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## The *Mercury* Incident: Russian America in the West



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# George Eayrs

## *Notorious Sea Otter Hunter and Smuggler*

Cameron La Follette

Perhaps the most successful maritime trader and smuggler in the history of the Northwest maritime fur trade was George Washington Eayrs, an American out of Boston, captain of the ship *Mercury*. Though there is little in the published literature on the fur trade about Eayrs, there is a fairly large body of documents that provide windows into some of his activities. Because they are split between two collections and are written in Spanish, they have been little used. One set, held by the Los Angeles Public Library, and the other by Beinecke Library at Yale, document the aftermath of Eayrs' capture off the coast of Santa Barbara in June 1813, and the many concerns of New Spain's officialdom with his long history of maritime smuggling and hunting on the west coast of North America. The Los Angeles documents contain principally official correspondence from just after the capture to the 1820s, while the Beinecke documents cover Eayrs' continuing efforts to obtain restitution for the seizure from the early 1820s until 1841.

Both document sets contain many letters between officials at different levels of jurisdiction in New Spain and then Mexico, inventories of the ship's goods and other shipboard effects, protests from Captain Eayrs, and discussions of relevant issues such as the existence (or not) of a privateering license to the Peruvian merchant privateer who captured him, the values of cargo items, the fate of Eayrs' appeals, and the various jurisdictions' authority in the problems of restitution, which became especially acute after New Spain became independent from Mexico in 1821. Furthermore, New Spain was riven by civil war from 1810 to 1821, and a part of the conflict was a divide between Mexico City, where Viceroy Felix Maria Calleja and his supporters wanted to restore Spanish sovereignty and ban external trade, and other centers,

such as Guadalajara, whose partisans favored more open trade. Between 1811 and 1815 the Spanish navy's supply ships did not sail to California due to this many-faceted war, and the need in California for the most basic goods became acute.<sup>1</sup> The stage was set for the drama of Eayrs' capture by a privateer off the Santa Barbara coast in the summer of 1813.

### **The Maritime Fur Trade: An Eye Toward Eayrs' Role**

The *Mercury* was owned by American investors and, outfitted to participate in the maritime fur trade, focused first on sea otters and then on fur seals and other marine mammals on the northwest coast of America. The trade flourished from about 1785 to 1820, when first otters and then fur seals experienced precipitous population declines. Sea otters' traditional habitat extended from Japan, across the north Pacific, and down the entire west coast of North America to the southern tip of Baja California.

American and European (principally British) traders were the middlemen in the vast maritime fur trade initiated by, and sustained by, the Chinese. The Americans could sell pelts directly in Canton, but the British traders, thanks to the British East India Company's monopoly on Asian trade, could not; they had to use other strategies to sell to the Chinese and routes via India. China greatly valued sea otter pelts as a luxury for the royalty and highest nobility, after the Manchurian emperors of the Qing Dynasty began their rule. The Manchurians conquered China beginning in 1631. The Quianlong emperor (reigned 1735–1796) was the fifth emperor of the Qing dynasty, and the fourth to rule over all of China. During his reign, the journals of the third journey of British captain James Cook were published and made known to the



Alexander Baranov. Portrait by Mikhail T. Tikhanov, 1818. State History Museum, Moscow, Russia. Public domain.

Western world the astonishingly high prices the Chinese in Canton would pay for sea otter pelts of the Northwest Coast.<sup>2</sup> Thus began the rush of American and European seafaring companies to fill the gap as middlemen to barter and trade with Northwest natives, who hunted sea otters in exchange for European trade goods. The traders then sailed to Canton to sell the pelts for Chinese merchandise popular in the United States.

There was another, often neglected but very important, aspect to the maritime fur trade: the Russian Empire. Russia colonized Alaska beginning in 1784, having discovered it, via difficult voyages through the Bering Sea, in 1741. The Russian-American Company (RAC), founded in 1799, arose to streamline the sea otter hunting (principally in the Aleutians at that time) of the *promyshenniki*, the independent Russian entrepreneurs. The RAC moved its Alaskan headquarters from Kodiak Island to Sitka in southeast Alaska in 1804. Its principal income came from trade based on sea otter furs.<sup>3</sup> In 1812 the company also built Fort Ross, an outpost in

northern California north of Bodega Bay, to expand the Russian Empire's reach and the opportunities for sea otter hunting.<sup>4</sup>

The Russians soon conquered the Aleut and Kodiak peoples, whose cultures centered on marine mammal hunting; all who observed or worked with them acknowledged their prowess. The Russians placed Kodiak hunters (Aleut men participated much more rarely in the hunts) on forced labor contracts to hunt sea otters, first in Alaska, and then on down the Northwest Coast. The Russian-American Company's first and best known manager, Alexander Baranov, contracted with a few American fur trade captains, those whom he personally trusted, to take Kodiak hunters south to California, hunt the abundant sea otter populations there, and divide the pelts half and half with the company. One of the captains whom Baranov trusted for the hunt was George Washington Eayrs, with whom he negotiated hunting contracts in at least 1808 and 1809.<sup>5</sup>

Carrying Kodiak hunters to California otter grounds created one principal difference between the *Mercury* and most other American traders. A second activity that set the *Mercury* apart is that its captain greatly expanded an additional role: smuggling in California. Though some other captains appear to have smuggled among the California missions to a limited extent, the *Mercury* brought the art to great heights, networking between the Russians in Alaska and California at Fort Ross, the California missions dotting the Alta and Baja California coasts, and the Northwest Native tribes. All this activity, much of it illegal, finally attracted the attention of the Spanish authorities in New Spain. A Peruvian privateer, Don Nicholas Noé of the *Flora*, captured the *Mercury* off the coast of Santa Barbara in June 1813, and his fellow merchant and privateer, José Cavenecia, transported Eayrs and crew to San Blas on board his ship, the *Tagle*. The Spanish officials saw an unparalleled opportunity to learn more about the smuggling and surreptitious sea otter killing that was taking place along the long, undefended, and sparsely populated coasts of Alta and Baja California. Captain Eayrs had a long relationship with the California coast and its settlers, which began long before he became the *Mercury*'s captain, as is glimpsed through remaining historical records.



Fort Ross. Russian postage stamp, Russia, 2012. Public domain.

### The Role of George Eayrs

George Washington Eayrs was born in Lexington, Massachusetts, in 1775 and went to sea as a young man; he was first mate on the *Alexander* (a Boston vessel) in 1802, by the time he was twenty-seven years old. The ship first anchored in San Diego Bay in February 1803. But the Spanish suspected the ship of smuggling rather than just trading goods for provisions; boarding the ship, they found their suspicions confirmed when they uncovered some 490 otter pelts.<sup>6</sup>

Interestingly, with an eye to Eayrs' future smuggling career, Captain John Brown of the *Alexander* "abandoned" Eayrs in Monterey in December 1803, as he indicated in a deposition to Spanish officials in 1804. Officials transported Eayrs to San Blas, where he remained for some six months while they determined his intentions and decided on their course of action. They eventually gave him permission to go to Veracruz so he could leave via a passing ship, which he did on the ship *Aurora*. Eayrs indicated to the officials that "the staying on land of the pilot was on his part involuntary, as it was also premeditated and willfully done on the part of the Captain on account of resentments between them that had preceded the [leaving on land of George]." <sup>7</sup> Given his later smuggling career, it is entirely possible, though completely undocumented, that Captain Brown and Eayrs staged this "abandonment" in order for Eayrs

to learn more about the role of smuggling, its outlook for American ships, and its protectors in the officialdom of New Spain.

The *Mercury* was a 145-ton ship built in Boston, with a 16–18 man crew. It left Boston on its maiden voyage in 1806 with William Heath Davis as captain. Eayrs was supercargo on this voyage. The ship arrived on the Northwest Coast in the autumn of 1807. Captain Davis appears to have developed the basic smuggling route, which Eayrs—once he became captain—continued and expanded. Eayrs became the *Mercury*'s captain in 1808. For several years, his basic trading and smuggling pattern was constant sailing between Russian Alaska (headquartered in Sitka), the Columbia River, Fort Ross (the Russian settlement near Bodega Bay, completed in 1812), the California missions, and Canton.

### *Ties with Officials in Aid of Smuggling*

The details are unclear, but it seems Eayrs had longstanding and intimate ties with the principal officials who organized, protected, and benefited from much of the smuggling of foreign goods along the coast of New Spain. One glimpse of Eayrs' contacts comes from an 1809 letter from José Argüello (commander of Presidio Santa Barbara) to Alta California governor Jose Arrillaga, reporting that on December 22, 1809, three sailors came to the presidio, announcing



that they had deserted from the *Mercury*, whose captain was George W. Eayrs. They had escaped onto islands in front of Santa Barbara Bay, where the *Mercury* had scuttled in a furious storm to repair a broken mainmast. Two of the sailors gave their names and places of origin: Juan Blanco was from Spain, and the other, Juan Bautista, came from the Philippines. Spanish officials noted that both men were Christians. The third deserter is only identified as “an Indian of the islands of San Dussik (Durrik, Dunik)” or San Luis, an as yet unidentified place.<sup>8</sup> Officials decided to send the three to San Blas, with orders that the “Gentile Indian” be instructed in catechism to the Catholic Church. Why did they desert, which was at that time a serious crime? The records are silent on this crucial question, reporting only that the deserters said they did not want to sail any more with Captain Eayrs.<sup>9</sup>

Indians of the island where the *Mercury* came to shelter, who described themselves as sea lion fishermen, conducted the three to the mainland.<sup>10</sup> The letter writer, Santa Barbara presidio commander José Argüello, later became well known when, as interim governor of Alta California, he ordered the release of fur trader John Jacob Astor’s ship *Pedler* at San Luis Obispo in 1814, which had been seized by the merchant and privateer José Cavenecia. By this action he essentially signaled Spanish settlers of California that it was permissible to continue trading with the American “foreigners.”<sup>11</sup> But in this earlier event with the crew of Captain Eayrs, Argüello reported that he reprimanded the island Indians, telling them that they were not to conduct such individuals to the mainland. The document does not say why; perhaps because events such as this raised a delicate international situation for Spanish officials, or perhaps because it brought unwelcome attention to the widespread smuggling enterprises that sustained the region. Refugio Cove, fronting the Santa Barbara islands where the *Mercury* scuttled for safety, was a known and frequently used smuggler’s landing spot. It was linked to the nearby presidio (military post) at Santa Barbara of which Argüello was commander, and had been since 1798.<sup>12</sup>

Another letter gives a few more details: An Indian at Mission Santa Inez had first seen a vessel in the morning, nearly lost in furious winds, but then could

not watch it further due to the weather, until he saw it again at four o’clock in the afternoon, when it was anchored at sea outside the Boca del Rancho. The ship came so close to the coast that the crew could be spoken to, and he asked them to identify themselves.<sup>13</sup> The deserters were transferred to San Blas and impressed to service in Spanish vessels of the proper class.<sup>14</sup>

As witnesses to their declarations, Argüello appointed Don José Martiarena and Juan de Ortega. Though other contemporary records do not appear to mention José Martiarena, thus leaving his activities in contraband trade unknown, Bancroft, in his voluminous *History of California*, mentions a “Sindico Martiarena of Tepic,” a business enterprise of the Martiarena family operating from Tepic, the business community of the important and strategic port and naval station of San Blas.<sup>15</sup> Though this reference relates to independence activities in 1822 and does not mention contraband activity, the Don José Martiarena of the Eayrs incident may likely be from the same extended family running the business concern.

Juan de Ortega was a son of José María Ortega and grandson of José Francisco Ortega, who founded Santa Barbara in 1781. Bancroft suspected that the Nuestra Señora del Refugio—the eminent smuggler’s cove—was granted to the family before 1800. It remained in the family for decades and was a well-known and favored smuggler landing spot.<sup>16</sup> Thus, it may not be an accident that the *Mercury* put into a harbor on the Santa Barbara islands, right across the Santa Barbara Channel from Rancho del Refugio. And it seems very likely that Argüello, Martiarena, and Ortega, who conducted the deserters’ depositions and made sure their desertion was not widespread knowledge, were officials, businessmen, and ranchers who knew about, participated in, and understood the value of illegal trading with the American captains.

Deserter Juan Blanco said in his deposition that he was a Roman Catholic from Ferrol, a longstanding maritime city in Galicia on Spain’s northern coast, who worked in agriculture and as a sailor on ships. He stated he had sailed on the *Mercury* for twelve years. He had recently been ill, and stayed in “the Russian establishments” for a time (the document at this point is partially illegible), then touched into

the Columbia River, then the port of San Luis, and lastly at the mouth of Rancho Refugio, running from San Luis in a furious storm. They anchored in the islands to repair the broken mainmast. Blanco said the purpose of the *Mercury*'s presence was sea otter ("nutria") fishing. Asked if he knew of other vessels on the coasts of New Spain, he reported he had seen a frigate he heard was captained by a man named O'Cain.<sup>17</sup> Asked if the Russians were "embarking on some establishment on these coasts," he recounted the story of the Russian schooner *Nikolai*, sent as a colonizing ship down the coast from New Arkhangel, Alaska, in 1808. Though he did not mention the *Nikolai* by name, Blanco accurately reported its fate: it wrecked on the Olympic Peninsula, the survivors enslaved by the local Makah Indians.<sup>18</sup>

The second deserter, Juan Bautista, stated that he was from Santa Cruz de Manila in the Spanish Philippines and was employed mainly in sewing sails for boats, and also in farming. He said he had been a sailor for some fifteen years, originally in Bengal. In a fascinating, though somewhat garbled tale, Juan Bautista recounted that he sailed with O'Cain when O'Cain's ship, the *Eclipse*, wrecked in the Aleutians on the island of Sanak in 1807. O'Cain, some crew, and others from Kodiak built a second ship out of the timbers of the *Eclipse* and tried to sail on to Kodiak, but that ship also perished, in 1809, in the ice between Sanak and Umnak, and in that second shipwreck O'Cain died. It seems from the declaration that Juan Bautista left after the *Eclipse*'s initial shipwreck on Sanak and sailed on a Russian ship to New Arkhangel (now Sitka), where he stayed for seven months before embarking as a sailor on the *Mercury*.

Describing the crew, he said there were two pilots, one scribe and a dispenser, and fourteen mariners.<sup>19</sup> Like Juan Blanco, he described the fate of the Sv. *Nikolai* when asked about Russian intent to build an establishment on the Northwest Coast; interestingly, he said he heard this news while the *Mercury* was in the Columbia River. If nothing else, this tidbit shows how far-flung peoples across great distances all had access to news of important events in the region by Native trade networks, other maritime trade vessels, or both. Blanco too said the *Mercury* came to Rancho del Refugio to repair a mainmast broken in a storm at San Luis.<sup>20</sup>

### ***The Smuggling Route and the Russian Connection***

Apart from the glimpse offered by the documents covering the *Mercury*'s deserters, our knowledge of Eayrs' smuggling career comes principally from the *Mercury* case documents held at the Los Angeles Public Library. Eayrs' specialty was certainly smuggling with the California missions. By 1804, Spain had nineteen missions along the coast of Alta and Baja California. The first was founded at San Diego in 1769. As Spanish law did not allow "foreign" trade, and the empire's requisition system for furnishing needed goods was inefficient and cumbersome, the missions were chronically short of basic items. The Spanish requisition system for the missions originated in Mexico City and required bulky items in large quantities to be transported by mule overland to the port of San Blas, and then loaded onto ships for California. Worse yet, the pack trains and local shipping network ceased operating from 1811 until 1816, due to the civil war that culminated in Mexico's independence. How was California provisioned in those desperate years? Captain Eayrs was one option; Nicholas Noé and fellow regional merchants, such as José Cavenecia of the *Tagle*, were another—but it seems, from the scanty evidence, that they charged higher prices.

Eayrs continued and expanded the *Mercury*'s trade and smuggling network, bringing necessary commodities—both American and Chinese—to exchange at the missions for locally hunted sea otter pelts and other, mainly agricultural items. The *Mercury* began this smuggling network under Captain Davis. An example of the ship's smuggling and trading itinerary along the California coast is as follows: The *Mercury* was at Mission San Luis Obispo at Morro Bay in November 1806; then Refugio Cove west of Santa Barbara, near the headquarters of the ranch of retired Spanish officer José María Ortega, and also near three Franciscan missions; then, in December 1806, near San Pedro, gateway to the Los Angeles area; then in early 1807, to the Dominican missions down in Baja California; and then, April–August 1807, back up the California coast to trade and smuggle further with (among others) Missions San Gabriel and San Fernando, as well as padres from some Franciscan missions again, Santa Barbara, San Luis Obispo, and San Miguel.<sup>21</sup>



Nicholas Noé, captain of the privateer who captured the ship in 1813—some six years after Eayrs became captain—later told the governor of Santa Barbara that the *Mercury*'s own sailors told him that the ship's wealth came from sales of items along the California coast. At the time of capture, the sailors reported the ship was carrying 25,000 pesos (presumably from sales), 4,000 sea otter pelts, and goods from Asia.<sup>22</sup> This information was repeated in the summary sent to the viceroy of New Spain, Félix Maria Calleja.<sup>23</sup> However, the document language is unclear, and it may be that the *Mercury* had sold 4,000 pelts and was at the time of capture only carrying the proceeds. The one book on the history of the *Mercury* quotes Claims Commission documents that the *Mercury* had on board at the time of capture 465 otter pelts and 817 otter tails.<sup>24</sup> That may indicate the sailors were estimating to Noé the number of sea otters taken over the last several years. Nevertheless, the statement that the *Mercury* was carrying 4,000 sea otter pelts, or had recently sold that number of pelts, is particularly striking.

