PHILADELPHIA COMMERCE WITH LATIN AMERICA, 1820-1830

By Sanford W. Higginbotham
The University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia

A PHILADELPHIA newspaper recently devoted four complete pages to articles on the countries to the south, headlining proudly that “Philadelphia's Contacts With Latin America Are Older Than Those Of Any U. S. City.” The columns following not only stressed the commercial advantages of close relations with the republics of the Americas but also pointed to the rich cultural life which they had developed as an added incentive to increased intercourse. Nearly a century and a quarter earlier another Philadelphia newspaper had regarded the culture less favorably and had printed a curious item to the effect that the ladies of Lima stood up in their boxes at the theatre and lighted their cigars from the chandelier.

Despite such patronizing references there was in the United States a genuine interest in the struggles for independence then being waged by the patriot armies. Letters, excerpts from European newspapers, and reports from masters of vessels lately arrived from South American ports were given much space, and the progress of revolutionary arms was followed in detail.

The 1820's were eventful years in Latin America. They witnessed the triumphant campaigns of Bolivar in Peru and Greater Colombia; stories of the battles at Carabobo, Junín, and Ayacucho were on the lips of all. They saw the star of empire wax and wane in Mexico as Iturbide’s grandiose dreams crashed before the realities of a divided nation. They remarked the successful establishment of another empire in Brazil under the “legitimate” house of Braganza. They beheld numerous internecine conflicts within the new nations. And from the point of view of the United States they were marked by the recognition of the new republics and the promulgation of the Monroe Doctrine.

1 Philadelphia Evening Bulletin, January 17, 1940.
2 Poulson’s American Daily Advertiser, April 26, 1822.
Commerce between the United States and Latin America was inaugurated in the 1790's as a result of the wars of the French Revolution in Europe which caused Spain to throw open the ports of her American colonies to the ships of neutral nations. A lucrative trade developed with the Spanish West Indies and a considerably smaller one with the ports on the Spanish Main and the Plata estuary. Brazil too was opened to neutral vessels by Portugal, and an important commerce arose with that country. The conclusion of the European wars in 1815, however, brought to an end twenty-five years of profitable American foreign trade. The renewed competition of European merchants, the panic of 1819, and other factors made the decade of the 1820's one of general depression in American world commerce, though it did not affect trade with Latin America.  

Exports to Mexico, Central America, and South America experienced a rapid increase. They climbed from more than two and a half million dollars in 1821 to over thirteen and a half millions in 1825, and, while they soon declined from this eminence, they were more than three and a half times as great at the end of the decade as they had been at the beginning. The growth in imports was even more impressive. From less than two million dollars in 1821 they mounted rapidly to nearly ten million in 1825 and continued to rise steadily though less spectacularly until by 1830 they were six times as great as in 1821.

Unfortunately the trade in the early years of the decade was subjected to the hazards of piracy. The European wars had

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*4 A good brief survey of American foreign trade from 1790 to 1860 may be found in Emory R. Johnson et al., *History of the Domestic and Foreign Commerce of the United States*, 2 vols. (Washington, 1915), vol. ii, chaps. i and ii. The term "Latin America" for the purposes of this paper has been restricted to Mexico, Central America, and South America. The trade with Cuba, Haiti, and Porto Rico was an important one, bulking larger than that with the mainland in the first few years of the 1820's, but this trade has a unity of its own and should be studied as such.

The figures are:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1821</th>
<th>1825</th>
<th>1830</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Exports</td>
<td>$2,626,220</td>
<td>$13,651,066</td>
<td>$9,905,531</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Imports</td>
<td>1,935,318</td>
<td>9,712,627</td>
<td>11,778,722</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Compiled from Timothy Pitkin, *A Statistical View of the Commerce of the United States of America* (New Haven, 1835), 266-287. Pitkin's figures are based on the annual official reports of the Secretary of the Treasury and have been checked against them. They also appear in the *House Executive Documents* and elsewhere among the statistical publications of the government. The above figures are for fiscal years beginning October 1, and unless otherwise noted all statistics used in this article are for the same period.
loosed a large number of privateers, and after the close of hos-
tilities these nominally legitimate raiders hoisted the Jolly Roger
or else received one of the privateering commissions issued in
blank by the patriot governments of Latin America. The waters
around the West Indies became exceedingly dangerous for Ameri-
can vessels, and petitions listing the number of depredations com-
mitted by the buccaneers and demanding that some action be
taken to suppress them poured into Washington. After the es-
establishment of a West Indian squadron in 1825, however, cases
of piracy were extremely rare. The work of the navy in this
instance was supplemented by American diplomacy, which pre-
vailed upon the South American governments to withdraw the
much-abused commissions.  

