

CAPE ANN Museum

Report of the Davis Project — October 27, 2020

The Davis team has completed a three-year project of transcribing more than 500 pages of ships logs and other documents relating to 57 voyages of Capt. Elias Davis between 1781 and 1807. The captain commanded several vessels during this period, including the brigs *Augusta*, *Byfield*, *Two Friends*, *Hope*, *Olive Branch* and *Joseph*, and the schooners *Polly* and *Violet*.

The captain's voyages were roughly evenly divided between longer transatlantic voyages to Sweden, Denmark, Spain, France and Great Britain and coast/Caribbean trade to ports like Charleston, Norfolk, Martinique, Dominica. He also had two voyages in which he hailed on the Isla de Maio in the Cape Verde Islands off the coast of Africa. In addition to the logs there are some fragmentary manifests and bills of lading from some, but not all of his voyages.

The manifests and logs indicate that Capt. Davis participated in the so-called "Triangle Trade" which brought salted fish from New England to the Caribbean, for use in feeding enslaved people, and often returned with molasses, which was used in the distilling of rum for export to Europe. It does not appear that the captain engaged directly in the carrying of enslaved peoples from Africa. We do not have manifests for the two recorded voyages to the Cape Verde Islands, which were close to the slave ports in West Africa. However, the fact that the return voyage from Isla de Maio ended in Gloucester and Boston respectively, making it unlikely that slaves were carried on those voyages, as slavery and slave trading had both been outlawed in Massachusetts at the time of the voyages.

In addition to molasses and fish, the captain's vessels carried such cargo as tobacco and rice from Virginia and the Carolinas, lumber, shingles bricks and other construction materials from New England. From New England as well came barrels and cooperage, corn and flour.

Our goal is to create a database to be hosted on the Cape Ann Museum website that will allow researchers to search the logs by destination, date, location and other relevant data. Besides the logs, the team has created Google Maps of each of the captain's voyages. I hope someday to be able to publish the logs in book form.

Participants in the project have included: Paul McGeary, Tamsen Endicott, Pippy Giuliano, Joan Gorga, Sarah Mowitt, Amanda Santoriello and Teresa Silverman. I would like to acknowledge the special help provided by Erik Ronnberg, who has been an invaluable resource in aiding our understanding of 18th and 19th century seamanship and navigation, and Leon Doucette, who originated the idea of creating maps of Capt. Davis' voyages. Our current and former librarians and archivists Trenton Carls, Stephanie Buck and Molly Hardy have all been extremely helpful in getting the project going and pointing us in the direction of resources. Special thanks as well to the Harvard University Libraries, which digitized the original documents and made them available at no cost to the project.

— Paul McGeary