By 1813, the maritime trade for sea otters had been ongoing at white heat for nearly thirty years, and sea otter populations were plummeting across the species' range. Gone were the days when Northwest Natives could kill large numbers of sea otters to trade for coveted European trade goods, and a single trading ship could hoist anchor for Canton with three or four thousand pelts on board. By the second decade of the nineteenth century the otter take was generally smaller, even for those ships that, like the *Mercury*, ranged widely up and down the Northwest and California coasts seeking natives with large numbers of pelts to trade. How did the *Mercury* acquire such a large number of sea otter pelts?

Eayrs was one of the few American captains who contracted with the Russian-American Company for Kodiak marine mammal hunters, bringing them south to California to hunt sea otters. Eayrs contracted with the Russian-American Company for Kodiak hunters at least in 1808 and 1809.<sup>25</sup> Under the first contract in 1808, Eayrs returned to Sitka with 844 pelts as the Russian half of the total hunt<sup>26</sup>—meaning that the total take was 1,688 prime sea otter pelts, not including the 256 yearlings and 136 cubs. At Governor

Baranov's request Eayrs sailed to Canton in 1810, arriving in March 1811, to sell accumulated Russian furs as well as, presumably, his own share.<sup>27</sup> He went to Sitka again after further Northwest trading, in September 1812, with five hundred more otter skins.<sup>28</sup> He was not, so far as is known, carrying Kodiak hunters when he was captured in June 1813. Thus the sailors' statement concerning 4,000 sea otter furs is likely a round figure covering at least two or three years of activity during Eayrs' captaincy, which spanned the years 1808–1813. It probably includes the results of both trading on the California coast for pelts offered by the missions, and Kodiak hunting on contract. It is nevertheless a number that shows starkly the effect of the Chinese sea otter pelt market, and the trading and hunting that followed, on otter populations half a world away.

Equally important to the saga of the *Mercury* is Captain Eayrs' relationship with the Russian outposts in the Americas, and his connecting of them with Canton. He was a major link between Sitka, the headquarters of Russian Alaska; Fort Ross, the new Russian outpost north of Bodega Bay in northern California; and the Chinese of Canton. The Russian Empire was forbidden by the Treaty of Khabarovsk from trading directly with the Chinese at Canton, but Eayrs' network provided solutions to this problem. Eayrs took the Kodiak hunters with their *baidarkas* (canoes) south on the *Mercury* to California, where they would kill sea otters. Eayrs, at Baranov's request, sold the accumulated Russian-American Company otter furs in Canton. He brought goods from Canton to trade with the California missions and also to sell to the Russians, and thus (indirectly) strengthened ties between the Russians and the Chinese.

### The Russians and the Spanish

The delicate political problem for Spain was that they were at peace with Russia, yet had to deal with Fort Ross, recently (1812) sited just beyond their own settled territory, which informally ended at about San Francisco. However, Fort Ross had been built without Spanish permission in a region the Spanish claimed, as a Spanish document makes clear: "These [orders on the formation of a Russian establishment] ask the Governor of Alta California to manifest to

Comandante Coscof of said establishment, that, there being the greatest harmony between his Nation and ours, thanks to the Treaty of Alliance signed in Veliky Louky by 8 [individuals] on 20 July of the year of grace 1812, wanting to form an establishment in a possession that is acknowledged as Spanish, as is the northern Coast of California up to the Strait of Juan de Fuca, is a violation of the territory and the sacredness of the treaties.”<sup>29</sup> In other words, the Spanish claimed the territory all the way up to the Strait of Juan de Fuca, the northern border of present-day Washington, though they had no permanent settlements north of about San Francisco.

With the capture of the *Mercury*, the Spanish had an unparalleled opportunity to learn more about the new Russian establishment further north—but also had a potentially explosive international incident on their hands. Eayrs in his declaration described to the viceroy of New Spain his recent commerce with the Russian establishment at Bodega Bay:

Having remained for seven months in the Russian establishments, in the 57th northern parallel, with the object of repairing my ship, I consumed almost all of my provisions, and from there I sailed on the 28th of April to the coast where I now find myself. I directed my course towards the Russian establishments in New Albion, on the 39th–40th northern parallel, to unload six tons of molasses and some clothes that the Governor had placed under my care with this object. He also placed under my care a small box that contained six watches of gold and silver, one of which was sent as a present by the Emperor to the Governor, with the task of taking them all to Canton to have them repaired. I unloaded the clothes but not the molasses, because the Russian commander did not have a boat that could be used to that effect.<sup>30</sup>

Eayrs clearly did in fact admit, in his declaration to Spanish officials, to commerce with the Russians. Official correspondence to the viceroy reports,

[He] acknowledged his commerce with the establishments of the Russians in the northwestern coast, and that the object of his landfall in the

present station was to bring, by instructions of the Governor of said establishments, clothing and provisions for the Russian establishment located above the Puerto de la Bodega, as was carried out in the last month of May, ignoring the object and motive behind this establishment in the Coast of California.<sup>31</sup>

The situation for the Spanish was further complicated by the capture, at about the same time, of three Russian deserters from Fort Ross, all of them fishermen. These were likely Kodiak or Aleut men, as they were the most frequent fishermen working with American captains, on contract from the Russian-American Company; however, the record does not describe the men in any way that would allow identification. The viceroy of New Spain first ordered Don José de la Cruz (general commander of Nueva Galicia) to return the men to the commander of the Russian establishment, hoping to entice the Russian commander there to transfer Fort Ross outside the area claimed by the Spanish Empire.

The viceroy ordered de la Cruz to

mak[e] him understand that I have decided upon this to honor the sincere unity and alliance that exists between his Court and ours, since this determination contributes to discourage the desertion of his soldiers or sailors. And that, as a reward, and to prevent any reasons for complaint that could arise between the subjects of both Nations and the suspicions regarding illicit trade, I hope that he will transfer his establishment outside the limits of what is known to be Spain in the Northwestern coast of this America, which extend up to the 48th northern parallel in the coast, that is, up to the strait of Juan de Fuca.<sup>32</sup>

These men were being transported from Monterey in Cavenecia’s merchant frigate, the *Tagle*. But one died, and the other two deserted again, before they could be brought to San Blas and be questioned “in order to find out the object and intentions with which said establishment was formed.” However, the local official assured the viceroy, any additional depositions would shed little more light on Fort Ross from

the three men than the government already had from the captains of the *Tagle* and the *Flora*.<sup>33</sup>

### What Is Happening at the “Russian Establishment”?

The Spanish were definitely pleased with the opportunity to interrogate a handful of foreign sailors from the *Mercury* about their knowledge of the recent Russian intrusion into Spanish territory by building Fort Ross near Bodega Bay just the year before, in 1812. They asked every *Mercury* crew member they interviewed what he knew about the Russian establishment.

Eayrs in his own deposition reported that he had navigated Northwestern waters for eight years, trading with both the Russians and the Native peoples. Spanish officials also asked about other American ships trading on the Spanish coast, and Eayrs replied he did not know of any, but, significantly, “in the Northwest there were eight frigates and brigantines of his nation buying sea otter and other animal pelts from the Indians[.]”<sup>34</sup> In a later letter to the viceroy he more explicitly said that there were “a certain number of American merchant ships” constantly on this Spanish coast trading with the Indians and the governor of Russia.<sup>35</sup> In his declaration he explained that “his landfall on this coast in this present season was in order to conduct an assignment for the governor of the Russian Establishment on the Northwest Coast, bringing clothing and provisions for the Russian Establishment that was situated above Bodega Bay.” He could, and did, furnish the name of the Russian commander to his interrogators, but professed ignorance of why the Russians had founded Fort Ross.<sup>36</sup>

The Spaniards asked whether he traded for money, and he replied that he traded for sea otter and other pelts; and that the only commerce he had had with the Russians for eight years was to carry pelts to China. But he also said that the commander at Bodega Bay (Ivan Kuskov) “gave him two sealed documents with a little container so that he could take them to the frigate or boat that was going to the establishments where the governor [i.e., Russian-American Company governor Aleksander Baranov in Sitka] could be found so that he could give them to him.” No, he said, he did not know what the documents contained.<sup>37</sup>

John Delaney (Dillaney, Dillaway), the *Mercury*’s pilot, had been in that position for only two months—he

had begun his employment in Sitka. He told officials he was a Roman Catholic, born in Boston. He said the *Mercury* carried clothing and grain to “the Russian establishment” at Bodega Bay; but he also said he did not know the outpost’s purpose, “other than that they were hunting sea otters.”<sup>38</sup>

Thomas Jones, sailor, had been with the *Mercury* for two years, having joined the ship in China, and he provided much more information. Jones reported that he was a Roman Catholic, born in the city of Mable (could that term be a Spanish misunderstanding of “Marblehead,” a well-known fishing community in northern Massachusetts?). The Spanish probed relentlessly for information on Jones’s knowledge of Eayrs’ Russian contacts, trading, and hunting. They asked how many ports and coasts the *Mercury* had visited, and he replied that all the voyages had been between the northwest and southern reaches of the coast of North America where there were Russian establishments; the *Mercury* had moved back and forth between them, anchoring in about five different places. Jones further explained that the *Mercury*’s anchoring places weren’t actual, developed ports, but “they had offloaded cloth and other effects from the ship to the land that they brought on board skins and other things from the land.” He told the Spanish that he did not know why Eayrs stopped at the Russian establishment at Bodega Bay; all he saw when they anchored there was “that they offloaded clothing and other provisions for the Russian establishment that the Russian governor from the Northwest had sent.”<sup>39</sup>

Manuel Vicente Navarro then testified. A Catholic born in Manila, in the Spanish Philippines, he was the sailing master of the *Mercury*, having joined the ship in Macao. He said that from Macao the *Mercury* had sailed to Sitka, seat of the Russian governor Alexander Baranov. Eayrs had traded with Baranov, and then sailed south to the California coast. At one point they anchored at Bodega, and Captain Eayrs went ashore to the Russian establishment; then they “sailed south to this coast and anchored at a place fifteen leagues north of Point Concepcion. There they traded blankets for sea otter pelts and Captain George bought some pigs and cows that were slaughtered for their crew.” Then sailing further south, they anchored eight leagues south of Point Concepcion, and then at St. Caterina, about forty leagues south. There they



“did not do any business because there were no sea otters.” After that they anchored in two other places, and then Cabo San Lucas.<sup>40</sup> The anchorage eight leagues south of Point Concepcion was most likely to have been Rancho Refugio, the much-frequented smugglers’ landing place, though the document does indicate this directly.

Navarro’s testimony made two things clear to the Spanish: first, that the “Russian establishments” were central in Eayrs’ trading-and-smuggling network; and second, that sea otter pelts were at the heart of the trading network Eayrs had inherited from Captain Davis and expanded over the years of his captaincy. Navarro’s testimony also illuminated Spanish concerns, as the officials kept asking him whether he knew the purpose of the Russian fort at Bodega Bay, if he knew any of the people there, and if he knew of other Anglo-American sailings along the coast—and if any of such ships accompanied Eayrs in his trips. Navarro replied that he knew of no other ships, neither in general nor accompanying Eayrs, and also did not know the names of Russian officials. But as to the purpose of the Bodega Bay establishment, Navarro replied that “it was for the purpose of whaling, and the trapping of sea otters and sea lions. He did not know about anything else in particular.”<sup>41</sup>

All of these tangled activities with the Russians led Spanish authorities to boil down their concerns about the capture of the *Mercury* to three points: first, the establishment of the Russians on the California coast, and noting especially that the *Mercury* had assisted their commerce; second, the legality by which the *Mercury* was captured; and third, which authority should have jurisdiction over the prize.<sup>42</sup>

### **Was It a War Prize, or Was It Engaged in Illegal Activity?**

Spanish officials noted that the *Flora*, which captured the *Mercury*, was armed not only as a merchant ship, but also as a privateer, as Captain Noé made clear when he presented his royal patent to officials.<sup>43</sup> Privateering is traditionally one way war was waged at sea—however, in this instance, the United States and Spain were at peace. Thus, among peaceful nations, one nation could not conduct privateering against another, because it would break the neutrality between them. Eayrs had noted in previous

correspondence that Spain and the United States were at peace, which limited Spanish ability to consider his capture a war prize. The Spanish did not, in fact, want to give America a pretext to be hostile to the Spanish. The United States had just made a move to the Northwest Coast with the recently completed Lewis and Clark expedition, which wintered on the north Oregon coast in 1805–1806. The United States had also recently completed the Louisiana Purchase in 1803, which brought the country into close proximity with Spain’s holdings in what is now the southwestern United States.

But Spanish officials had a loophole: The *Mercury* was carrying contraband and engaging in illicit trade in Spanish territory, as the deposition and other documents from Captain Eayrs showed. Thus, under royal orders of 1790 and 1802, the Spanish were allowed to confiscate the ship and prosecute the guilty mariners of any nation so engaged on Spanish ports and coasts. The question that remained for Spanish officials was whether the *Mercury* had only been trafficking in foodstuffs, or had traded in other goods, and on the coasts of New Spain—in which case, Eayrs could be punished and the ship confiscated. The deposition of Captain Nicholas Noé of the *Flora* clarified why he seized the *Mercury* and strengthened the case of declaring the *Mercury* to be engaged in contraband: Noé stated that he was unable to sell the goods he had brought from Lima to Monterrey, as the inhabitants told him the “foreigners” offered better prices. Noé, having determined by this information that the foreigners were driving national ships off the California coast, decided to chase the smugglers, and especially the *Mercury*, because of its many trips and near-constant presence on the Spanish coasts.<sup>44</sup> Officials further decided that the signatures and letters of mission fathers found on the *Mercury* constituted proof of the illicit trade Eayrs engaged in, along with the stops noted in the ship log and Eayrs’ own deposition.<sup>45</sup>

Eayrs had a different view of his activities and did not consider them illegal, because local officials enthusiastically supported his trade. His version of events was, as might be expected, carefully colored to show him in the righteous position, and to defend the local officials, all of whom (according to him) encouraged and approved of his activities:

All of the officers who reside in this coast have generally encouraged my trade, and at their request I have provided various instruments for cultivation and other effects that they lacked. I have provided the priests with all that they needed for their instruction and acts of religion, for they were deprived of these succors due to the revolutions in the continent. I have been paid for these effects with provisions, and with some furs: I have dressed many who were naked, and I have been given in return some products of the country, as the Jefes of this district could inform Your Excellency.<sup>46</sup>

But the Spanish officials were unmoved by this evidence of local support for smuggling. Once satisfied of the proof that the *Mercury* had been engaged in illicit trade and contraband, the proper official would be in a strong position:

He must notify the results, and, having investigated the complaints presented by Captain George Eayrs, take care to remedy them, and avoid giving him motive for new complaints and any other protests that this foreigner may justly make, and Captain George himself must be notified of this providencia, which answers his representations, so that it is understood that the capture of his Ship is not understood as a war capture, nor that his imprisonment owes to this reason, but to the illicit trade in which he may have engaged, and that Your Excellency has ordered the remedy of the acts that have provided reasons for his complaints, regarding the treatment given to his person, his family, and his interests. And any other cause for complaints or protestations on his part must be avoided, until the resolution of this case is reached, in justice, and in conformity with our laws and customs.<sup>47</sup>

Much of the *Mercury* collections of documents in the Los Angeles Public Library consists of correspondence between Spanish officials over questions of how Captain Eayrs should be treated, what rations he should be given, whether he should be issued money for his sustenance, whether he should receive the proceeds and any profit from the sale of the ship and its goods, and how best to value and sell

the ship and its contents. Having determined that the ship was engaging in contraband, the Spanish decided that decisions about the *Mercury*'s fate fell under the jurisdiction of the Treasury, and not the navy commander at San Blas, as the United States and Spain were not at war.