Philadelphia had particularly close relations with Latin America.
One of her merchants, John Leamy, was the owner of the ship
John which touched at Montevideo in 1798 and inaugurated
American trade with the river Plata. Furthermore, the city
built many vessels and disseminated much propaganda for the
patriot governments.  

Her share in the rising commerce with those regions in the 1820's was a large one, in the early years of the
decade probably the largest of any single port in the country,
although the lack of adequate statistical data makes a positive
statement on this point impossible.

In the years 1825, 1826, and 1827 exports to Latin America
were respectively fourteen, seventeen, and eleven per cent of the
total exports of the United States.  

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5This subject receives a full discussion in Gardner W. Allen, Our Navy and the West Indian Pirates (Salem, 1929). Newspaper comments on the matter may be seen in Poulson's American Daily Advertiser, January 4 and 13 and February 3, 1820. An interesting account of an eventful voyage by the brig Concord is in ibid., February 1, 1820.


8The figures are:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Total Exports</th>
<th>Latin American Exports</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1825</td>
<td>$99,535,388</td>
<td>13,651,066</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1826</td>
<td>$77,595,322</td>
<td>12,956,310</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1827</td>
<td>$82,324,829</td>
<td>9,441,055</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Calculated from Pitkin, Statistical View, pp. 274-279.
percentages for Philadelphia were thirty-one, thirty-four, and twenty respectively. Similar results appear from a study of the tonnage records and ship entries. The percentages for the country as a whole in this case were ten, nine, and six and one-half of the total tonnage entering American ports. The percentages for the Quaker City, based on the number of vessels entering the port, were twenty-four, eighteen, and seventeen respectively. It is thus apparent that the trade was of relatively greater importance to Philadelphia than to the country as a whole.

While it must be borne in mind that statistics for the period are unreliable and are based on calendar years instead of fiscal years ending September 30, as are those of the United States, apparently Philadelphia exports to Latin America in the three years in question were a quarter, a fifth, and a sixth of those for the country as a whole. A comparison of Latin American entries into Philadelphia with those into New York gives added support to the former's claim to an early preëminence in the trade. Figures for the years between 1820 and 1825 are:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Total Exports</th>
<th>Latin American Exports</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1825</td>
<td>$11,245,274</td>
<td>3,456,443</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1826</td>
<td>$7,550,480</td>
<td>2,558,907</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1827</td>
<td>$7,539,143</td>
<td>1,526,547</td>
</tr>
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</table>

Calculated from tables in Samuel Hazard (ed.), *The Register of Pennsylvania*, 16 vols. (Philadelphia, 1828-1836), vol. ii, pp. 204-205. Hazard's figures are not official and are subject to the further objection as a basis of comparison that they use calendar rather than fiscal years.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Total Tonnage</th>
<th>From Latin America</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1825</td>
<td>973,681</td>
<td>97,295</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1826</td>
<td>1,047,860</td>
<td>95,559</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1827</td>
<td>1,055,950</td>
<td>69,334</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


The figures for Philadelphia (based on calendar years) are:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Vessels Entering</th>
<th>From Latin America</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1825</td>
<td>484</td>
<td>115</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1826</td>
<td>483</td>
<td>86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1827</td>
<td>467</td>
<td>80</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figures for vessels entering the port of Philadelphia have been used since no tonnage figures by countries of entry exist for the separate ports. The figures given above are for calendar years and were calculated from the report made by a seminar group at the University of Pennsylvania under the direction of Professor Arthur C. Bining. This group compiled statistics from the records of the Philadelphia customhouse. The report will hereafter be cited as Bining Seminar Report.

