succeed. He calculated that the expedition's ships, supplies, men, and trade goods would need an investment of forty-nine thousand dollars, a small fortune at the time. But despite the cost and wild reach of Barrell's plan, his reasoning was convincing and the prospect for trade was attractive. Fourteen shares were soon divided among his circle of friends as a joint venture. Barrell took four shares, and two shares each went

to his new partners: young Charles Bulfinch, who would become America's premier architect; Crowell Hatch, a Boston captain; Samuel Brown, a Boston merchant and shipowner; John Derby, a Salem merchant whose family owned and provisioned ships; and John M. Pintard, a financier based in New York.

They knew that carrying out the voyage was fraught with difficulty. Spain would resist any encroachment in the Pacific, and the route westward around South America's Cape Horn was greatly feared. The two ships would have to withstand immense punishment, and there were few vessels available. Boston, like other port cities, had been devastated by the British during the first two years of the war. Shipyards were wrecked, and hundreds of ships up and down the coast had been seized and taken to auction at Liverpool or burned to the waterline where they lay anchored. New ships were hard to come by. The shipyards that survived were shorthanded, and the few ships being framed were going to foreign owners who could pay in cash. Adding to the expense, the hulls of the expedition's ships would need to be sheathed in copper to ward off wood-boring teredo worms, barnacles, and rot.

The voyage would also be extraordinarily long—more than two years—and require a large amount of provisions, as well as a mountain of trade goods and ship stores to maintain the vessels. There was also a question of whether seasoned men would sign on. Although there was an exotic allure to the Pacific, colored by tales of island paradises and unrestrained sex with beautiful women, the ships were headed for dangerous, uncharted waters, and it was well-known that long voyages like this commonly lost a quarter or more of the crew to scurvy and other diseases.

The key to attracting good men and ensuring success for the expedition rested on finding the right commander. New England was full of blue water captains, but this one would have to be both a seasoned warrior and a diplomat who could negotiate dangers at sea and along unknown coasts. It would take someone experienced in the care of a crew on such a long journey, someone who could hold the hearts of his men and fire their determination through soul-wrenching events. Moreover, he would have to be a master

navigator who appreciated the dream of an American outpost on the Pacific and was willing to risk his life in this venture. Whatever candidates they considered, the choice came down to one broad-shouldered captain who literally stood above the others.

By the early summer, Barrell sent word for John Kendrick to meet him at his counting house at Boston's Town Dock. Kendrick had been a whaling captain for twenty years, and was well-known for his command of privateers during the Revolution. Upstairs from the cavernous storeroom, they sat in Barrell's office overlooking the waterfront. Dressed in his velvet jacket and ruffled shirt, Barrell appeared very much the wealthy patrician. Kendrick, a rough-hewn counterpart, was tanned and wrinkled and worn by years at sea. He was tough, but possessed a charm and confidence that easily won others over. The two men were nearly the same age: Barrell forty-eight years old and Kendrick forty-seven. They had come to manhood during the turbulence and protests in Boston before the Revolution, and both had risked their lives and fortunes in the war. Barrell knew that Kendrick would see the expedition as more than just a trading mission. Like many of the founding fathers, they shared the naive belief that the Revolution could be carried out into the world through open ports and free trade. Markets opened by American ships, as much as the concept of liberty, would undermine secret pacts between Old World nations and topple corrupt monarchies. This new trade with China was a stroke in that direction. If they were successful, they would gain the money they were desperate for and contend with the ancient empires that sought to contain the new republic. Barrell rolled out a map, and Kendrick watched his keen eyes and fine hands as the merchant traced out the voyage.

The two ships would carve an American trade route around Cape Horn to the Far East, Barrell told him. They would sail the whole coast of the Americas and barter for furs in the north, then cross the Pacific and stop at the Sandwich Islands on the way to Macao, China. The trip homeward would cross the Indian Ocean and round Africa's Cape of Good Hope. It would be the first circumnavigation by American ships, and more than just a historic trading voyage, Barrell explained he wanted to establish an American