However, by that time the San Blas naval personnel had already taken some actions, including sale of the *Mercury*'s effects, and officials ended up having to approve their actions as a fait accompli—though San Blas did not have jurisdiction over the *Mercury*, they did not know that at the time they sold its effects. Officials also appraised the value of the ship at 23,310 pesetas.<sup>48</sup> Nevertheless, San Blas personnel sold it for 5,300 pesos to Don Nicolás Nuñez. However, officials then determined the sale was null and void because it was arbitrary and not underpinned by a proper appraisal. Officials needed to complete a valuation of the ship before it became completely useless and publicly post the ship's appraised value so that it could be sold in an open manner to the highest bidder.<sup>49</sup>

Eayrs protested vociferously and frequently to Spanish officials about ill treatment. The Spanish, in turn, were concerned about this question principally because of political ramifications with the United States, a nation with which the Spanish were at peace. Thus in 1814, less than a year after the capture, Royalist general José de la Cruz wrote rather anxiously to Eayrs, trying to smooth over the situation after further complaints from him, with promises of good treatment and mitigation of any insults he might have suffered thus far:

And as regards the ill treatment that Vuestra Merced [you] say to have experienced in that destination, on your person as well as on your family and property, I have ordered the Governor of Alta California and the Commander General of Nueva Galicia on this date to issue the necessary *oficios* that will secure your interests, allowing you to be united with your family, and scrupulously avoid any insults to you, as is demanded by the consideration and good relations in which the Spanish Nation and that of the United States find themselves[.]<sup>50</sup>

But two years later, the Spanish had become more confident in their treatment of the American smuggler and less anxious to please. Officials noted suspiciously that though Eayrs had no Spanish property, he had somehow managed to sustain himself without any government succor all this time. If and when he requested sustenance again, the viceroy could order him to be given “a moderate amount,” enough for sustenance only. It was decided that he must only be given regular army rations.<sup>51</sup>

Later documents, held at Beinecke Library of Yale University, describe a rather coarser motive for the seizure of the *Mercury*: greed. In a letter from 1841, some twenty-six years after the event, Eayrs’ attorney, James Caudlen, described Nicholas Noé and his crew as corsairs, who took the ship and its valuable cargo to Santa Barbara where it was plundered by high-ranking officials:

There, in connivance with the governor, and before any process was carried out, he [Noé] took \$17,000 from the ship in money and a large amount of silk, and other valuable articles, for which no receipts were made, and without there having been any prior inventories nor appraisals. Part of this was used to provide the troops of four garrisons with wages and supplies, as requested by the governor. Another part was sold some to “one or two” individuals, and the remainder, \$11,171 and 2 reales, he kept for himself. The total value of this plunder is not recorded, nor is it recorded how much the governor participated in it, beyond the \$12,452 that he admits to having distributed to the garrisons in money and supplies, and for which he wrote bills of exchange drawn against the General Treasury in Mexico.<sup>52</sup>

Caudlen also stated that at the time of capture the money aboard the ship amounted to \$16,813, and he described several unauthorized cargo inventories before the first formal one in San Blas, which took place on January 26, 1814. Eayrs was not present for any of these inventories. Caudlen further accused the governor of giving the *Mercury* a letter of marque after its capture so that, under another crew, it could operate as a “corsair.”<sup>53</sup>

## The Later Years

Spanish interest in the Russian facet of Eayrs’ activity struck a high point directly after the capture, in the initial depositions of the crew, when presumably the danger of an international incident was highest. Essentially nothing further about Russian activity is mentioned after that; all the correspondence concerns cargo and financial restitution, or the sustenance of Eayrs himself. Curiously, there is no further mention in the *Mercury* documents of the fates of any of the crew, nor discussion of what should be done with them. They were of different nationalities, the majority not American, which undoubtedly made it more difficult for the Spanish: Should they be repatriated to their own countries, sent to the United States, kept in New Spain, set on a ship to travel out of New Spain? The documents do not tell us which of these options the Spanish may have pursued with respect to the *Mercury*’s crew.

But we do know what happened to Captain Eayrs: He spent the rest of his life in New Spain, and then Mexico. The *Mercury* had not been sold even by 1819. Eayrs moved to Guadalajara in 1816, where he converted to Catholicism (he had been raised a Presbyterian) and married Maria Ana Velasco in 1818. They had four sons. Eayrs made a living for himself in various ways, including the practice of medicine—and he got in trouble with the Mexican authorities for doing so without a license in the 1820s. But he appears not to have been fined or jailed for the offense. He also received some support from his family in Boston. From the Spanish and then Mexican authorities, he received \$50 per month from 1817 till 1824, when the payments ceased. In July 1824, the Treasury paid for part of the cargo that had been sold in San Blas, a total of \$7,405—but then deducted the years of monthly payments from that amount. The \$3,055 check he received was the only government money he was ever awarded from the government of Mexico for the *Mercury* or its cargoes.<sup>54</sup>

Caudlen in his 1841 letter details Eayrs’ numerous petitions to the central government of New Spain and then Mexico to redress his financial grievances, extending through the 1820s and into the 1830s, upon occasion through the good offices of J. R. Poinsett, minister plenipotentiary of the United States to





Main plaza of Guadalajara. Lithograph by Carl Nebel, *Voyage Pittoresque*, 1836. Public domain.

Mexico from 1825 to 1829. But even as of the date of Caudlen's letter in 1841, Eayrs had not received, and never did receive, any other than the most skeletal sustenance and restitution, far less than the cargo's value. In addition, he was crippled in his efforts at documentation: "Since the captors and the authorities took all paperwork related to his cargo when the ship was taken from him, he can only present a Claim for the amounts that are recorded in the documents related to his case, renouncing a large import of the lootings and pillage that he suffered."<sup>55</sup> George Washington Eayrs died in Guadalajara on May 16, 1855, at approximately eighty years old.<sup>56</sup>

### Importance of the *Mercury* Case

Apart from the mind-boggling and labyrinthine bureaucracy of first New Spain and then Mexico that the Eayrs case depicts more clearly than any other, the *Mercury* saga is a perfect example of the opportunities and perils of the maritime fur trade. Eayrs' activities show the extent to which the maritime trade

was fully international, involving all the tribal groups on the Northwest Coast from Alaska to Baja California, the Chinese who created and sustained the market from Canton, and the middlemen traders from America, Britain, Russia, and occasionally Spain and other nations.

This case also, more than any other, underlines the importance of smuggling to presidios, missions, and officials of New Spain. It was not casual or occasional; the American traders were bringing goods that were otherwise unavailable to this sparsely populated area. Some of the documents also make clear what is generally left unspoken: high-ranking officials in New Spain either participated in the smuggling networks, or at the least, they protected its principal actors. Though a full picture may be unavailable, the hints are there that high officials found smuggling with American traders very profitable. The *Mercury* case also illuminates the extent to which the Russian empire was a major player in the fur trade, beginning in Alaska and then boldly building a new fort



Map of sea otters' original and current range.

in northern California without even telling the Spanish they were doing so, much less asking permission. The Russian-American Company was also in frequent commerce with American traders, both for trading furs and purchasing goods, and for providing Kodiak hunters on contract to American captains, which extended Russian influence far south to all of Baja California.

Finally, the *Mercury* case also highlights the importance of the rapidly dwindling sea otter populations to the West Coast economies from Alaska to the tip of Baja California. In the rapidly changing political realities of the early nineteenth century, the sea otter was essentially a de facto currency: the foundation of trade for the Northwest native peoples seeking to acquire European wares, the basis for extensive and growing American trade with China for highly desirable merchandise, the principal trade item for California missions seeking commodities they could not otherwise acquire, and also the principal source of wealth for the entire Russian American Company. Sea otter trade also propelled the nations sparring for territorial advantage in this distant region into closer relationship and conflict, and ultimately was the spur for settling competing claims that took their initial shape during the intense decades of the maritime trade.

## NOTES

1. Marie Duggan, "From Bourbon Reform to Open Markets in California, 1801–1821," *Journal of Evolutionary Studies in Business* 8, no. 1 (January–June 2023): 64.
2. For a thorough overview of the Chinese creation of the international sea otter trade, see Jonathan Schlesinger, *A World Trimmed with Fur: Wild Things, Pristine Places, and the Natural Fringes of Qing Rule* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2017).
3. For a history of early Russian Alaska, see Andrei V. Grinev, *Russian Colonization of Alaska: Baranov's Era, 1799–1818* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2020).
4. For an overview of Fort Ross and documents on the Russian presence in California, see Glenn J. Farris, *So Far from Home: Russians in Early California* (Berkeley, CA: Heyday and Santa Clara University, 2012).
5. "A Contract Between Governor Baranov and Captain Eayrs for Joint Sea Otter Hunting on the Coast of the Californias. No. 2, St. Paul Harbor, May 1808," in James Gibson and Alexei A. Istomin, *Russian California, 1806–1860: A History in Documents*, vol. 1 (London: Hakluyt Society, 2014), 249–254, 270–272.
6. Robert Ryal Miller, *A Yankee Smuggler on the Spanish California Coast* (Santa Barbara: Santa Barbara Trust for Historic Preservation, 2001), 7, 14.
7. Carta No. 60 de José de Iturrigaray, virrey de Nueva España, a Pedro de Ceballos, secretario de Estado, 26 June 1804. Archivo General de las Indias, Estado, 30, N, 44. Translated by Marie Duggan.
8. "Sobre tres desertores de la fragata anglo-americano mercurio . . .," 1809. Archivo General de la Nación (AGN), Provincias Internas, vol. 019 ff. 159–177. Copy at University of Arizona Institutional Repository (UAIR), serial number 041-00322, reference number 1900006, item 211825.
9. Ibid.
10. Ibid.
11. Duggan, "From Bourbon Reform to Open Markets in California," 68–69.
12. Ibid., 24.
13. "Sobre tres desertores," 1809.
14. Ibid.
15. Hubert Howe Bancroft, volume IX, *California*. Volume II, 1801–1824, p. 458, fn. 22 (San Francisco: A. L. Bancroft & Company, 1885).
16. Hubert Howe Bancroft, volume IX, *California*. Volume I, 1542–1800, pp. 670–671, fn. 61 (San Francisco: A. L. Bancroft & Company, 1884).

17. Joseph O'Cain (d. 1809) was the first American captain to contract with the Russian-American Company to ferry Kodiak hunters to hunt sea otters in California.
18. *Ibid.*; for the history of the *Nikolai* and the crew's fate see Kenneth N. Owens, ed., *The Wreck of the Sv. Nikolai* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, Bison Books, 2001).
19. *Ibid.*
20. *Ibid.*
21. Miller, *A Yankee Smuggler*, 17–20.
22. Nicholas Noé to Governor of Santa Barbara [missing date and location], *Mercury Case Manuscript Typescript* (MCMT), Cuaderno 16, 379–381 (Los Angeles: Los Angeles Public Library, Special Collections). (Summary by Emilia Gonzalez).
23. "Testimony of the file on the Capture of the Anglo-American Frigate *Mercurio*," Report to Viceroy Félix Maria Callejo, 1814 (Seville, Spain: Archivo General de las Indias, Estado, 31, N. 28), p. 11 of original manuscript.
24. Miller, *A Yankee Smuggler*, 35.
25. "A Contract Between Governor Baranov and Captain Eayrs," 249–254, 270–272.
26. Kyrill T. Khlebnikov, *Colonial Russian America*. Kyrill T. Khlebnikov's Reports, 1817–1832, translated by Basil Dmytryshyn and E. A. P. Crownhart-Vaughn (Portland: Oregon Historical Society, 1976), 7.
27. Miller, *A Yankee Smuggler*, 21–22.
28. *Ibid.*, 25.
29. Torres Torija to Viceroy Félix Maria Calleja, Mexico, 19 April 1814, MCMT, Cuaderno 16, 469–476 (translated by Yesenia Pumarada Cruz).
30. George Eayrs to Viceroy of New Spain, San Diego, 8 [or 10] October 1813, MCMT, Cuaderno 17, 79–84 (translated by Yesenia Pumarada Cruz).
31. Torres Torija to Viceroy Félix Maria Calleja, Mexico, 19 April 1814, MCMT, Cuaderno 16, 469–476 (translated by Yesenia Pumarada Cruz).
32. Viceroy of New Spain Calleja to Governor of Alta California via the General Commander of Nueva Galicia, 15 April 1814, MCMT, Cuaderno 10, 29–31 (translated by Yesenia Pumarada Cruz).
33. Jose de Laveyene to Viceroy of New Spain, Guadalajara, 2 June 1814, MCMT, Cuaderno 10, 60–62 (translated by Yesenia Pumarada Cruz).
34. George W. Eayrs Testimony/Deposition [missing date and location], MCMT, Cuaderno 16, 409–410 (translated by Rex Gurney).
35. George Eayrs to Viceroy of New Spain, San Diego, 8 [or 10] October 1813, MCMT, Cuaderno 17, 79–84 (translated by Yesenia Pumarada Cruz).
36. George W. Eayrs Testimony/Deposition [missing date and location], MCMT, Cuaderno 16, 409–410 (translated by Rex Gurney).
37. *Ibid.*
38. John Delaney Testimony/Deposition, MCMT [missing date and location], Cuaderno 16, 414–416 (translated by Rex Gurney).
39. Thomas Jones Testimony/Deposition, MCMT [missing date and location], Cuaderno 16, 416–419 (translated by Rex Gurney).
40. Manuel Vicente Navarro Testimony/Deposition, MCMT [missing date and location], Cuaderno 16, 419–424 (translated by Rex Gurney).
41. *Ibid.*
42. Torres Torija to Viceroy Félix Maria Calleja, Mexico, 19 April 1814, MCMT, Cuaderno 16, 469–476 (translated by Yesenia Pumarada Cruz).
43. A "privateer" is an armed ship owned and crewed by private individuals holding a government commission, authorized for use in war especially for the capture of enemy merchant shipping.
44. From [Unclear] to Royal Treasury Prosecutor, Mexico, 11 September 1815, Mexico, MCMT, Cuaderno 10, 152–162 (translated by Yesenia Pumarada Cruz).
45. *Ibid.*
46. George Eayrs to Viceroy of New Spain, San Diego, 8 [or 10] October 1813, MCMT, Cuaderno 17, 79–84 (translated by Yesenia Pumarada Cruz).
47. Torres Torija to Viceroy Félix Maria Calleja, Mexico, 18 April 1814, MCMT, Cuaderno 16, 469–476 (translated by Yesenia Pumarada Cruz).
48. Letter from [Unclear] to Royal Treasury Prosecutor, Mexico, 11 September 1815, MCMT, Cuaderno 10, 152–162 (translated by Yesenia Pumarada Cruz).
49. Jose de la Cruz to Asesor General, Guadalajara, 5 April 1816, MCMT, Cuaderno 10, 169–176 (translated by Yesenia Pumarada Cruz).



50. Jose de la Cruz to Eayrs, [unknown place] 24 April 1814, MCMT, Cuaderno 16, 480–81 of typescript (translated by Yesenia Pumarada Cruz).
51. Jose de la Cruz to Asesor General, Guadalajara, 5 April 1816, MCMT, Cuaderno 10, 169–176 (translated by Yesenia Pumarada Cruz).
52. Letter from James H. Caudlen to Junta de Comisionados, Mexico, 8 December 1841, WA MSS S-2465, Box 1 f.1, Representation of the case [32245, Eayrs, George Washington] (Beinecke Library, Yale University).
53. Ibid.
54. Miller. *A Yankee Smuggler*, 74–95.
55. Letter from James H. Caudlen to Junta de Comisionados, Mexico, 8 December 1841, WA MSS S-2465, Box 1 f.1, Representation of the case [32245, Eayrs, George Washington] (Beinecke Library, Yale University).
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# A Transpacific Perfect Storm

## *The Arrest of George Washington Eayrs and the Oceanic Context of the Mercury Case of Late Spanish California*

Richard Ravalli

On the surface, the arrest of an American sea captain for engaging in contraband trade in Spanish California in the 1810s seems like a small footnote in the pages of far western history. Yet the confrontation between New England merchant George Washington Eayrs and South American merchant and privateer Nicolas Noé reveals much about the intricate web of geopolitical and commercial relationships across the Pacific Ocean and around the globe in the early nineteenth century.

The Anglo-American conflict of 1812 upset trading patterns that had linked US maritime fur traders with imperial China. With access to the port of Canton limited by British warships in the western Pacific, American merchants intensified their activities in the eastern Pacific, seeking trading relationships with Spanish customers. This oceanic repositioning of American vessels helped make Eayrs an easier target for arrest on the coast of Alta California. But the War of 1812 further shaped his showdown with colonial officials by stoking potent fears of American ships in Pacific waters. The depredations of the USS *Essex* off the South American coast, just months before Eayrs' vessel, the *Mercury*, was captured in 1813, helped form the context in which Noé's actions against the illegal "contrabandista" trade occurred. The voluminous documents that resulted from the *Mercury* incident suggest that the uneasy nature of conflict between the United States of America and Spain, England's ally against Napoleon, was cited as a motivating factor in the ship's capture. Notwithstanding how the error originated—Spain remained neutral in the War of 1812—war in the Pacific is an important, overlooked element in the illustrative commercial and political confrontation that occurred in early nineteenth-century California.

Beyond military considerations, other broad, transpacific developments contributed to the "perfect storm" of maritime contingencies that allowed Noé's *Flora* to capture Eayrs' *Mercury* in 1813. Spanish officials had become increasingly anxious by the 1810s regarding Russian intervention on the northern California coast. Seeking furs and agricultural supplies for their expanding North Pacific empire, Russian hunters and their Native Alaskan conscripted laborers entered Spanish territories and in 1812 began construction of a permanent settlement north of San Francisco Bay known as Fort Ross. Once again the *Mercury* case documents illustrate the heightened intercolonial tensions that swirled around the captured vessel, particularly since Eayrs had close contact with the Russian empire. Furthermore, the Mexican Revolution, which led to the capture of the port of San Blas in 1810, disrupted Spain's imperial ambitions and drew merchants like Eayrs into more intimate relationships with provincial settlers for needed supplies.