See figures given in n. 8 and n. 9 above.

The most important regions of trade for Philadelphia in Latin America in terms of the vessels entering were Colombia, Mexico, Brazil, the Plata ports, and the west coast of South America in the order named. With relation to value of exports Mexico was the most significant, followed by Colombia, the ports of the west coast, Brazil, and the Plata region.13

A great variety of articles was exported to these places. Mexico offered practically no market for the domestic products which figured so largely in the trade to other Latin American countries. The prices current sent out by trading firms there listed only codfish in this class, and it was usually marked "invendible."14

Thus the cargoes that went to Alvarado and Vera Cruz carried virtually no provisions but were instead composed principally of foreign reexports—cocoa, Russian sheeting, German and British textiles, jewelry, silks, and wines. One cargo valued at over $125,000 included only two domestic articles—spermacetti candles and umbrellas—valued at slightly over $500.15 The great importance of the Mexican trade lay in the quantities of specie and bullion which were obtained in exchange. These were the principal imports from the country, with cochineal as the only other item of any significance.

13 Bening Seminar Report; Hazard (ed.), Register, II, 204-205. The import figures are more irregular but indicate about the same positions. Ibid., 217.

14 Frederic des Brosses & Co. to Stephen Girard, Vera Cruz, August 15, 1826; Morotte, Hargous & Co., to id., Vera Cruz, December 10, 1826. These are prices current and may be found in the Stephen Girard correspondence, Girard College, Philadelphia. The author is indebted to President Merle M. Odgers for permission to make use of this collection and to Miss Hazel Erchinger, librarian, for courteous and valuable assistance.

15 See manifest of schooner George Washington which cleared from Philadelphia for Alvarado on October 12, 1825. This may be found in the outward foreign manifests in the Philadelphia customhouse.
Domestic articles made up a considerable part of the trade with Colombia; they normally exceeded foreign reëxports in value. Flour shipments were small, but leather, candles, soap, whisky, hats, umbrellas, books, lumber, and furniture were prominent. Foreign goods carried there included hardware, florentines, nankeens, medicine, firecrackers, and cologne. Imports consisted mainly of cocoa, indigo, hides, and some specie.

Brazil was the best market for provisions. Flour was by far the most important article of export. Other foodstuffs, lumber, chairs, candles, and soap also were among the significant domestic articles in the trade. Since the proximity of Europe made the prices of European goods too low for American merchants to compete, foreign goods were of relatively less importance here than anywhere else in Latin America. Chinese and East Indian products were the chief foreign items in Brazilian cargoes. The principal imports were coffee, sugar, molasses, hides, and horns.

The Plata ports of Buenos Aires and Montevideo, like those of Brazil, were better markets for American domestic products than for reëxported foreign goods, although not to the same extent. Flour was the most important single item, and chairs and lumber were of some consequence. Other domestic products in the trade were butter, soap, turpentine, nails, ploughs, and seed. The chief foreign articles in the cargoes were silks, satins, and miscellaneous German manufactures. One cargo contained the unfamiliar items of juniper berries and the head and worm of a still. Imports were restricted in nature, consisting almost entirely of hides, horns, and jerked beef, although wool and various types of skins were taken when they were available.

Trade with the west-coast ports of Guayaquil, Lima, Coquimbo, Valparaiso, and Arica displayed some similarity to that with Mexico. In both regions the great attraction was the specie and bullion exported, and in both cases foreign goods formed the major portion of the cargoes sent out from Philadelphia. Other imports from the Pacific region were Peruvian bark, cocoa, tin, copper, wool, and skins.

In Philadelphia, as elsewhere, it was a common custom to identify certain merchants with the trade of particular regions; some, for instance, were spoken of as being engaged in the Marseilles trade, others in the East India trade, and so on. From this practice has come a false impression of the foreign com-
merce of the period. As the foregoing description of the exports has shown, goods of foreign origin played an important role in the mercantile relations with Latin America. This so-called "carrying trade" was of relatively greater importance to Philadelphia commerce than to that of the country as a whole. In 1825 foreign reexports amounted to thirty-three per cent of the total exports of the United States, making up forty-one per cent of those of New York, thirty-one per cent of those of Baltimore, and sixty-five per cent of those of Philadelphia. The Latin American trade of Philadelphia showed about the same percentage of foreign articles of export in the same year.

The simple fact indicated by the above is that no trade was mutually exclusive. Brazilian and West Indian coffee were forwarded to Europe; Guayaquil and Caracas cocoa were carried to the Mediterranean and to Mexico; Chinese and Indian silks, German notions, and Russian duck were loaded in cargoes for Alvarado, Arica, and elsewhere. Most of the voyages, particularly the longer ones, were cooperative ventures, with sometimes as many as twenty-seven merchants and firms involved. Importers of silks from East India, flour millers from the interior, dealers in German linens, and general merchants who bought varied cargoes at the auctions on the docks could be and often were represented in the same voyage. Each particular branch of commerce depended for its prosperity not only on the sale of goods in the home market but also on the development of other markets to dispose of its surplus.

Lewis Clapier, an important merchant of the period, is an excellent illustration of this point. He is spoken of by one writer as having been engaged in the Marseilles trade and as having had ships which called at ports in China, the West Indies,

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38 The figures are:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Total exports</th>
<th>Foreign Reexports</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>United States</td>
<td>$99,535,388</td>
<td>$32,590,643</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New York</td>
<td>35,259,261</td>
<td>14,607,703</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maryland</td>
<td>4,501,304</td>
<td>1,408,939</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pennsylvania</td>
<td>11,269,981</td>
<td>7,333,848</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


39 Total exports to Latin America from Philadelphia in 1825 amounted to $3,456,443; foreign reexports accounted for $2,343,047 of this amount. This is about 68 per cent. Hazard (ed.), *Register*, vol. ii, pp. 204-205. Based on calendar year.
South America, and elsewhere. Thus the impression is conveyed that his interests were relatively small in these accessory branches of his commerce and that Marseilles goods probably formed the major portion of his exports to them. Yet out of five export manifests, selected at random, of vessels bound to Valparaiso or Arica he was represented in four and was the heaviest investor in three. Nor was there any particular type of product which characterized his shipments. On one voyage his share was a $37,000 consignment of domestic wax; on another it was an $8,000 investment in silks; and on the other two his items were a mixture of German textiles, silks, and numerous other articles.

Other notable figures in Philadelphia’s Latin American trade in the 1820’s were Charles Rugan, Jacob Idler, John and James Coulter, Thomas and George W. Morgan, John Craig, Borie and Languerenne, Peter Bosquet, William Lynch, P. F. Fontanges, John Latour, Henry Pratt, John Goddard, Samuel Archer, John T. David, William Geisse, Matthew Bevan, William Porter, Whitton Evens, Manuel Eyre, and Charles Massey. The list is by no means exhaustive, for it contains only those names which appeared most frequently on cargo manifests.

Although wholly lacking in modern means of communication, merchants of the early nineteenth century possessed a breadth of knowledge of markets, political disturbances likely to affect commerce, and general trade conditions which is little short of amazing. They had correspondents in all the ports in which they traded and many in those where they did not. From them they received printed prices current with pertinent comments and also long letters describing the business outlook that remain today important sources of information concerning the conduct of trade in almost all parts of the world. Among the significant collections of such correspondence which have survived is that of Levi Hollingsworth and Son, flour merchants of Philadelphia. The firm traded principally with Baltimore, New

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19 See outward foreign manifests at Philadelphia customhouse: ship *America*, May 15, 1824; brig *General Sucre*, June 21, 1825; ship *Georgia Packet*, September 10, 1825; brig *Wizard*, October 18, 1825; and ship *Dorothea*, May 5, 1826. Clapier did not participate in the voyage of the *America*. 
York, Charleston, Savannah, Gibraltar, and Liverpool, buying flour and grain from millers in Pennsylvania, Maryland, and Virginia and transshipping it to these ports. They engaged in no direct trade with Latin America, but on at least one occasion they served as the agent of Samuel Bell, a miller at Reading, for a shipment to Rio de Janeiro. The course of the transaction may be followed in the letters written by the latter.