While historians have previously noted these geopolitical and commercial contexts for the *Mercury* incident, the commercial and environmental dynamics involving sea otters in late-Spanish California needs more attention. Countering suggestions of colonial Spain's overall disinterest in the maritime fur trade by the early nineteenth century, some evidence indicates that officials in Southern California supported an active otter hunting economy during the 1810s. Sources such as the letters of Father Jose Senan at Mission San Buenaventura help document fur exchanges California and New Spain and suggest that American *contrabandistas* contributed to a noticeable decline of sea otters in the region prior to Mexican sovereignty. Local nearshore sea otter fluctuations likely played a



Oil on copper painting of Whampoa Anchorage, c. 1810. Courtesy Massachusetts Institute of Technology. Public domain.

role in later hunting regulations implemented by provincial authorities. Maritime traders such as Eayrs thus represented threats on multiple fronts to Spanish imperialism, and their activities relate to significant historical developments across vast oceanic and terrestrial spaces in the early 1800s. The veritable sea of archival documents that surrounds the *Mercury* can help scholars tell these dynamic stories. Such sources deserve closer inspection and wider publication than they have received to date.<sup>1</sup>

The War of 1812 began as an Atlantic conflict between the United States and Great Britain, but it ultimately had a broader, global reach. In the western Pacific, British warships and East India Company vessels patrolled the Chinese coast for signs of American activity throughout 1813, after news of hostilities between the two countries finally reached the Far East. American trade ships were located at the

harbor of Whampoa, just outside the port of Canton, sitting emptied and dismantled as captains waited out the war in what was considered neutral water. While privateers later preyed upon several East India Company vessels in the western Pacific, trade between either of the belligerents and the Chinese was either made difficult or was nonexistent during the conflict.<sup>2</sup> Unfortunately for the Americans, this meant that selling cargoes of sea otter pelts in Canton from the Pacific Northwest would need to wait. Therefore they coasted. A number of merchant crews concentrated on the eastern Pacific, doing temporary business with the Russians at Sitka and sailing south to supply California settlements in violation of Spanish restrictions. With the naval aspect of the War of 1812 in full swing, as Adele Ogden described in her classic account of the sea otter trade, “Yankees . . . remained in the fur business as ocean tramps.”<sup>3</sup>



These military and commercial realities made merchants like George Eayrs easier prey for Spanish officials looking to clamp down on contraband, as they were simply on the coast for longer periods of time and thus more likely to get caught. Yet the War of 1812 in the eastern Pacific more directly shaped imperial actions against illegal trade. Most notably, this involved the depredations of the USS *Essex*, captained by David Porter who, by March 1813, was preying upon British whalers at the Galapagos Islands. Porter also attacked a Peruvian-based Spanish privateer that had assaulted American ships, the *Nereyda*, and although he returned the ship to Callao as a gesture of goodwill, the Spanish viceroy was furious, retaliating against earlier American prisoners with hard labor.<sup>4</sup> Though Spain was officially neutral during the War of 1812, Eayrs noted after his arrest in June 1813 that he had been informed by Noé, his captor, that there was a state of war between Spain and the United States. According to Eayrs' testimony, Noé "brought and circulated the news of an open Declaration of war between Spain & the United States of America."<sup>5</sup>

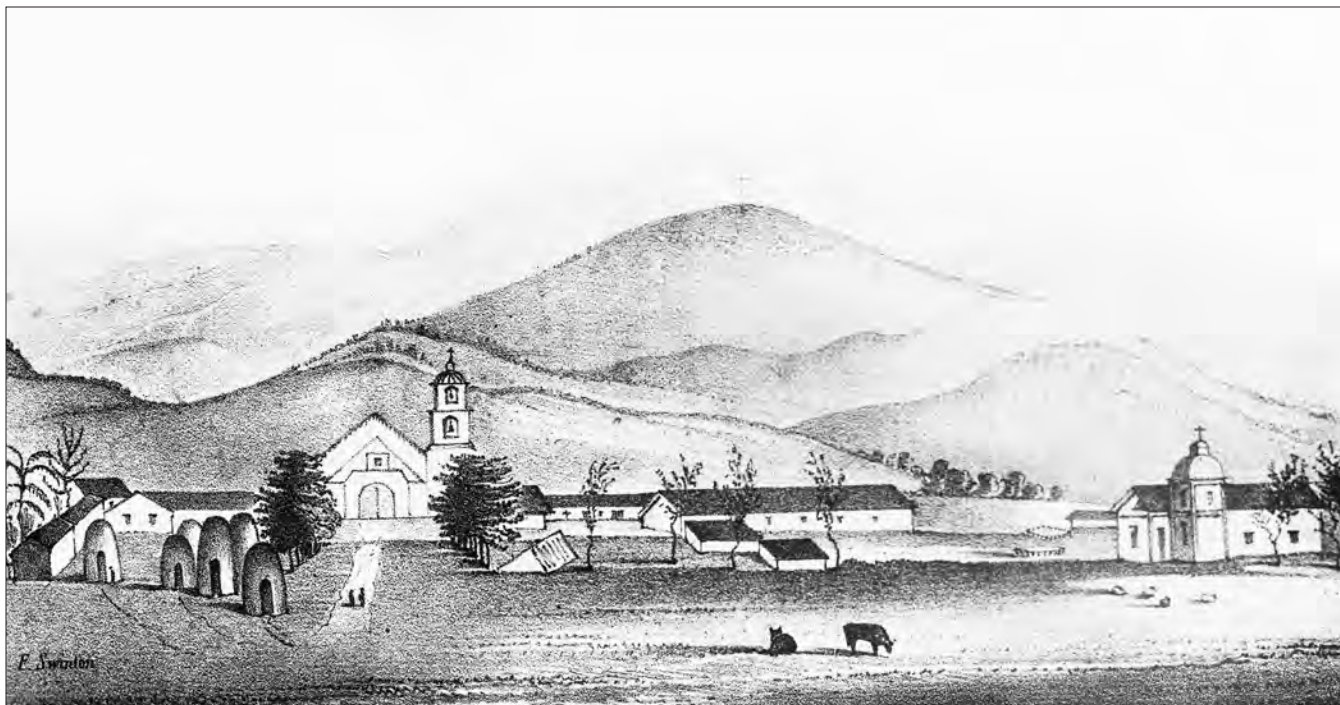
Also, while imprisoned in San Diego and on his way to Mexico, Eayrs claimed that "it is reported to me, that Spain is at War with the United States," but he noted that he did not believe that America and Spain would go to war "unless forced by Britain."<sup>6</sup> While not previously emphasized in histories of the *Mercury* incident, it seems probable that Noé knew of the *Essex* and its attacks off the South American coast prior to sailing to California in the spring of 1813, as military events in the eastern Pacific contributed to an uncomfortable geopolitical climate that facilitated his capture of the *Mercury*. The ship was, at least in Noé's mind, a potential military target. This may be reflected in part by the captain receiving a license as a "Privateer and Merchantman" by the California governor shortly after his arrest of Eayrs in June.<sup>7</sup> Even if Noé had no such authority at the time he took the *Mercury*, it is possible that rumors of war were circulating on the California coast that spring and motivating the actions of several Spanish authorities.

A report written later in Mexico in April 1814 is one of several that demonstrate that the War of 1812 remained a lingering issue in the unfolding *Mercury*

case. The document stresses Spanish neutrality in the conflict and that Eayrs should not consider himself a "prisoner of war, and neither does his detention have anything to do with it."<sup>8</sup> Eayrs' repeated accusation of a nonexistent Spanish-American war as the pretext for his capture was likely viewed as useful in his eyes as a method to secure his release from custody. Yet it is equally apparent that officials tried to make up for earlier unjustified claims regarding military efforts as a reason for seizing the American trader. A communication dated April 1816 suggests that the war rumor originated not with Noé but later with the *comandante* at San Blas.<sup>9</sup> Another document from September 1815 specified that Noé was not the source of the rumor, and that Eayrs "had no verification" for his claims "other than his declaration."<sup>10</sup> Such administrative insistence in absolving the captain of the *Flora* at the very least raises suspicion.

What is clearer from the 1814 report mentioned above is that authorities in Mexico were concerned about the recent Russian presence at Fort Ross on the northern California coast. Traders like Eayrs were troublesome not only because they engaged in illegal commerce with missions and settlements but because they did business with the Muscovites in California. Spanish officials were uneasy about the intentions of the Russian Empire during the War of 1812 and wanted to remain in Russia's good graces during the conflict. They did not know how, or whether, it might affect Spain's relationship with Russia that Spain captured an American trader who did so much business with Russian outposts both in Sitka and at newly built Fort Ross.

In addition to war in the Pacific and Russian expansionism, the Mexican Revolution contributed to the seizure of the *Mercury* and the subsequent debate regarding Eayrs and his vessel. The political turmoil in Mexico that began in 1810 created supply troubles for California settlements. The port of San Blas was captured in 1810 by insurgents who, according to a letter from Fr. Jose Senan at Mission San Buenaventura, threatened goods shipped from the mission, including the sea otter skins he had exported.<sup>11</sup> Disruption on the Mexican coast resulted in irregular shipments going in the other direction to the province. Missionaries and settlers were increasingly willing to



Mission San Buenaventura in 1839, where sea otter hunting continued to be sustained prior to the Mexican era of the 1820s. From Alfred Robinson, *Life in California*. San Francisco: William Doxby, 1891. Courtesy USC Digital Library, California Historical Society Collection. Public domain.

deal with American merchants who brought much needed goods to California, as warm, friendly letters from the priests at various missions and Eayrs make clear. For example, Fr. José Caulas wrote to Eayrs on April 19, 1812, “Señor Commandante and Friend Don Jorge: To-day there goes to you the padre of San Fernando who was unable to go last week because of illness. Trade with him, and to-morrow (God willing) I will come to your *Fragata* to dine, and we two will trade on our own account. . . . There will be sent likewise the otter-skins which on my coming we will examine. Also be pleased to receive a small pig for yourself.”<sup>12</sup> Another priest, Fr. Pedro María de Zarate, wrote in an undated letter, “Friend Don Jorge: It is necessary that early in the morning a boat be landed to enable me to embark and purchase that of which I have spoken to you . . . thus I must manage in order to act with safety.”<sup>13</sup> Such trade may have been illegal, and engaged in clandestinely, but it was more prevalent in the 1810s as Californians struggled to get by. As Governor José Darío Argüello claimed, “Necessity makes licit what is not licit by the law.”<sup>14</sup>

Indeed, Eayrs was not the only American *contrabandista* who was captured in the 1810s for violating

imperial restrictions. The *Pedler*, under Captain Samuel Northrop, took supplies to Fort Ross, sailed southward, and by August 1814 was stopped by the *Tagle*, another South American merchant vessel, courtesy of two cannon balls. Unlike the *Mercury* case, Governor Argüello released the *Pedler*, since Northrop’s stated mission was that he intended to rendezvous with a Russian ship and transfer his cargo. Such obfuscation conveniently masked his desire to tap into the California fur market.<sup>15</sup> Spanish authorities and colonial business interests had every reason to be concerned about Americans depriving them of opportunities to make money in the province during the revolution, even if cheaper supplies brought by US merchants were welcomed by many on the ground.

The presence of South American vessels enforcing trade restrictions in California brings to light lesser known patterns in early nineteenth-century Pacific trade that shaped the *Mercury* affair. As Marie Christine Duggan has documented, late Spanish commercial contacts expanded in the eastern Pacific by the 1810s, characterized by increasingly lucrative maritime links between California and Guadalajara, Panama, and Lima. For example, the Spanish



**Captain David Porter, whose military activities in the Pacific during the War of 1812 stirred fears among both British and Spanish officials.** Courtesy Naval History and Heritage Command. Public domain.

king gave temporary permission in 1808 for British goods arriving from the Caribbean to be taxed and shipped up and down the Pacific Coast from Panama. The policy resulted in a sharp increase of goods that entered Guadalajara for a decade.<sup>16</sup> South American vessels like the *Tagle* and Noé's *Flora* were invested in protecting these burgeoning market routes by making sure that Americans were not the ones meeting the demands of customers in the Californias. Hence the commercial ambitions of well-connected individuals in the eastern Pacific were a principle reason for Eayrs' arrest in 1813. He was not only at the wrong place at the wrong time but was messing with increasingly determined business interests.

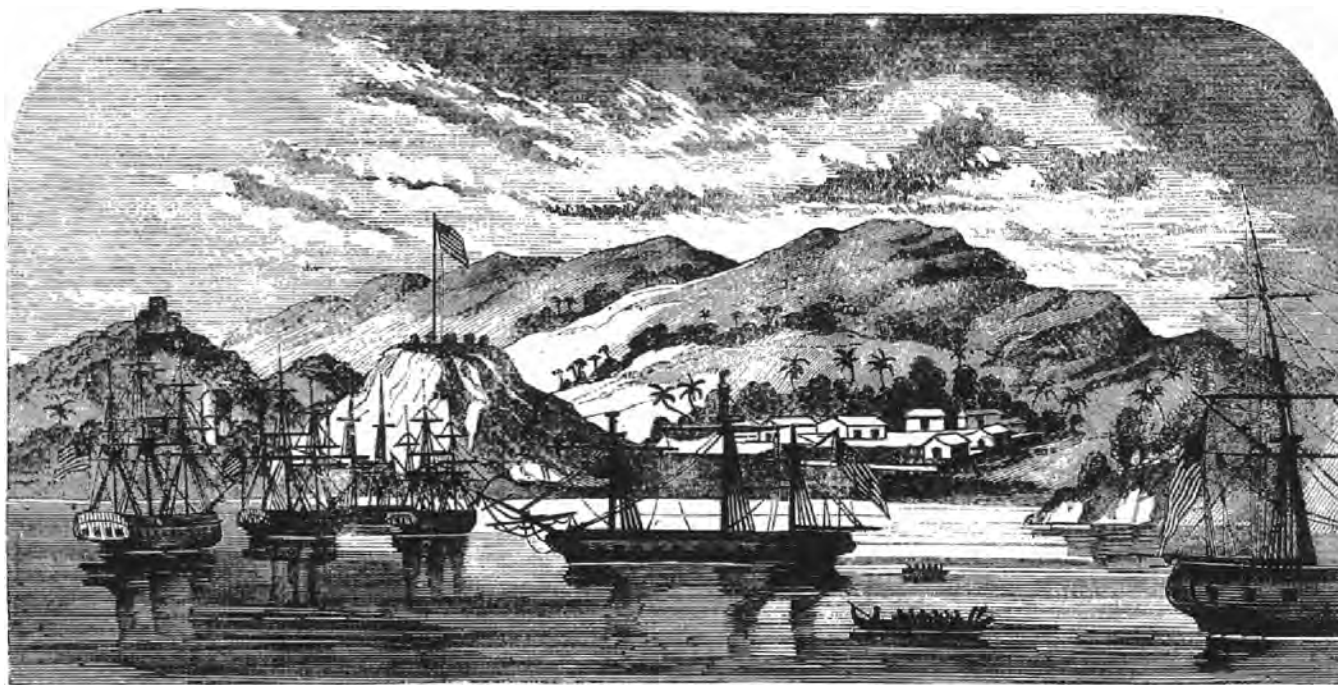
The published letters of Father Senan at Mission San Buenaventura not only describe Noé's activities on the coast in the 1810s but also offer clues relating to the environmental dynamics of the sea otter trade of Spanish California. For example, Noé and the *Flora* are noted as being at Monterey in the spring

of 1812 seeking tallow. As Senan writes, "The vessel completed an uneventful voyage in 33 days, including in its cargo the eagerly-awaited collateral ornaments for our altar. These were carried free of charge by the Captain and owner, Don Nicolas Noe."<sup>17</sup> In a letter from September 1813, he mentioned the conflict between Noé and Eayrs from earlier in the year: "Senor Noe, Captain and owner of the frigate *Flora*, has taken prisoner the notorious smuggler known as Jorge, who has been harassing this coast for years."<sup>18</sup> In December, Senan emphasized how well regarded Noé and other South American traders were by California missionaries: "And thanks be to Divine Providence for bringing us these Peruvian ships, which we have never before seen on these shores! God must have been saving them against the fateful emergencies that have arisen in this Province. They also serve to hold the Russians in check as well as the Anglo-Americans, who are intruding more and more along the coast."<sup>19</sup>

Senan also discussed Southern California otter pelts that were collected at San Buenaventura and shipped to Mexico. While complaining in a letter about a missing shipment of skins, he defended the mission's Chumash hunters, stating, "One hundred and sixty otter pelts are worth a great deal of money and have cost our poor Indians even more in hard and dangerous labor, sometimes at the risk of life itself."<sup>20</sup> Earlier, in 1810, he wrote of an opportunity that had been proposed to transship California pelts from Mexico to Manila instead of selling them in Mexico City. Noting that there were also would-be purchasers in California, he recalled that an official "had offered to forward to Manila all the otter pelts we might send him and to credit the several missions with the entire proceeds of their sale," an arrangement that Senan hoped to revive.<sup>21</sup>

Despite the opportunities presented by the late-Spanish sea otter trade, Senan mentions the subject less and less over the course of the decade. In June 1816, he wrote about some Aleut or Kodiak Natives—"Russian Indians" who had been brought to the Channel Islands as hunters and were living in impoverished conditions on Santa Rosa Island—who came to San Buenaventura to be baptized, bringing with them "their canoe (cayuco) with all its gear and four otter pelts, which were the sole possessions of these poor people."<sup>22</sup> Years of poaching and illegal





David Porter's *Essex* pictured in the Nuka Hiva Campaign of the Marquesas Islands in 1813. Courtesy Naval History and Heritage Command. Public domain.

trading of sea otters by Russian and American interests reduced what had once been a viable source of income for Southern California settlements as well as for outsiders. Senan's last mention of local sea otters is unique because it represents imperial worry about the environmental fate of the animals at the end of Spanish sovereignty. In an 1822 report, just at the start of California's Mexican era, he wrote, "In years gone by the Mission used to catch many sea otters, by dint of great effort and skill, but hunting them now is a waste of time, for the Anglo-Americans and the Russians have finished them off. The few remaining ones have fled, disgusted by so much persecution."<sup>23</sup>

Senan's regret for local nature reflects not only the reduced numbers of *Enhydra lutris* in the region but the relative importance of the maritime fur trade that was sustained through the closing years of Spanish sovereignty in the eastern Pacific. Furthermore, it suggests that California sea otters did not significantly rebound in the 1810s (at least in specific areas south of Point Conception) following the conclusion of joint Russian and American contract poaching, as other evidence may indicate.<sup>24</sup> Scholars should continue to examine this important place and time in the otter trade.