Bell apparently observed the reports in the newspapers carefully, and on reading that the ship _General Hawkins_ was soon to sail for the river Plata he wrote Levi Hollingsworth on May 13, 1823, asking his advice on the desirability of shipping four hundred barrels of flour on the vessel. The venture proved either inexpedient or impossible, and nothing further was done. Other arrangements were made, however, and on May 30 Hollingsworth drew up a remarkable letter of instruction for Ralph W. Peacock, who was to serve as Bell's agent for the sale of four hundred and sixteen barrels and one hundred and sixteen half barrels of flour to be shipped on the brig _Hope_ bound for Rio de Janeiro. Warning the young man to be discreet, he informed him that "suspicion is painful but the utmost caution & vigilance & thought" were essential to protect the interests of his employers. A detailed analysis of market conditions followed, and Hollingsworth concluded with the blunt assertion that there could now be no reason for any blunders on the part of Peacock.

After the departure of the _Hope_ Bell scrutinized the newspapers carefully. On August 7 he wrote that he had read that the vessel was unloading at "Ryo," and nine days later he expressed his hope of a profit on the transaction since he had seen that flour prices were high in Brazil. On October 15 Peacock sent word from Rio that he had disposed of the flour and had bought two hundred and eleven bags of coffee with the proceeds, forwarding them to Philadelphia by the brig _Warrior_. Bell wrote Hollingsworth on December 20 announcing his pleasure at the safe arrival of the vessel and requesting that the coffee be disposed of for him. There is no further correspondence on the matter, and the ultimate outcome of the venture cannot be determined.

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20 The Hollingsworth collection is located in the Historical Society of Pennsylvania. All correspondence mentioned in the Bell transaction is to be found there.
The papers of Stephen Girard also are valuable sources of information concerning American commerce. While he was not engaged in trade with Latin America, Girard received a constant stream of communications from Mexico, Brazil, and the Plata region. The letters, sent by firms hoping to obtain his patronage, were unsolicited except in a few instances. Only in the latter part of 1822 did the Philadelphia financier become interested in Latin American commercial possibilities. He was no doubt prompted by the hope of both finding work for his idle ships and discovering markets for a surplus of Russian goods that he had received as a result of his recent renewal of trade with St. Petersburg. Other factors which may have influenced him were the recent recognition of the Latin American governments by the United States, a belief that political conditions had settled enough to permit profitable trade, and the suggestion of a South American friend in Philadelphia.

Girard’s attention was drawn first to Mexico. In September 1822 he received a letter from Telesforo de Orea, former agent of the Colombian government, who suggested that he inaugurate a trade between China and Acapulco on the west coast. Nothing ever came of this, but a month later Girard addressed a letter to a firm in Havana requesting complete information on the operation and prospects of commerce with Mexico. The Havana merchants were not encouraging. They wrote of the recent inauguration of lower duties at their port which included a drawback system for goods reexported and complained that “this System would carry greater advantages to us if the kingdom of Mexico was quayet [quiet]; but un-fortunately that country is in the worst state one can imagine.” They added that merchants of integrity had disappeared in Mexico, that there were great risks

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21 Girard did make one venture to South America in 1810 and 1811, but it proved disastrous. For an account of this and for other facts concerning Girard’s relations with South America see John B. McMaster, The Life and Times of Stephen Girard, Merchant and Mariner, 2 vols. (Philadelphia, 1918), pp. 146-171.
22 Girard to Yriarte and Lasa, Philadelphia, October 13, 1822; id. to Clapp, Raguet and Co., Philadelphia, March 18, 1823; and Fontanges, Subervielle and Co. to Girard, Alvarado, September 20, 1824. These letters are all in the Girard collection, and any other letters to or from Girard which are cited hereafter are in the same place.
23 Telesforo de Orea to Girard, Philadelphia, September 12, 1822.
24 Ibid.
25 Girard to Yriarte and Lasa, Philadelphia, October 13, 1822.
and insecurity, and that only a smuggling trade was being conducted. While their report put an end to the matter for the time, two years later members of a firm in Alvarado wrote Girard giving him a long review of the state of affairs there. They announced that although the market was glutted, Russian sheetings might find subsequent sale and German goods usually sold well. In regard to Mexican exports they reported that specie and cochineal were the most important but that some vanilla, jalap, and sarsaparilla were occasionally marketed. They also suggested that it was both feasible and profitable to establish a monopoly of the cochineal trade. Girard did not act on their suggestion and apparently took no further interest in trade with Mexico.