## NOTES

1. For the most complete history of the *Mercury*, see Robert Ryall Miller, *A Yankee Smuggler on the Spanish California Coast: George Washington Eayrs and the Ship Mercury* (Santa Barbara, CA: Santa Barbara Trust for Historic Preservation, 2001).
2. Gordon K. Harrington, "The American Naval Challenge to the English East India Company during the War of 1812," in Douglas C. Meister, Sharon Pfeiffer, and Brian VanDeMark, eds., *New Interpretations in Naval History: Selected Papers from the Tenth Naval History Symposium Held at the United States Naval Academy, 11–13 September 1991* (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 1993), 129–152.
3. Adele Odgen, *The California Sea Otter Trade, 1784–1848* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1941), 75.
4. Andrew Lambert, *The Challenge: America, Britain and the War of 1812* (London: Faber and Faber, 2012); George C. Daughan, *The Shining Sea: David Porter and the Epic Voyage of the U.S.S. Essex during the War of 1812* (New York: Basic Books, 2013).

5. *Mercury Case Manuscript Typescript*, Cuad. 10, 67, Los Angeles Public Library Special Collections, Los Angeles, California (hereafter MCMT).
6. MCMT, Cuad. 16, 59.
7. Miller, 37.
8. MCMT, Cuad. 16, 90–103.
9. MCMT, Cuad. 10, 150–152.
10. MCMT, Cuad. 16, 122–126.
11. Paul D. Nathan, trans., and Lesley Byrd Simpson, eds., *The Letters of Jose Senan, O.F.M., Mission San Buenaventura, 1796–1823* (Ventura, CA: Ventura County Historical Society, 1962), 63–65.
12. Irving Berdine Richman, *California under Spain and Mexico 1535–1847* (Boston and New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1911), 203.
13. Ibid.
14. Ogden, *California Sea Otter Trade*, 66.
15. Ibid., 70–71.
16. Deni Trejo Barajas and Marie Christine Duggan, “San Blas and the Californias: Hispanic Trade in the Northern Pacific Rim in a Time of Great Change (1767–1820),” *Mains’l Haul: A Journal of Pacific Maritime History* 54 (2018): 41–44.
17. Nathan and Simpson, *Letters of Jose Senan*, 63.
18. Ibid., 72.
19. Ibid., 75.
20. Ibid., 64.
21. Ibid., 42–43.
22. Ibid., 86.
23. Ibid., 164.
24. See Richard Ravalli, *Sea Otters: A History* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2018), 73.

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- Ogden, Adele. *The California Sea Otter Trade, 1784–1848*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1941.
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# Bhagalpur Silk and Blue Nankeen

## *What Hispanic Actors Made of Eayrs' Cargo, 1807–1812*

Marie Christine Duggan

The inner workings of missions and private ranchos in Alta and Baja California are something of a mystery to historians, and examining the items such institutions purchased from George Washington Eayrs between 1807 and 1812<sup>1</sup> provides some insight into their day-to-day activities, along with the human relationships that made the society function. In 1813, a merchant from Lima named Nicolas Noé seized Eayrs' ship to eliminate his rival, and the papers from the ensuing court case open a window on the economy of Alta and Baja California. The six-year period from 1807 to 1812 was one of unimaginable change. In 1808, Napoleon imprisoned Carlos IV, and the nearly 300-year-old Spanish Empire began to crumble. By 1810, insurgents emerged in New Spain, as well as in South America. Royalists, including the San Blas navy, fought to stay connected to Spain, while insurgents were often ambitious mulatto and mestizo men like many of California's soldiers, who wanted to throw off the Spanish system. Through 1810, Mexico City merchants had delivered goods paid for by the State to California through the port of San Blas on the Pacific Coast, and the navy then had carried the goods north (Figure 1 shows San Blas at the right). The royalist San Blas navy in 1811 was diverted from supplying California to putting down rebellion in what would become, in 1821, independent Mexico. California's soldiers had always redeemed their pay in goods at stores run at presidios by *habilitados* (supply masters). Between 1810 and 1821, Mexico City's supplies did not arrive, so the stores had very little to offer soldiers and pay became hypothetical. At Santa Barbara, José Darío Argüello was in command from 1807 to 1814, and he would defend California's trade with New Englander Eayrs on the grounds that extraordinary need made

licit what was normally illegal. In effect, California lost its government subsidy, which forced the colony to reorient to produce for export. G. W. Eayrs both bought from California and sold to its people.

Eayrs traded between Canton (China), Sitka (then Russia), the Santa Barbara Channel (Alta California), and the Bay of San Quintín (Baja California) with occasional trips to Cabo San Lucas (Baja California Sur), see Figure 1.<sup>2</sup> Records of trades by Missions San Luis Obispo, Santa Barbara, San Fernando in Alta California, and El Rosario in Baja California Norte demonstrate that religious ceremony distinguished missions from ranches, which otherwise shared purchases of tools, clothing, and chinaware. Trades made at Rancho Refugio and Rancho Topanga let us glimpse the disparities between private settlers such as the Ortegas and Bartolomé Tapia, and indeed disparities between clothing purchases at older missions and those at the young Mission San Fernando hint at the rise of a managerial class of Native people of the second generation at the older establishments of San Luis Obispo and Santa Barbara. As for El Rosario in northern Baja California, these rare documents on Fr. José Caulas indicate it was an austere place that relied upon sales of otter hides to men like Eayrs, given that its herds were small. At all of the institutions, cloth is a prominent purchase, and readers can complement this essay by turning to <http://dwrillustrator.blogspot.com/> to see how historian and illustrator David Rickman brings the material to life.

From 1811 to 1813, missionaries agreed to divert a share of Native Christians' produce to the presidios so that local military could redeem part of their pay. This marked a fundamental change in what a mission was, from a Native community that produced for itself, to an institution increasingly subordinate to military needs.<sup>3</sup>



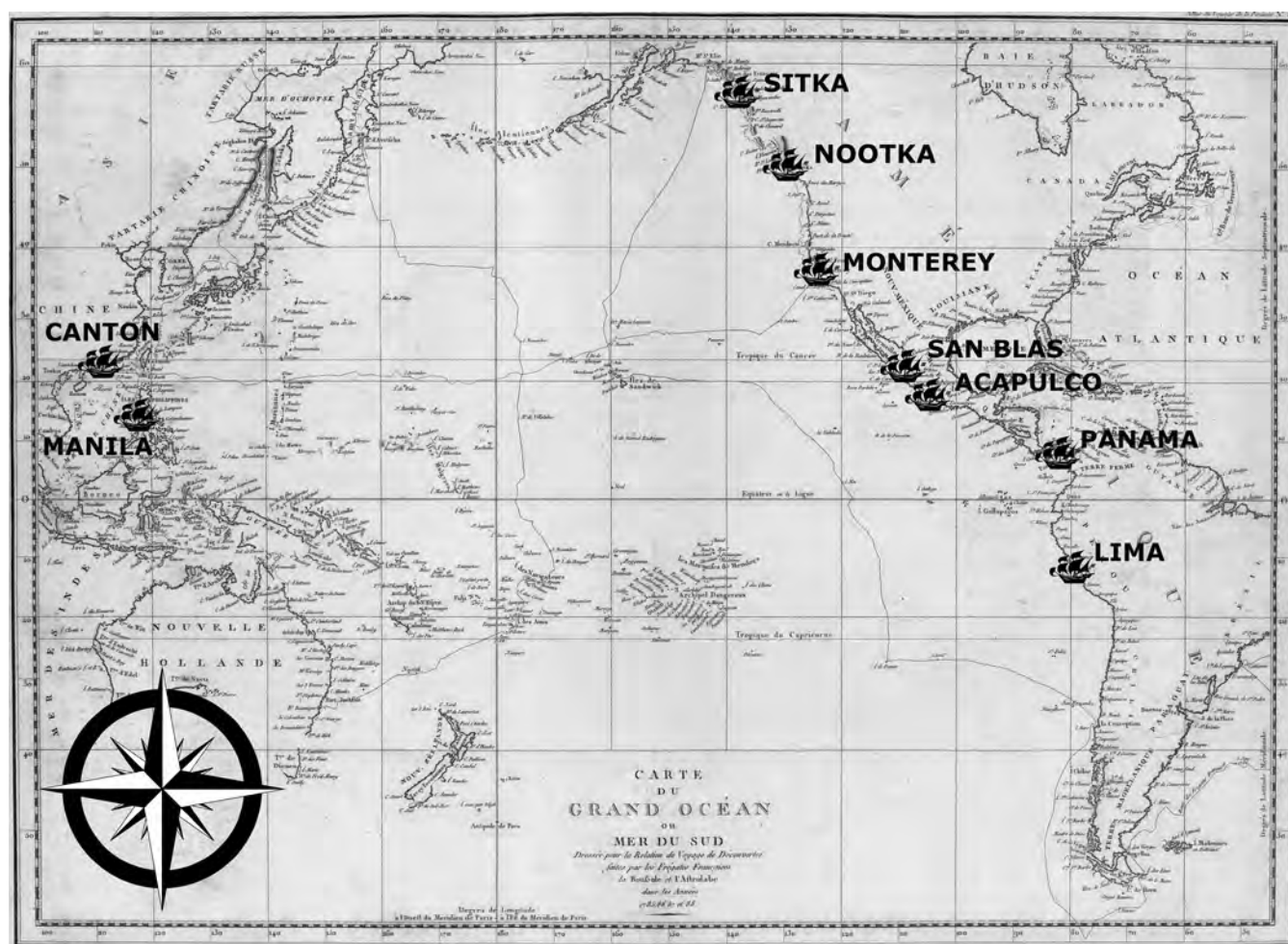


Figure 1. California in the Pacific Rim, ca. 1810. Captain Eyars sailed from from Canton to Sitka to the Santa Barbara Channel to Cabo San Lucas. Base map from La Pérouse, Jean-Francois de Galaup, comte de. 1797. *Mer du Sud. Atlas du voyage de La Pérouse*. Paris: L’Imprimerie de la Republique, p. 3. Public domain.

Mission San Luis Obispo’s 1812 account with Eyars is our example of a mission purchasing from Eyars when the missionaries’ goal had been transformed to sustaining the local military as well as the Native congregation. In these early years, many thought this was a temporary adaptation to a crisis period that would soon pass. But they were wrong. Spain lost the civil war in New Spain, and independent Mexico was born into debt without funds to adequately compensate soldiers.

Figure 2 provides the bird’s eye view to look at California as part of western New Spain from Guadalajara to Sonora to Baja California and San Francisco, and we see that the entire region turned between 1810 and 1821 from supplying itself via Mexico City to an increasing reliance upon Pacific trade—from Canton, Manila, Panama, and Lima ships started sailing in and out of San Blas, with the port itself rapidly becoming

more commercial than military. This opening of Pacific trade occurred because, due to conflict in Europe, little was coming from the Atlantic into the Americas. Furthermore, for hundreds of years, Spain had very specific and restrictive rules about trade even between its own colonies, but suddenly those rules were not enforced and maybe not even applicable. Trade in San Blas increased sixty-fold between 1809 and 1815.<sup>4</sup> As merchants mingled there, word of the potential profits in California reached them. Civil conflict was causing shortages of foodstuffs and tallow in South America, needs that California could supply.

### Part 1. 1807: The Brothers Ruiz and the Dominicans of Baja California Norte

Port San Thomas, August 21, 1807, “We promise to pay in eight months to el Padre Joseph Caulas

four hundred and thirty one dollars. Guillermo Davis and George W. Eayrs.”

In 1807, Fr. Caulas of Mission El Rosario was rather generous with Captain William Heath Davis and the young Eayrs, because he lent them \$431 pesos and accepted a promissory note from the New Englanders. In the event, Eayrs paid it back only five years later in 1812. Perhaps the loan indicates how intensely the Dominican friar wanted the New Englanders to remain on the coast. Eayrs’ ship, the *Mercury*, was a lifeline for Mission El Rosario, which barely scraped by, but could dramatically raise its income by providing otter hides to a ship sailing to Asia that was willing to come to Baja California Norte. Figure 2 shows Mission Rosario’s location at its founding in 1774. The Dominican Fr. José Caulas served a population of about 250 at Rosario from 1807 to 1814. Rosario was known for having few cattle and scanty harvests.<sup>5</sup>

Fr. Caulas developed a friendship with Eayrs, but remained a tough negotiator in business matters. The Dominican wrote, “I don’t like the goods which Don Guillermo Davis brought me, I intend when he returns that he bring me back the money, and if then he carries some goods that I like, we can do business.”<sup>6</sup> It was Eayrs who had sent the goods by way of Davis, an effort to pay back Fr. Caulas for his 1807 loan, but the friar was not satisfied: “The note for \$431 signed by you and payable to me I wish in money & you will, I expect, before you leave the coast, stop at my mission and take up the note & thereby oblige your friend & humble servant.” Fr. Caulas wanted either silver coin or something he could really use, as befits a man living a rather austere lifestyle without much backup.<sup>7</sup> Eayrs would often anchor near El Rosario at the Bay of San Quintín (see Figure 2). Upon closer examination, it turns out that the sometime commander of Presidio San Diego, Francisco María Ruíz, was the brother of Commander Manuel Ruíz at the subpresidio of Baja California Norte at Mission San Vicente; the implication is that the most northern part of Baja California was in many ways tied to Alta California. Let us follow Eayrs to his stops in Alta California before we return back to his home base, as if we were making the circular journey with him.

## Part 2. 1808: Rancho Topanga and Mission San Fernando

[Sail] about seven leagues past Point Mugu, towards the south. This anchorage is before you get to San Pedro [see Figure 3]. You will find a point of dead land, and around the corner is the port. We have otter hides and cash and seeds and salt and beef cattle and wood and water.<sup>8</sup>

Bartolomé Tapia gave these directions for Rancho Topanga to Captain George Washington Eayrs, probably around 1808 when Eayrs first captained the *Mercury*. Tapia was born in Culiacán, Sinaloa, and at age eleven he came from Sonora/Arizona to California with his father and stepmother as part of Juan Bautista de Anza’s settlement party in 1775.<sup>9</sup> By 1791 he was a twenty-seven-year-old settler in Los Angeles and in 1804 received Rancho Topanga Malibu Sequit.<sup>10</sup> We do not know what service he rendered to the powerful that got him this early land grant in territory that would otherwise have belonged to the Chumash congregation of San Buenaventura or to the multicultural Tongva/Chumash/Tataviam congregation of Mission San Fernando Rey (see Figure 3).<sup>11</sup> The next anchorage after Topanga was San Pedro, which is why Bartolomé stated in his postscript to George Eayrs: “Don Jorge, if you can’t come [to Topanga], send one of your people



Figure 2. Eayrs’ markets in Las Californias, 1807–1812. Map by Kathleen Harper. Used with permission.

to whom I can return the money you supplied me in San Pedro.”<sup>12</sup> San Pedro is today known as the Port of Los Angeles, the second-busiest container port in the United States due to its trade with Asia.<sup>13</sup> The trade between G. W. Eayrs and Bartolomé Tapia was an early precursor.

One year Don Bartolomé of Topanga was frustrated because he couldn’t make his meeting with Eayrs: “I was taken prisoner as you will know, however my case is nothing, and proof of this is that already I am leaving, as the bearer [of this note] will tell you.” The reference to an apparent arrest, of course, leaves the reader wishing to know more; but we are forced to use our imagination to complete the story. Tapia continues, “If I manage to get out quickly, I will go there to give you an embrace. And if I cannot go, and you depart, leave with Martín two bolts of *manta* and one pound of thread.”<sup>14</sup> This refers to Martín Ortega (see below) at Rancho Refugio, a previous stop on Eayrs’ route.

Topanga is located at the far edge of territory which in the first decade of the nineteenth century bordered three neighboring institutions (see Figure 3): the town of Los Angeles and the missions of San Fernando and San Buenaventura. San Fernando is near the modern “Grapevine” on Highway 5, and to understand its commercial relationship to Rancho Topanga on the coast, recall that when a Native community was baptized, the community brought its lands so that the mission expanded in area, with the people baptized switching the land’s use from solely hunting and gathering to a combination with Spanish agriculture and husbandry as well. A mission such as San Fernando would use the various watery spots in its territory as locations for fields or pastures, and some of those spots pushed San Fernando’s boundary in the direction of Topanga. By 1805, most Native Americans upon the strip of California coast controlled by the Spanish had accepted baptism, and therefore most lands were under the jurisdiction of the mission congregations. In 1786, when Governor Pedro Fages obtained the right to grant private lands to men such as Tapia, the condition was that “the tracts do not encroach on mission lands, pueblo lands, or the villages of unconverted native Californians.”<sup>15</sup> Rancho Topanga was as distant as possible from two missions. Yet if the people of Topanga had relocated



Figure 3. Santa Barbara Channel, 1807–1812. Map by Kathleen Harper. Used with permission.

to San Fernando, they still would have considered the Sesquit land their own. Topanga is the sort of spot at the edge of mission jurisdictions where a settler with political connections had the best chance of obtaining land. Even so, private land grants were unusual, and Tapia must have completed some service to the state to attain it.

At Topanga, Tapia purchased goods from Eayrs’ Canton cargo not only for himself, but also for “Padre Pedro.”<sup>16</sup> Fr. Pedro Muñoz served some twenty-five miles inland from 1807 to 1817 at Mission San Fernando Rey (see Figure 3). We learn from this that Topanga was the access to the sea of Mission San Fernando, which has not been included in the literature up to now.

As shown in Tables 1 and 2, both institutions purchased work tools. Tapia purchased for the rancho hinges and a two-handed adze, as well as machetes. The carpenter’s tools were for constructing a building, while the machetes were for field work. He also purchased *coletas*, which were tarps for covering things from rain or dust, or the same material could also be used to make tough work clothes for field work. If we look at what Tapia offered to sell Eayrs, we find that he mentioned grains (*semillas*), livestock, and wood, which must be what the ranch produced—in effect, not much. Tapia also offered otter hides. The Chumash and Tongva both constructed plank canoes for travel between the coast and the Channel Islands (Santa Cruz was the closest), and the Chumash on the islands were not yet baptized, so it stands to reason that Tapia at Topanga



**Table 1. José Bartolomé Tapia's Purchases for Rancho Topanga, ca. 1807<sup>17</sup>**

Purchase (Spanish)	Purchase (English)	Definitions
2 piezas de manta y una libra de hilo	2 bolts of <i>manta</i> and one pound of thread.	Manta: heavy cloth, usually wool but could be cotton, often used either to cover a bed, or to cover oneself (underwear). RAE, DHLE <sup>i</sup>
12 piezas de saya	12 bolts of saya	Saya is a skirt for women, or a tunic for men; RAE <sup>ii</sup>
12 piezas buruato (asume burato)	12 bolts silk crepe. In California used for sashes for vaqueros; in Spain, black buruato was for mourning.	Rickman, DHLE <sup>iii</sup>
Diez piezas de mascadas, negras y de colores	10 pieces scarves, black ones and colored ones.	
3 libras seda azul torcida	3 pounds of twisted blue silk	
2 libras seda negra torcida	2 pounds of twisted black silk	
1 libra seda colores	1 pound of colored silk	
4 libras de hilo	4 pounds of thread	
Listones. piezas.	Ribbons, bolts	
pañó fino	Wool cloth	Paño is wool cloth of various kinds in 1739. But by 1737 is any cloth of silk, linen or cotton, a sort of generic term. DHLE <sup>iv</sup>
Bisagras, machetes, Azuela de dos Manos.	Hinges, machetes, adze of two hands.	
Losa de lo que haiga.	Porcelain ware, whatever you have.	
Manta. Géneros rayados que sirvan para naguas.	Cloth. Striped types for making skirts.	Rickman, no date, points out that Louis Choris depicted Ohlone at Mission San Francisco in striped cloth.
Pañuelos si hay	Shoulder scarves woman, or neckerchiefs for a man.	
Muselina, tres piezas	Muslin, three bolts.	Fabric of Cotton, silk, wool, etc. That is fine and not dense. p. 290 LA-1. RAE <sup>v</sup>
Si hay, coletas azules o blancos	If you have, blue or white coletas.	Used for field work, or to protect from dust or rain, to make sacks or to clean. <sup>vi</sup>
Bayetón	Loose-fitting cloak	DA <sup>vii</sup>

**Table 2. Fr. Pedro Muñoz of Mission San Fernando, Purchases at Topanga (date unknown)<sup>18</sup>**

Purchase (Spanish)	Purchase (English)	Definitions
Piezas de tisú	Bolts of lamé (silk cloth with gold and silver thread woven so that one side shines).	RAE, DHLE <sup>i</sup>
Géneros para frontales, nácar y negro	Types of cloth to adorn the front of an altar, cream-colored and black.	
Papeleras	Wastebaskets	
Piezas sayasaya	Bolts of plain-woven silk fabric from China	Sayasaya is silk crepe per David Rickman, personal communication.
Piezas de buruato	Bolts of silk crepe	Definition from David Rickman, personal communication.
Pieza Olanda	A very fine piece of linen (lienzo) from which shirts/camisas, sheets/sábanas.	RAE, DHLE <sup>ii</sup>
cajones de vidrios	Boxes of glass windows	
Piezas de manta china	Bolts of Chinese manta	See table 1
2 libras seda negra	2 pounds of black silk, an extremely thick fiber made from the cocoons. Used to make many type of cloth, and also to sew or embroider	DHLA <sup>iii</sup>
Cepillos, gurbias, formones, barrenas junteras, azuelas, dedos manos, compases grandes y chicos. Martillos, escofinas, Limas de todos tamaños, claveras	Planes, gouges, chisels, drills, joiners, adzes, inches, hands, compasses, small and large. Hammers, rasps, files of all sizes, <i>claveras</i>	
Dos cajas para guardarlo	Toolboxes for storing them	
Primero estuche de matemática	Pencil case for mathematics	
Dos taladras	2 punches	

was trading with the island people for the hides that he sold to Eayrs.

As Table 2 illustrates, Fr. Pedro Muñoz purchased far more tools than the ranch, reminding us that missions were the primary institutions of production in Spanish California. Muñoz ordered tools that indicate construction and sophisticated carpentry among the Tongva/Chumash/Yokuts of Mission San Fernando: planes, gouges, chisels, drills, joiners, adzes, and punches. Another sign of precision in construction at Mission San Fernando is the instruments he ordered that would have facilitated drawing prior to the construction:

compasses, inches (*dedos*), and hands (*manos*), along with the *estuche de matematica*; an *estuche* is typically a pencil case that a student would carry, and the item advances the idea of careful drawing prior to carpentry work. The source of the cloth and porcelain was probably Asia, yet where did the tools come from? If this trade is indeed from 1808, perhaps Eayrs still had Boston products in his cargo.

In Table 2, there is a clear contrast in several of the purchases that Padre Pedro Muñoz of San Fernando made from those of the rancher. The Franciscan purchased glass panes (*vidrios*), presumably for the church

at San Fernando. He also purchased bolts of *tisú* (silk cloth with gold and silver threads interwoven in such a way that one side is shiny, which is today known as lamé). The friar also purchased black and cream-colored frontals to hang in the front of the altar facing the congregation during mass, and one bolt of *olanda*, a fine piece of linen, possibly an altar cloth. As at San Luis Obispo, the ceremonial aspect of mission life distinguished San Fernando from the Topanga ranch.

Both the rancher and Fr. Pedro purchased manta, which Bartolomé Tapia tells us (rather helpfully) that he plans to use for skirts (*naguas*), and he wants striped manta. He also hoped for *pañuelos*, if Captain Eayrs had any; these were scarves for wrapping around a woman's shoulders or for men to use as neckerchiefs. Tapia purchased a *bayetón*, which was a poncho of heavier cloth, possibly to keep himself warm and dry. Finally, Tapia hoped he could get chinaware for his home from Eayrs.

The manta that Padre Pedro purchased was given the epithet "*de China*," which possibly made it a slightly different type of cloth, of which we know little. The Franciscan also purchased bolts of *buruato* and bolts of silk (*sayasaya*). Sashes were issued to leadership on missions, and we know they were made of either *sayasaya* or *buruato*.<sup>19</sup>

The overall impression is that Mission San Fernando was a larger, more sophisticated institution than Rancho Topanga in the period 1807–1813 of these undated notes. On the other hand, Mission San Fernando's purchases were only one-fifth the size of those of the much older Mission San Luis Obispo. It is surprising that Mission San Fernando did not order more cloth for the Tongva/Chumash/Tataviam congregation; Duggan has shown that in the period 1769–1810, Missions San Diego, Santa Clara, and La Purísima ordered from Mexico City much larger quantities of cloth clearly destined for the bulk of the population.<sup>20</sup> For Fr. Muñoz, the purchases of tools took precedence over clothing. San Fernando was a young mission, founded in 1797, and it was far enough from the sea that earning extra cash from the otter trade may not have been possible (especially given that Tapia occupied the prime coastal outlet of the area). To purchase from Eayrs, the mission needed something to trade, or else a pile of silver coins. Lack of both may be why Pedro Muñoz largely limited his

purchases to specialty fabrics from Asia and precision tools.

### Part 3: 1809: Rancho Refugio, the Ortegas, and Mission Santa Barbara

Dear Mr. George, Happy voyage and come back soon. I am placing an order with you from Russia for a bolt of red *bayeta*<sup>21</sup> and four bolts of *manta ancha*. Padre Luís [Gil y Taboada] says you should send four locks for wardrobes and the screws for the hinges I bought and gave to Martín. . . . B.S.M. Ortega.<sup>22</sup>

Martín was the son of José Vicente Ortega, which suggests the latter as the author of the above note. José Vicente's order from Russia for a bolt of red *bayeta* confirms that Captain Eayrs obtained cargo from Russian outposts as well as China. Rancho Refugio was a strip of coast between three missions (La Purísima, Santa Ynez, and Santa Barbara) occupied by the Ortega family, with the best harbor in the channel. The land was granted to José Vicente's father, José Francisco Ortega, who was from 1782 to 1784 the founding commander of Presidio Santa Barbara. José Francisco Ortega had managed a warehouse in Guanajuato before he joined the military, which hints at a commercial background. He became a *habilitado* in 1787,<sup>23</sup> and he was one of the few whom the auditor did not arrest for contraband. Given J. F. Ortega's later reputation at Refugio, that may have been an error on the auditor's part! José Francisco Ortega tended to inspire trust and confidence, so his escape from the auditor's wrath is in character.

In 1794, Ortega and his family built homes and a vineyard at Rancho Refugio. Conventional wisdom is that the land was granted to J. F. Ortega to empower him to repay a debt to the military that he had accumulated as *habilitado*. However, the timing and location raise a second possibility: that presidio command and all three missions desired to supplement the meager funds allotted to California by means of trade using Refugio Beach. Initially the trade was with the Port of San Blas via the navy supply ship, whose staff J. F. Ortega would have come to know from working as *habilitado*. Indeed, in 1801 the Ortegas shipped wheat to San Blas. After the Ortega patriarch died in 1798, his sons José María and José Vicente managed Rancho Refugio, and by 1805 there were two



separate Ortega households. We turn first to that of José Vicente, the smaller of the two Ortega operations.

José Vicente Ortega was born in Loreto in 1778 and married in 1798 in Santa Bárbara.<sup>24</sup> Table 3 indicates that on December 6, 1809, José Vicente purchased one bolt of *platilla*, a strong, fine fabric typically used for curtains, but possibly also for fine shirts. He also bought two bolts of *manta* for making shirts and underwear, and two bolts of blue nankeen for making pants. The impression is that he was a hard-working individual, just starting out; his purchases of cloth show no sign of a labor force. J. V. Ortega paid for these 1809 purchases with eight heifers at six pesos and one otter hide at eight, which goods supplied to Eayrs totaled fifty-six dollars. Foodstuffs produced in California were a more important export at this ranch than otter hides. José Vicente obtained from Eayrs goods (and a little coin) worth \$56.

Turning now to the other Ortega operation, Table 4 illustrates that José Dolores Ortega bought \$1,385 worth of goods, about thirteen times what his uncle José Vicente bought from Captain Eayrs. José Dolores Ortega was the son of José María Ortega, José Vicente's brother.<sup>25</sup> By 1809, this grandson of the patriarch José Francisco Ortega ties with Fr. Luís Martínez of San Luis Obispo as the top commercial actor living on the Santa Barbara Channel.

In 1804, 1813, and 1817, the friars at Mission Santa Barbara protested the Ortega family's efforts to make their title to Refugio permanent on the ground that the mission congregation included the Chumash of Casil who had a natural right to the territory that the Ortegas claimed, which included water sources that made it fertile territory that the mission could use to raise food for the congregation. In 1818 Fr. Ripoll of Santa Barbara protested that the Ortegas had

expanded their ranching beyond the original canyon allocated by the governor, such that they controlled more land than the mission, despite the larger number of people in the Santa Barbara Chumash congregation. Fr. Ripoll's protests illustrate the way a mission congregation's territorial size expanded into the areas from which Native people were baptized, and also the missionary's role as land advocate on behalf of his congregation to keep powerful Hispanic actors from encroaching.

José Dolores Ortega's large 1809 order in Table 4 supports Father Ripoll's 1818 argument that the Ortega family progeny were expanding beyond what their father had been permitted to use in 1794. We see in José Dolores's purchases a man who likes the finer things in life (three bolts of *platilla* for curtains/shirts, two boxes of gin, and that remarkable bolt of Bhagalpur silk, as well as fine *pañó*, which he purchased by the *yard*, rather than the bolt, indicating its expense). José Dolores also purchased the remarkable quantity of 100 bolts of blue nankeen for making work clothes. The purchases suggest that he had a large Chumash workforce. In 1841, J. D. Ortega would receive much of the former Mission Santa Ynez and its congregation as his personal estate but in 1809 his workforce may have been the unconverted on the Channel islands.

The Ortegas sold otters that the Chumash must have hunted in the Santa Barbara Channel. José Dolores sold fifteen otter hides at \$10, another seventy-one hides at \$9, another eight otter hides at \$5.50, and another eight spoiled ones for which Eayrs paid only \$2, for a total supply of \$900 pesos. Let us compare this to what José Dolores spent purchasing from Eayrs. If we subtract the \$150 in silver coin that J. D. Ortega picked up, he spent \$1,235 on goods. José Dolores then financed 73 percent of these purchases by the sale of otter hides.

**Table 3. José Vicente Ortega's December 6, 1809, Purchases<sup>26</sup>**

In Spanish	In English	Cost	Define
1 pieza de platilla a \$25	1 bolt of platilla at \$25 (fine and strong material used for curtains)	\$25.00	DHLE. <sup>i</sup>
2 piezas de <i>manta</i> de algodón a \$9	2 bolts of Cotton <i>manta</i> at \$9	\$18.00	See Table 1.
2 piezas de Mahon azul at 2.75	2 bolts blue nankeen at \$2.75	\$5.00 [sic]	See Table 1.
En dinero \$7.50	In silver coin \$7.50 (received by JVO)	\$7.50	
	<b>Total:</b>	<b>\$96.00</b>	

**Table 4. José Dolores Ortega's December 9, 1809, Purchases<sup>27</sup>**

Purchase (Spanish)	Purchase (English)	Cost	Define
15 piezas manta blanca de algodón a \$9	15 bolts white cotton cloth at \$9	\$135.00	See Table 1.
2 cajas de ginebra a \$6	2 boxes of gin at \$6	\$12.00	
3 piezas platilla at \$25	3 bolts of <i>platilla</i> at \$25 (fine and strong for curtains)	\$75.00	See Table 2
1 bolt de Boglepur	1 bolt of Bhagalpur silk	\$14.00	Arya & Chandra 2022 <sup>i</sup>
3 sobrecamas a \$5	3 bedspreads at \$5	\$15.00	
8 hachas de cortar a \$2.25	8 axes for cutting at \$2.25	\$18.00	
1 pala	1 shovel	\$2.00	
11 arrobas de fierro at \$4	11 arrobas of iron at \$4	\$44.00	
100 piezas Mahon azul a \$3	100 bolts of blue Nankeen at \$3	\$300.00	
116 yardas de paño fino a \$7	116 yards of fine paño at \$7	\$112.00	
24 idem colorado a \$4.50	24 yards of fine red paño at \$4.50	\$108.00	
5 yardas de paño azul a \$5	5 yards of paño azul at \$5	\$25.00	
6 piezas de cordoncillo a \$7	6 bolts of braid or piping at \$7	\$42.00	Collins dictionary is definition
1 sextante	1 sextant	\$300.00	For taking altitudes in navigation
2 1/2 yardas de paño fino azul a \$7	2 ½ yards of fine blue paño at \$7	\$17.50	
4 bandas azules a \$3	4 blue sashes at \$3	\$12.00	
<b>Dinero</b>	Silver coin (received by J.D. Ortega)	\$12.00	
	<b>Total</b>	<b>\$1,385.00</b>	

Perhaps José Dolores had a Chumash crew operating in the waters. By 1809 there would have been few unconverted people living along the coast, though it is possible José Dolores obtained hides from Chumash living on the islands opposite Refugio Beach.

Did José Dolores have a ship of his own? Because of his purchase for \$300 of a sextant to measure latitude, the question comes up. This author has never heard that any Hispanic settler in California had a ship until the 1820s. However, prior to reading this document she also had never hear of a certain Cayuelas, who may have been a muleteer selling cloth made at missions in California.

To pay in kind for his purchases, José Dolores Ortega provided one barrel of aguardiente and six

barrels of wine at \$20 each to Eayrs, which confirms that there was a vineyard at the original Rancho Refugio along the coast. He also sold to Eayrs a substantial amount of flour (over \$50), and a few garbanzo beans and onions. The year 1809 was not yet the era of the hide and tallow trade, but José Dolores did sell one leather hide (*cuero*) and six *arrobas* of tallow. Don Ortega obtained \$2 per *arroba*, which is a good price. The overall impression is that livestock was a small part of J. D. Ortega's operation; he specialized in otter hunting by the Chumash, along with operating a still for whisky, a vineyard, and a gristmill.

Fr. Luís Gil y Taboada may have used the beach at Rancho Refugio to pick up from Eayrs his purchases for Mission Santa Barbara. As Table 5 indicates, Fr.

**Table 5. Fr. Luis Gil y Taboada of Mission Santa Barbara Purchases, ca. 1809<sup>28</sup>**

In Spanish	In English	Cost	Define
6 bolts Mahon azul at \$3	6 bolts of blue Nankeen at \$3, used as for breeches, or for petticoats or shirts	\$18.00	Document states that Mahon is synonym for nankeen
12 bolts of Mahon at \$2.75	12 bolts of Nankeen at \$2.75	\$33	
5 piezas Mahon amarillo a \$2.50	5 bolts yellow Nankeen at \$2.50, used as above.	\$12.50	
2 piezas platilla at 25	2 bolts <i>platilla</i> at 25	\$50	See Table 2.
9 piezas de manta de algodón a 9	9 bolts of Cotton cloth at 9.	\$81.00	Cotton manta was for every day shirts and skirts.
17 yardas de manto de seda negra	17 yards of black silk <i>manto</i> .	\$30.00	A <i>manto</i> is a cape, and manto de <i>humo</i> is a veil for a widow to cover her whole body. RAE, DHLE, DEM <sup>i</sup>
7 yardas de manto de seda a \$2	7 yards of silk manto.	\$14.00	
Un espejo	A mirror	\$2.00	
3 1/2 yardas de paño azul a \$7.00	3 1/2 yards of thick wool cloth at \$7.00.	\$24.50	Thick wool fabric. DEM <sup>ii</sup>
Una sobrecama	A bed spread	\$5.00	
1 banda colorada a \$3.00	1 red sash at \$3.00	\$3.00	
1 pañuelo at \$1.25	1 shoulder scarf for a woman or a neckerchief for a man	\$1.25	The red sash and the pañuelo were one line item.
Una pieza de cinta a \$9.00	A bolt of ribbon at \$9.00	\$9.00	
	<b>Total:</b>	<b>\$283.25</b>	

Gil y Taboada purchased twenty-three bolts of nankeen, perhaps to make petticoats or shirts for the Chumash congregation, or else to makes breeches, jackets, or aprons for those Chumash who worked at skilled trades, or for the thirty to forty Chumash who managed the 1,413 people in the congregation at Mission Santa Barbara. He also ordered nine bolts of *manta de algodón*, a thick cotton cloth for shirts, skirts, and underwear. The implication of the

large-scale nankeen and manta purchases is that at Santa Barbara, too, a substantial subgroup of the Chumash congregation was beginning to resemble the settler community in some of its attire.