Soon after his first inquiries concerning Mexico, Girard wrote to a business house in Rio de Janeiro asking for full details on the trade of that port. He sought specific information on the provision trade and the market for Russian goods and suggested that if it was worth while he could have his China ships touch there on the outward voyage to trade goods for specie. The reply to his query was discouraging. His correspondent wrote that no article of American manufacture could be sold at a profit and that flour alone of all American produce found a ready market. Trade in even this commodity was unsatisfactory, however, as the consumption, easily oversupplied, was of a wholly retail character, subject to rapid and violent fluctuations in price. As for Russian goods, while there was no firm which imported them directly, the British merchants received them in sufficient quantities to make the venture unattractive. German and French products were brought directly from Europe, and no American firm could compete in these lines with goods reexported from the United States. Trade in Chinese and Indian goods was denied to foreigners by law. Finally, there was little hope of a successful general trade between the United States and Brazil so long as the British continued to receive a nine-per-cent advantage in

26 Yriarte and Lasa to Girard, Havana, November 25, 1822.
27 Fontanges, Subervielle and Co. to id., Alvarado, November 13, 1824.
28 Girard to Clapp, Raguet and Co., Philadelphia, March 18, 1823. Raguet was a native Philadelphian who had gone to Rio de Janeiro as United States consul in the fall of 1822. He withdrew from the partnership with Samuel Clapp at about the same time that Girard wrote. See his letter cited in n. 29 below.
In the face of such conditions Girard made no further investigation of Brazilian commerce.

Many firms in Montevideo and Buenos Aires sent letters to Girard seeking his patronage and furnishing him with a wealth of commercial data on the markets there. One particularly enterprising individual, very active in soliciting his business, sent him reports on prices and even gave detailed descriptions of the cargoes most likely to sell. The main items which he suggested were German textiles, Chinese and Indian silks, tea, Catalonian wines, cordage, tar and pitch, munitions, tobacco, flour, biscuits, chairs, and furniture. He counseled him that if he intended to trade with the firm, he should instruct his supercargo, "else the ungentlemanly competition of some houses" would frustrate his desires. The appointment of his friend Caesar A. Rodney, former senator from Delaware, as United States minister to Buenos Aires gave Girard a chance to check up on conditions in the Plata region, and he wrote to him in the spring of 1824 asking for a report on prospects there. Rodney was in very poor health, but he replied in a brief letter, inclosing a list, which he had had the consul prepare, of recent arrivals of vessels with flour. He also requested several firms in Buenos Aires to write. The replies were not such as to satisfy Girard, and nothing more was ever done.

The list of vessels which Rodney forwarded gives an excellent cross section of the flour trade to Buenos Aires and Montevideo, showing its extent and the relative shares of different cities of the United States in the Latin American trade in this commodity. In the report are named all the vessels which arrived in the period from November 17, 1823, to March 29, 1824, together with the

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29 Condy Raguet to Girard, Rio de Janeiro, September 12, 1823.
30 T. L. Halsey to id., Buenos Ayres, February 12, 1822; Halsey, Robinett and Co. to id., Buenos Ayres, March 10, 1822; id. to id., Buenos Ayres, May 21, 1822.
31 Girard to Caesar A. Rodney, Philadelphia, March 2, 1824.
32 Rodney to Girard, Buenos Ayres, May 22, 1824. The list which was inclosed was separated from the letter in the arrangement of the correspondence in the Girard collection. It is an undated single sheet and bears the title "Memo of the arrivals with Flour at Buenos Ayres and the prices at which it sold on board or as near as can be ascertained." The letter is filed under No. 388 in the correspondence for 1824, while the list is under No. 254 for the same year.
33 John Eschenburg to Girard, Buenos Ayres, July 6, 1824; Stewart, McCall and Co. to id., Buenos Ayres, July 7, 1824.
amount that each carried and the average price for which each cargo was sold. During this time there were thirty such arrivals, carrying 41,710 barrels. Of this number seven Baltimore ships had brought in 18,274 barrels, an average of more than 2,600 each; six Philadelphia ships had arrived with 7,586 barrels, an average of about 1,260 barrels; and six New York ships had entered with 6,436 barrels, an average of about 1,070 barrels. Only one vessel had arrived from Norfolk, but it carried 3,126 barrels in the single cargo. The remainder had been brought in small quantities by vessels from Salem, Boston, Providence, and elsewhere.