There are some entries in Table 5 suggesting that Fr. Luís Gil was upgrading his own quarters: a mirror for \$2, one bedspread, and a couple bolts of *platilla*, a fine, strong fabric typically used for curtains. Recall that 1809 was one year before crisis came to



California's supply line, that is, a time when Native people baptized into California's mission system experienced the highest economic standard of living they would ever see. In those years, baptized Native people distributed the produce of missions among themselves; the military got no share of mission output unless *habilitados* paid for it. Long-standing missions were then forty years old, with second-generation Native Christians in leadership, and had solidly constructed irrigation systems, gardens, herds, looms, forges, leather and carpentry shops. The first mission we looked at, San Fernando, was only ten years old in 1807 and probably still constructing its productive capacity. Mission Santa Barbara was twenty-three years old in 1809, and this older mission's account illustrates the type of purchases made at peak operating capacity when its sole obligation was to sustain its own community of Chumash Christians.

In addition to receiving \$800 worth of goods from the state each year, these older missions sold to the local military or to the San Blas navy or to men such as Eayrs, so that before the crisis total money income for an older mission was upward of \$4,000 pesos per year.<sup>29</sup> The community's 1809 peak income shows up in better clothes for Native Christians, and more spectacular ceremony in churches.

Mission Santa Barbara ordered twenty-three bolts of nankeen, both blue and yellow. David Rickman suggests that the blue was used for skirts or shirts, or possibly for breeches and aprons for artisans. Our images of Native Americans at missions largely come from Luis Choris, who painted Ohlone in striped cloth in 1816 at Mission San Francisco. We know manta could be striped, because Tapia specified striped manta in his orders, and Mission Santa Barbara did order nine bolts of manta. The purchase of twenty-five bolts of nankeen at Santa Barbara suggest that at an older mission nankeen pants were used by second-generation people in managerial positions or working as artisans. Fr. Gil y Taboada also ordered nine bolts of manta, which Tapia had mentioned came striped. Striped manta corresponds with what we know many Native people wore at missions. It is surprising that the nankeen orders were double the manta orders, but perhaps the real surprise is that the nankeen was so cheap, at three pesos per *pieza* vs. nine pesos for a *pieza* of manta. The advantage to

Californians of purchasing textiles from China vs. New Spain is evident. This purchase at Santa Barbara of nankeen in quantity should cause us to rethink what mission Chumash were wearing in 1809, toward yellow or blue cloth, at least at missions that were Eayrs' customers.

At Santa Barbara, one person received a bright red sash and a neckerchief. This does not correspond to missionary attire. Perhaps an important leader wore it, such as the Chumash *alcalde*. The seventeen yards of black silk manto ordered in Table 5 may be for mourning or for decorating the altar during funerals; 101 people died at Santa Barbara in 1809. As is still true in the twenty-first century, global trade raises income, but also spreads contagious disease between continents; at missions, the first decade of the nineteenth century witnessed both a rising material standard of living, and also deadly epidemics.

Fr. Luís Gil paid for his purchases with eleven otter hides, for which he received \$100, that is, \$9 per hide. The implications are that, first, the Chumash congregation of Mission Santa Barbara still spent some time in their plank canoes in the channel; and, second, Fr. Luís had access to silver coin with which to settle the rest of his \$283.25 bill. Having \$183 on hand in silver is a sign of a certain amount of economic success at the mission, as is purchasing bolts of cloth for new clothes for its people, plus a new bedspread and curtains for the missionary. Yet, let's not exaggerate: This was success for people who were used to very little.

#### **Part 4. 1812: Mission San Luis Obispo and Fr. Luís Martínez**

The following undated note is signed only "Fr. Luís."

My friend Don Jorge, Welcome. At the ranch house, I look forward to eating with you. Come along with this vaquero, and we will talk about the news from Europe and of the whole world. . . . We will do business, too—if you don't bring things that are as expensive as last time. The boy says you asked why I am angry with you, and I say I'm not angry with anyone. Adios.<sup>30</sup>

With this short note, the wily Fr. Luís had already put Captain George W. Eayrs into a defensive bargaining

position over price. After 1810, every Franciscan was forced to trade with any ship that passed, despite their vow not to touch money. Roger Ryal Miller attributes the note to Fr. Lu s Gil y Taboada of Mission Santa Barbara, but this author suspects from the jocular tone that the author was Fr. Lu s Mart nez of San Luis Obispo.<sup>31</sup> But Fr. Lu s Mart nez relished trade with New Englanders. Mart nez was also a political power in the hinterland, taking armed Chumash auxiliaries into skirmishes with the unconverted Yokuts of the Central Valley and making sure that neighboring missionaries at the new San Miguel did not dare baptize in areas he considered San Luis Obispo's own. Rumors abounded in 1830 that, when Fr. Mart nez was run out of California by political enemies, he left with gold.<sup>32</sup> However, the people who propagated the rumors were military commanders who hoped to expropriate the land of Native congregations and make it their own, so while the story conveys Fr. Mart nez's reputation for business, the Franciscan may not have sought money as an end, but rather as a means to building political alliances with Native Californians, which commercial income permitted him to cement.<sup>33</sup>

Jorge, friend, the dye of vermillion is good, already Cayuelas is taking 2 bolts. However I want another papel of vermillion, and one or two pounds of cardenillo (blue-green), one paper of ochre—color yellow—and if you give me other colors as well, that would be great.<sup>34</sup>

When the San Blas navy ceased to send supplies regularly to the missions, Fr. Lu s Mart nez of San Luis Obispo pounced on the commercial opportunity by upgrading manufacturing capacity.<sup>35</sup> By the end of the decade, San Luis Obispo's rebozos and *gamuzas* had a solid reputation,<sup>36</sup> and Mart nez may already by 1812 have marketed the product to Cayuelas, perhaps a muleteer who marketed to the pueblos of Los Angeles and San Jos . <sup>37</sup> Aside from one cryptic comment by Bancroft about his mercantile activities,<sup>38</sup> we know of Cayuelas as a soldier who married a Chumash woman of Mission San Luis Obispo and obtained a grant at Rancho Margarita. The quotation above reveals that the friar obtained from Captain Eayrs dyes for the three colors: red from vermillion, green from *cardenillo*, and yellow from ochre. Eayrs



Figure 4. Native California Christian wearing *cot n* and *taparabo* while painting a mission wall. From David Rickman, *California History Coloring Book* (Mineola, NY: Dover, 1992). Used with permission.

probably obtained these in China, and their original source may have been India, which had the top reputation in the world for dyes.

In 1812, Fr. Lu s purchased goods totaling \$1,384 for San Luis Obispo, with its population of around 700 Native Californians.<sup>39</sup> This is more than the annual stipend of \$800 that the mission had received prior to 1810. With seven hundred Native Christians living at the mission, the subsidy provided only about \$1 per inhabitant per year! Prior to 1810, older missions such as San Luis Obispo had generated about \$4,000 more annually, which could raise the per person money income of a mission to \$6. As a comparison, soldiers in the presidios earned \$240 pesos annually, from which they purchased their equipment and supported families; even if we assume each paycheck supported six people, the per person income of a soldier's household would have been about \$30 per year, implying that soldiers' monetary income was multiple times higher than that of Native people. Missions were self-sufficient in grains and meat, but also chronically looking for extra sources of income

for metal and cloth. Selling surplus crops to the local military in return for payment, or exporting otter hides and providing food to the San Blas navy had generated extra.<sup>40</sup> Much of the extra income was used to clothe the inhabitants, or to decorate the church.

Missionaries were in shock in 1812 at the way civil war in New Spain suddenly undermined their finances by eliminating nearly all of that \$4,000 income. Fr. Luís at San Luis Obispo adapted rapidly by earning \$1,384 from Eayrs, and possibly more from Cayuelas. As Table 6 indicates, Fr. Luís did purchase some items for himself; the \$12 peso desk purchased from a ship sailing from Canton was no doubt lacquerware. The porcelain service set with seventy-two pieces must have been destined for the Franciscan cupboard, along with the dozen bowls.

Yet Table 6 illustrates that 35 percent of Fr. Luís's expenditures went to the community's asset, its church. The two expensive bolts of velvet (*terciopelo*) suggest ceremony, as do the fourteen bolts of delicate and insubstantial meringue cloth (*espumilla*) and the three bolts of Chinese silk (*sayasaya*). Making rich and elegant clothing for statues or vestments and altar cloths in the church was a way of honoring God in the hope that the saints would provide care for the community. Four bolts of Canton canvas were probably for use as tarps or work clothes.

The cloth ordered in large quantities must have been for the northern Chumash congregation. Table 6 indicates the purchase of sixty-five bolts of nankeen, which was used for making shirts or skirts.<sup>41</sup> The eighteen bolts of ordinary *manta* for \$198 was cotton cloth also used for making shirts and skirts. While *manta* could be striped, this nankeen was a solid blue—again, either causing us to change what we imagine baptized Chumash wore, or indicating a change in the clothing of indigenous Chumash leadership at a materially successful, second-generation mission. The record is a bit confusing as to the *piezas* of silk *pañuelos* for \$20 pesos per *pieza*. The term *pieza*, when referring to cloth, typically indicates a bolt containing many *varas*. One *vara* was roughly a yard, and George Eayrs uses a Spanglish measurement, one *yarda*. Yet when the item is scarves, one is tempted to translate *pieza* as one piece, that is, one scarf. But the price of \$20 per *pieza* seems too high to be one scarf. Perhaps scarves came joined together and were separated only after

purchase. We leave this question unresolved. We can say that Hispanic men typically wore neckerchiefs, often black. Clothing historian David Rickman tells us that by 1821 there was a group of thirty to forty Native men within a mission who were wearing the black neckerchief and red silk sash more typical of settlers,<sup>42</sup> and perhaps this was the case already in 1812. The friar also purchased eight shawls. The hint is there are maybe eight couples in leadership status. The large quantities of nankeen, *manta*, and scarves that Fr. Martínez purchased suggests that the cloth was for the northern Chumash congregation, and if that is true, then after forty years of the mission's existence, its people were beginning to dress in blue.<sup>43</sup>

To pay for his imports, Fr. Luís Martínez provided about \$400 of otter hides to the New Englander, covering one quarter of his bill. In addition to furs, Mission San Luis Obispo's community also sold foodstuffs to Captain Eayrs: fourteen pigs, thirteen chickens, four sheep, one heifer for veal, 150 eggs, salt, lard, and a good bit of flour. Surprisingly, Mission San Luis Obispo also sold one hundred bullets to Captain Eayrs—one might have expected bullets to be supplied to California from the outside world, but instead California supplied at least a few to the New Englander. Even so, Fr. Martínez had to come up with \$600 pesos in silver coin to complete his 1812 purchases of \$1,384. An intriguing mystery is from what activities in 1812 the Franciscan would have obtained such a store of silver coin—perhaps from Cayuelas.

That general picture shows Fr. Luís Martínez as an astute manager of the productive capacity of Mission San Luis Obispo during a period of massive economic change. The mission had the capacity to sell foodstuffs as well as the otter hides, and imported dyes to improve local manufacturing capacity. One surprise is that Fr. Luís purchased no tools. On the other hand, G. W. Eayrs himself may have run out of his tool inventory by 1812, which was seven years since the ship had arrived from Boston. Canton would have supplied more in the way of dyes, tea, cloth, porcelain, and lacquerware.

Given that Fr. Luís was known for military actions inside California's interior by means of northern Chumash auxiliaries loyal to him, what the attraction was to the northern Chumash of Fr. Luís's management style has long been a question. Here we see a partial answer, in that he distributed most of the income



Table 6. Fr. Luís Martínez, 1812 Purchases for Mission San Luis Obispo<sup>44</sup>

Purchase (Spanish)	Purchase (English)	Cost	Define
1 escribanía a \$12	1 desk at \$12	\$12.00	
1 vajilla con ciento setenta y dos piezas	Set of porcelain with 72 pieces	\$60.00	
1 docena de tazones o poncheras a 6 rr	1 dozen mugs or bowls	\$9.00	
2 piezas de terciopelo a 25 yardas.	2 bolts of velvet of 25 yards per bolt	\$100.00	
14 piezas de espumilla (meringue cloth) a \$8.50	14 bolts of meringue cloth at \$8.50, so-called because it is fine and loosely woven, so that it is delicate and insubstantial.	\$119.00	DEM <sup>i</sup>
3 piezas de sayasaya a \$16	3 bolts of silk at \$16; sayasaya was a plain woven silk fabric from Cina.	\$48.00	personal communication with David Rickman
19 cates de seda a cocer a \$12	8 cates of silk thread for sewing at \$12	\$238.00	
65 bolts Mahon azul at \$3	65 bolts of blue nankeen at \$3 (skirts or shirts or jackets)	\$195.00	Per LA I: 301-02, Mahon is nankeen <sup>ii</sup>
12 piezas de bretañas a \$12	12 bolts of Brittany linen, used to make shirts ( <i>camisas</i> ).	\$144.00	DEM <sup>iii</sup>
18 idem de Manta ordinaria a \$11.00	18 bolts of ordinary <i>manta</i> at \$11.	\$198.00	DEM <sup>iv</sup>
8 chales largos a \$6	8 large shawls	\$48.00	
4 piezas de Lona de Cantón	4 bolts of canvas of Canton at \$13	\$52.00	
4 piezas de pañuelos de seda	4 silk scarves (or are these 4 bolts of silk scarves? \$20 each suggests bolts)	\$80.00	
2 piezas de pañuelos a \$20	2 bolts of scarves (if for women) or neckerchiefs (if for men); possibly is two scarves.	\$40.00	
2 docenas de escupideras a 7 r.	2 dozen spittoons or chamber pots a 7 r.	\$21.00	
6 piezas de pañuelos G.W.E.	6 bolts or pieces of neckerchiefs G.W.E [sic]	No charge entered	
<b>Total:</b>		\$1,384.00	

to the community in the form of better care for the congregation's sacred objects, new clothes, and leadership symbols of respectable standing in the California community: neckerchiefs and shawls.<sup>45</sup> The sixty-five bolts of nankeen suggest a large number of northern Chumash men wore the same pants as the settlers. Mission San Luis Obispo's craftsmen made

fine *gamuzas*, yet it's not clear that the vaqueros there wore them. They would assist Presidio Santa Barbara in resisting attack in 1818 by an insurgent pirate.

### Part 5. 1812: Mission El Rosario Again

At Mission El Rosario, the 1811 and 1812 failure of the navy supply ships to bring supplies pushed Baja

Fronteras into more extreme need than usual, because as historian Mario Alberto Magaña explains, Ruíz made desperate efforts to provide adequate clothing for his men: “The nudity is so great among the soldiers . . . the Winter that we are experiencing is so rough that in the mission guard at Santa Catalina [inland desert region] two of them presented themselves . . . asking to be relieved of their duties in the field because they could not resist the cold.” Ruiz managed to get them some little blankets [*frazadillas*—perhaps from trading otter hides at San Quintín with the likes of Jorge Eayrs.<sup>46</sup>

One way to survive was by close collaboration with neighbors. An 1812 note reveals collaboration between the missionaries of El Rosario (on the coast) and San Fernando Velicatá (inland):

Sr. Comandante and friend Don Jorge, the friar from San Fernando is coming, he couldn’t come the other week because he was sick, I discussed the business with him, and tomorrow (God willing), I will be there to eat in your ship, and we will both negotiate separately. I am sending the Corporal with a few vegetables for you and the other two commanders; and also some eggs . . . and I want nothing but the honor of serving you. He will also deliver the otter hides, which after I arrive, we will look over. You will also receive a suckling pig, and another for the two commanders also present. Adios, until Monday at noon, Fr. Josef Caulas, el Santísimo Rosario, April 19, 1812.<sup>47</sup>

Rosario was on the coast just south of Captain’s Eayrs home base, the Bay of San Quintín. The fact that Fr. Caulas’s letter is dated and signed with his last name and location already distinguishes this actor from Eayrs’ customers in Alta California, implying that trade with New Englanders in Baja California Norte could take place without fear of sanction from anyone. Fr. Caulas is extremely welcoming to Eayrs because despite the struggles of agriculture in the region, he sends eggs, vegetables, and two suckling pigs to Eayrs and his comrades. We also learn that there are two other “commanders.” Does this mean two other boats lie with Eayrs in the Bay of San Quintín or that there are two from his crew that help him negotiate? The men are “Mick and Medico.”<sup>48</sup>

Whatever the case, since Eayrs got an entire pig and the other two had to share, Fr. Caulas is showing his particular appreciation of Eayrs.