The effect of such importations into a market whose monthly consumption varied between 4,000 and 4,500 barrels is illuminating. On November 17 the price was $18.00 per barrel on board (i.e., before duties were added); twelve days later it had fallen to $12.00; and by December 10 it had reached $9.75. For the remainder of the period the price varied slightly around an average figure of $9.50. But an even worse situation was yet to prevail. Many other American vessels were attracted to the Plata estuary during the year. On September 27, 1824, one firm reported that twenty-one American ships had arrived since September 10 with 24,000 barrels of flour and that the stock on hand exceeded ten months' consumption.

A week later another Buenos Aires house wrote even more discouraging news. The harvest was approaching, almost a year's supply of flour was in the cargoes of vessels lying in the river, and the price had dropped to five dollars a barrel on board. At this figure losses were certain to be great since the quoted prices at Philadelphia from January to July of that year ranged from a high of $6.33 to a low of $5.25 per barrel. The seriousness of the situation led one merchant to advise his correspondents as follows:

The great increase of American trade to this River during the last year (143 sail) has so entirely overdone this market, that I am induced to recommend the total suspension of shipments this way for five or six months from this date [May 7, 1825]. . . . We have now in port twenty-nine American vessels, many of which will be compelled to leave in ballast.

Zimmermann, Frazier and Co., to id., Buenos Ayres, September 27, 1824.
Stewart, McCall and Co. to id., Buenos Ayres, October 4, 1824.
Hazard (ed.), Register, VII, 137.
George W. Slacum to Girard, Buenos Ayres, May 7, 1825.
The damaging effect of such large shipments was not confined to the merchants of the United States. The agriculturists of the Argentine too were hurt, and on July 29, 1825, the government of Buenos Aires placed an embargo on the importation of flour. The ban was later removed, but an increased duty was levied in its stead. After the conclusion of the war with Brazil in 1828 Argentina began to supply her own needs in flour and ten years later had begun to export it.38

The difficulties of carrying on a flour trade with the Plata region were in many respects characteristic of all United States trade with Latin America in the 1820's. The products which these countries had for sale were limited in variety and with the exception of specie, cocoa, coffee, sugar, and other tropical commodities were not particularly suited to the American market. Similarly, as they became more stable, the new countries began to supply their own needs in foodstuffs and narrowed still further the American export market.39 John Quincy Adams foresaw this state of affairs as early as 1823. He wrote in his letter of instructions to the newly appointed minister to Colombia that as producing and navigating nations the two countries would be competitors, but that since the United States had the start of the Colombians she might “for many years after the conclusion of the war, maintain with them a commercial intercourse, highly beneficial to both parties, as carriers to and for them of numerous articles of manufacture and of foreign produce.”40

Philadelphia had been admirably suited for the Latin American trade of the early 1820's. She was second or third in exporting flour, which was an important staple in the commerce with Brazil and the Plata ports;41 she shipped out a great quantity of lumber, furniture, and other domestic articles in demand in those regions; and she was one of the largest reexporters of

foreign goods. Toward the end of the decade, however, her general commerce fell off sharply, and Pennsylvania dropped to seventh place among the exporting states of the Union. The decline was apparent also in her commerce with Latin America, although not quite to the same extent. Her loss of position in foreign trade was only a continuation of a long process which had begun much earlier. Philadelphia was finding richer opportunities for investment in domestic commerce. In addition, there were certain natural disadvantages in the city's location which encouraged the downward trend. Thus the decade between 1820 and 1830 saw the city gain and lose a leading position in the trade with Latin America.

42 Pitkin, Statistical View, p. 76.