Note that Fr. Caulas sent a corporal to deliver otter hides, the only client so far to do so. This identifying feature suggests that the following hasty scribble may also come from the missionary at El Rosario:

The boys with the corporal have to return after: send me 20 bolts of good manta, here is the money. If you give me a barrel of gunpowder, I will give you the purchase price. Here is this bread for the Señora. Happy voyage until your return.<sup>49</sup>

The large quantity of *manta* ordered suggests that Fr. Caulas was purchasing for his congregation at El Rosario. Caulas purchases no fancy cloth from Canton for statues, nor any niceties for his own living quarters—Mission El Rosario was austere. Just gunpowder, perhaps useful for battling coyotes away from his livestock, or for preparing against Mojave raids. In this austere existence, dinner with Captain George and Mick and Medico at San Quintín and the friar from San Fernando must have been a remarkable event. Fr. Caulas is also the first to mention the woman in Don Jorge’s life, to whom he sends a loaf of fresh-baked bread. Pegui was a Polynesian teenager who would give birth to Eayrs’ child a few days before his capture in 1813.<sup>50</sup>

Less than a month later on May 7, 1812, Caulas is once again writing to Captain Eayrs, an indication that San Quintín was Eayrs’ home base in the Californias:

My friend, here are two baskets of eggs, one for you and the other for the two other captains Mic and Medico, also friends. I beg of Don Tomas for the barrel repaired after, and to return it to the Indians who go up to San Vicente or Santo Tomas for wine right now. The forge clamp and the little box for Corporal Lopez which I left on your fragata, there is another Indian to bring them. May God grant you a happy voyage, as your friend wishes.

A clamp for the forge (*tornillo*) is a practical matter. The reference to barrels reveals that San Vicente or Santo Tomas were making wine. In the twenty-first century, this region around Ensenada produces the best wine in Mexico.

## Part 6: Cabo San Lucas and Tepic

Word had reached Cabo San Lucas that Captain Eayrs was making good money, and someone wanted to invest their savings in his business.<sup>51</sup> Possibly news of Eayrs' success reached Los Cabos by way of Fr. Caulas of El Rosario—despite his remote location, the Dominicans had some way for mail to flow from Baja California Norte to Sur. Eayrs did send two letters from Alta California, one to Tepic and the other to Mexico City, but we do not know who the recipients were in either location, and while it is possible he sailed to Tepic from Cabo San Lucas, we have no proof.<sup>52</sup>

## Part 7: Commander Argüello and Eayrs

Argüello is a name that we in California tend to associate with San Francisco, where Luís Argüello became commander in 1806. The role of his father, José Darío Argüello, as commander at Presidio Santa Barbara from 1807 to 1814 has somehow been overlooked, though the period was a critical one. From 1806 to 1814, the Argüello family controlled the Santa Barbara Channel as well as the port of San Francisco, and also had kin in the accounting position on board the ship *La Princesa* sailing between California and New Spain.<sup>53</sup> About Argüello, Eayrs wrote to Benjamin Lamb, his financier in Boston: "The very commander of the place that appears to be the most busy and taking the greatest pains is the same government official who not long ago received money to permit me to bring on board wheat, meat, and other provisions, and who made the effort to get me to go to Monterey with the purpose of supplying the coast."<sup>54</sup> That Argüello received money to permit Eayrs to sail along the coast is not surprising, but it is certainly interesting to see this confirmation in a formal document.

In 1812, Nicholas Noé came to California to pick up tallow, which he took back to Lima, probably for cheap candles used in silver mining in Peru.<sup>55</sup> He must have learned that year that California officials already had an agreement permitting Eayrs to trade in the region. Noé came back in 1813 and on June 2 removed his foreign rival.

Eayrs suspected someone in California of betraying him, but that someone was not Argüello. Commander Argüello argued in writing that the New Englander's mercantile activity in California was licit in the eyes

of God. In his formal defense to Viceroy Calleja, as interim governor Argüello would write on November 12, 1814, that according to church law, necessity made licit what was in ordinary times illicit. Furthermore, the purchasers in California did not bargain out of self-interest, but rather to protect the people in their care.<sup>56</sup> However, Viceroy Felix María Calleja was based in Mexico City, and he was known for representing the interests of Mexico City's merchants. It was clearly in the interest of Mexico City's merchants to prevent foreigners from making inroads in Alta and Baja California markets, and Calleja would never concede that populations in the outlying regions had the right to trade with New Englanders from whom they could generate higher income from exports and obtain better prices on imports. California's forces remained loyal to the Crown, and yet this in-depth analysis of trade in California demonstrates how Spain's restrictive rules were undermining the mother country's relationship with its outlying regions.

## NOTES

1. Though some documents are undated, in this essay we will assume all refer to this six-year period.
2. June 18, 1813. Declaration of Captain George W. Eayrs (aka Cayus) to José Argüello, Commander of Santa Barbara, Juan de Ortega, Mateo Llado and Manuel Lopez Lanvin as interpreted by Juan Díaz. Archivo General de Indias (AGI), Estado, 31, N. 28.
3. Marie Christine Duggan, "Laws of the Market versus Laws of God: Scholastic Doctrine and the Early California Economy," *History of Political Economy* 37 (2005): 343–370.
4. Antonio Ibarra, "El mercado interno novohispano en el diluvio: guerra civil, comercio directo y reorganización espacial, 1813–1818" ("The Domestic Market in New Spain in the Deluge: War, Direct Trade and Spatial Reorganization, 1813–1818"), *América Latina en la Historia Económica* 28, no. 2 (2021): 1–44. See figures on pp. 11–12.
5. For population, see Peveril Meigs, "The Dominican Mission Frontier of Lower California," *University of California Publications in Geography* VII (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1935), 24, 80–81, 168; also Francis J. Weber,



- “The Church Is Beginning to Crumble: A Dominican Document from Baja California in 1808,” *California History* 58, no. 3 (1979): 250–255.
6. LA I: 299.
  7. LA I: 299: March 15, 1810.
  8. LA I: 289.
  9. Bartolomé’s father was probably Felipe Santiago Tapia, who was 39 in 1775. Felipe was married to Juana María Cárdenas, but since she was only 23, she could not be the mother of José Bartolomé. There were nine children in the Tapia family: María Rosa (13), María Antonia (12), José Bartolomé (11), Juan José (9), José Christóval (8), José Francisco (7), María Manuela (6), María Isidora (5), José Victorio (6 months old). Damian Bacich, California Frontier Project, [https://www.californiafrontier.net/anza-members/#Soldados\\_and\\_their\\_families](https://www.californiafrontier.net/anza-members/#Soldados_and_their_families) [consulted December 19, 2022].
  10. Hubert Howe Bancroft, *History of California, Volume II: 1801–1824* (San Francisco: A. I. Bancroft and Company, 1885), 112.
  11. On the ethnic melting pot that was Mission San Fernando, see John R. Johnson, “The Mission of San Fernando,” *Southern California Quarterly* 79, no. 3 (1990): 249–290.
  12. LA I: 296.
  13. Xie Chuanjiao, *The China Daily*, July 21, 202.
  14. LA I: 296.
  15. Eric P. Hvalbøll, “The Ortega Family’s Rancho Nuestra Señora del Refugio,” *Noticias: Quarterly Magazine of the Santa Barbara Historical Society* 36, no. 3 (1990): 45–64.
  16. Pedro Muñoz officiated at Mission San Fernando, 1807 to 1817. Geiger, 262–64.
  17. LA I: 296. Table 1 notes: <sup>i</sup> Manta defined in *Real Academia Española* (RAE): *Diccionario de la lengua española*, <https://dle.rae.es/manta> [consulted December 18, 2022]; see also manta in *Diccionario de Autoridades: Diccionario histórico de la lengua española* (DHLE), Tomo IV (1734), <https://apps2.rae.es/DA.html>. <sup>ii</sup> Saya defined in RAE, <https://dle.rae.es/saya> [consulted December 18, 2022]. <sup>iii</sup> David Rickman, “To Clothe the Naked,” presented to California Missions Foundation at San Juan Bautista (2016). *Burato* in DHLE, Tomo 1 (1726), <https://apps2.rae.es/DA.html> and RAE, <https://dle.rae.es/burato> [consulted December 18, 2022]. <sup>iv</sup> *Paño* in DHLE, Tomo 5 (1737), <https://apps2.rae.es/DA.html>. <sup>v</sup> *Muselina* in RAE, <https://dle.rae.es/muselina> [consulted December 19, 2022]. <sup>vi</sup> *Coleta* in *Diccionario de Americanismos* (DA), Asociación de Academias de la Lengua Española, <https://www.asale.org/damer/coleta> [consulted December 19, 2022]. <sup>vii</sup> *Bayetón* in DA, <https://www.asale.org/damer/bayetón> [consulted December 19, 2022].
  18. LA I: 296. Table 2 notes: <sup>i</sup> *Tisú* in RAE, <https://dle.rae.es/tisú> [consulted December 18, 2022]; see also *Tisu* in DHLE, Tomo 6 (1739), Tomo 5 (1737), <https://apps2.rae.es/DA.html>. <sup>ii</sup> *Olanda* defined in RAE, <https://dle.rae.es/holanda> [consulted December 18, 2022]; see also *Olanda* in DHLE, Tomo 6 (1739), <https://apps2.rae.es/DA.html>, which states sheets (*sabanas*) are made from *olanda*. <sup>iii</sup> *Seda* defined in DHLE, Tomo VI (1739) <https://apps2.rae.es/DA.html> [consulted December 12, 2022].
  19. Rickman, “To Clothe the Naked”; we assume *burato* and *burato* are variants of one type of fabric.
  20. Marie Christine Duggan, “With and Without an Empire: Financing for California Missions Before and After 1810,” *Pacific Historical Review* 85, no. 1 (2016): 23–71.
  21. *Bayeta*, DHLE, is wool cloth, very thin and light.
  22. LA I: 295.
  23. *Habilitado* was a paid position in the military; the word is typically translated as supply master. *Habilitados* ran a store at the presidio where the troops redeemed their pay in goods.
  24. Hvalbøll, “The Ortega Family’s Rancho Nuestra Señora del Refugio,” 48–53.
  25. José Dolores Ponciano Ortega was born in 1790 and married Maria Dolores Leyba on August 30, 1813, at Mission Santa Ynez, inland and to the north of Rancho Refugio. José Dolores was the son of José María Ortega and Maria Francisca Lopez. In 1841 he got a land grant, Rancho Cañada del Corral, that extended from Rancho Refugio on the coast up inland toward the Santa Ynez mountains.
  26. LA I: 303. Table 3 note: *Platilla* is synonymous with *bocadillo*, used for curtains, DHLE, Tomo 5 (1737), <https://apps2.rae.es/DA.html> [consulted December 19, 2022]; also used to make skirts

- (*enaguas*) or shirts (*camisas*), per Marta Pérez Toral, “A vueltas con el léxico textil inventariado en el Siglo de Oro,” (Real Instituto de Estudios Asturianos, Universidad de Oviedo, Spain, n.d.), 94. Giorgio Perissinotto translates it as linen in *Documenting Everyday Life in Spanish California* (Santa Barbara Trust for Historic Preservation, 1998), 306.
27. LA I: 305. Table 4 note: The thread emerges copper-colored from Tussar silkworm cocoons. See Abhishek Arya and Dr. Ramchandra, “An Economic Analysis of Production and Marketing of Silk in Bhagalpur District of Bihar,” *Pharma Innovation Journal* 11, no. 6 (2022): 1917–1924.
  28. The archival transcript states only “Fr. Luís” of Mission Santa Barbara. Geiger, 104, states Fr. Luís Gil y Taboada served from roughly 1809 until 1815 at Mission Santa Barbara. He spoke the Chumash language. The entry is undated, but the previous entry is for José Dolores Ortega in December 1809, and the layout of the accounting is the same in both entries, so we assume 1809 for Gil y Taboada. LA Part I, 304. Table 5 notes: <sup>i</sup> Manto defined in RAE, 23.<sup>a</sup> ed. (versión 23.5 en línea), <https://dle.rae.es/manto> [consulted December 19, 2022]; manto defined in DHLE as “Cierta especie de velo o cobertúra, que se hace regularmente de seda, con que las mugeres se cubren para salir de casa,” Tomo IV (1734), <https://apps2.rae.es/DA.html> [consulted December 19, 2022]; Diccionario del Español de México, el Colegio de México, A.C. (DEM) defines manto as a cape or a veil, <https://dem.colmex.mx/Ver/manto> [consulted December 9, 2022].
  29. Duggan (2016), “With and Without an Empire,” pp. 45–47.
  30. This undated letter is signed only Fr. Luís. It has the joking tone of Martínez. The reference to a ranch must refer to Refugio, which was the next harbor after San Luis Obispo. LA Part I, 309.
  31. Robert Ryal Miller (2001). *A Yankee Smuggler on the Spanish California Coast: George Washington Eayrs and the Ship Mercury*. Santa Barbara: Santa Barbara Trust for Historic Preservation, p. 24.
  32. Hubert Howe Bancroft, *History of California, Volume III: 1801–1824* (San Francisco: A. I. Bancroft and Company, 1886), 94.
  33. Conversely, a missionary with a small congregation that distrusted him was not powerful politically inside California.
  34. LA Part I, 297–298. I attribute this unsigned letter to Fr. Luís Martínez because his early creation of quality textiles has been documented by others.
  35. Marie Christine Duggan, *Evolution of a Relationship: The Chumash and the Presidio of Santa Barbara, 1782–1823* (Santa Barbara: Santa Barbara Trust for Historic Preservation, 2004).
  36. *Gamuzas* are pants of soft leather, and Martínez would market them to the commander of Presidio Santa Barbara. See SBMAL, Martínez to José De la Guerra y Noriega, n.d., ca. 1815–1817.
  37. Edith Buckland Webb, *Indian Life at the Old Missions* (Los Angeles: Warren F. Lewis, 1952).
  38. Tio Cayuelas was connected to trade in California from 1790 to 1820 and had relatives at San Francisco, San José, and Monterey. Bancroft, *History of California, Volume II*, 755.
  39. The US dollar was backed by the Spanish silver dollar, so the two currencies were interchangeable. Although a Spanish peso was divided into eight reales, Eayrs divided his Spanish dollars into one hundred cents in the New England fashion, writing for example \$1.25 instead of \$1 and 2 reales. For population, see Misión San Luis Obispo Annual Reports, Santa Barbara Mission Archive-Library.
  40. Duggan. “With and Without an Empire,” 23–71.
  41. Personal communication from David Rickman.
  42. Rickman, “To Clothe the Naked.”
  43. “After the age of eight [boys] wore trousers of suede or of *jerga*, *bayeton* [two kinds of coarse woolen cloth] or of nankeen cotton,” José del Carmen Lugo, quoted in David Rickman (2022), “Chapel Interpretation Project Historical Clothing circa 1790–1810,” El Presidio de Santa Bárbara State Historic Park (2022), 5.
  44. LA I: 307–308. Table 6 notes: <sup>i</sup> DHLE, Tomo III (1732): Fine linen, loose weave, delicate and insubstantial; see *espumilla* in <https://apps2.rae.es/DA.htm>. <sup>ii</sup> Yellowish cotton cloth common in the eighteenth and even the nineteenth century, made in China. See *nanquín* in RAE, <https://dle.rae.es/nanqu%C3%ADn> [consulted December 25,

- 2022]. <sup>iii</sup> *Bretaña* entry in DEM, <https://dem.colmex.mx> [consulted December 19, 2022]. <sup>iv</sup> See DEM, <https://dem.colmex.mx/Ver/manta> [consulted December 19, 2022]; ordinary cloth per Perrissinotto, *Documenting Everyday Life*, 56.
45. Northern Chumash men, by 1814, would be auxiliary soldiers; if they wore neckerchiefs, this was a move toward the outfit typical of presidio soldiers, as explained by Rickman, “Chapel Interpretation,” 4. See also his illustration of the leather jacket soldier, <http://dwrillustrator.blogspot.com/2022/02/a-leather-jacket-soldier.html> [consulted December 25, 2022].
46. Mario Alberto Magaña Mancillas, “Neófitos y soldados misionales. Identidades históricas en la región de la Frontera de la Baja California, 1769–1834,” *Culturales* (Mexicali) 5, no. 9 (2009): 94. Translation is my own.
47. LA I: 286.
48. LA I: 291, May 7, 1812. LA I: 286. The friar mentioned that two other commanders would be present at the meal. On May 7, 1812 (p. 291), Fr. Caulas calls them *los dos comandantes Mic y Medico, tambien amigos*.
49. LA I: 288.
50. Miller (2001), *A Yankee Smuggler*, p. 31.
51. LA I: 293.
52. LA I: 298.
53. Francis Price and Francisco Durán (1958). “Letters of Narciso Durán: From the Manuscript Collections in the California Historical Society Library (Concluded)” in *California Historical Society Quarterly*, vol. 37, no. 3, p. 244.
54. March 9, 1814, Eayrs from San Diego to Benjamin Lamb (in Boston), LA I: 360.
55. Marie Christine Duggan, “From Bourbon Reform to Open Markets in California, 1801–1821,” *Journal of Evolutionary Studies in Business* (JESB) 8, no. 1 (2023): 45–83. Dení Trejo Barajas, “Del Caribe al Mar del Sur: Comercio marítimo por el Pacífico mexicano durante las guerras de Independencia” in Moisés Guzmán (ed.), *Entre la tradición y la modernidad. Estudios sobre la Independencia*. Mexico: Universidad de Michoacán San Nicolás de Hidalgo, 2007, p. 368.
56. November 12, 1814, José Darío Argüello of Santa Barbara to Viceroy Félix María Calleja of Mexico City, LA I: 320.

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