At dawn on June 8, 1823, the United States Frigate Congress lay in readiness to quit her Delaware moorings off Wilmington and sail down the river. A steamboat edged alongside to permit a number of passengers to board her—ministers to two foreign countries and their suites. Then, at 5 A.M., the ship unmoored, topgallant and royal yards were crossed, the boats were hoisted in and soon she was under way favored by a breeze from the north. Normally her commander would have felt legitimate pride at this moment as his beautiful ship, royals and studding sails set, stood for the open seas.\(^1\)

But Captain James Biddle could take little pride in his vessel on this voyage. His sense of propriety and of the traditions of the service was wounded. The son of a former sea captain and a nephew of Captain Nicholas Biddle of Revolutionary fame, he was an officer of meticulous custom and taste.\(^2\) Joining the Navy in 1800 as a midshipman, his career had been an interesting and distinguished one: for nineteen months he had been a prisoner in Tripoli following the capture of the Philadelphia; during the War of 1812 he had led the Wasp's boarding party which took the Frolic, and had later, when commanding the Hornet, won the Congressional Medal of Honor for his capture of the Penguin. Several years after the war he was sent to the Columbia River to take possession of Oregon Territory. During his subsequent career he was to sign a commercial treaty with Turkey and the first treaty between the United States and China; to serve as governor of the Naval Asylum at Philadelphia, as commodore of the West India station and of the East Indian Squadron, and as commander of naval forces on the Pacific Coast during the Mexican War. Despite years of foreign service, Biddle found time to preside as the first president of The Philadelphia Club, and to achieve a scholar's reputation as a widely read man.

\(^1\) Log of the Congress, The Historical Society of Pennsylvania (HSP).
\(^2\) James Biddle (1783–1848) was a son of Charles Biddle, Vice-President of Pennsylvania under Benjamin Franklin, and was a brother of Nicholas Biddle, the banker.
In April of 1823 Captain Biddle sailed the *Congress* into Hampton Roads to complete a successful cruise in the West Indies. There he learned that he was to take Caesar Augustus Rodney, newly appointed Minister to Argentina, and his family to Buenos Aires, and Hugh Nelson, Minister to Spain, to Cadiz. "I have official information that nine Miss Rodneys are coming on board. This alone is sufficient to prejudice me against the minister to Buenos Ayres, for it is not genteel nor reputable in any man to have nine unmarried daughters." So wrote the bachelor captain on May 16 in humorous mood to his good friend General Thomas Cadwalader while awaiting a favorable wind to sail for Wilmington.³

It was later stated that Rodney's friends had attempted to dissuade the Minister from going with Biddle, for they feared differences would arise between the two. Their reasons for this suggestion, according to *Niles' Weekly Register*, were that "Captain Biddle was a very precise 'particular' man, attentive to the smallest matters of etiquette on board of his ship: that Mr. Rodney knew nothing about etiquette, and could not understand it—and that his frank and friendly disposition, with the exceeding fondness that he had for his family, would continually interfere with Captain Biddle’s ideas of propriety in the regulation and government of his ship, on a long and interesting voyage. And, indeed, to one who has been accustomed to have a whole cabin to himself, the ingress of a man and his wife and eleven children all with equal right to possess it, could not be very pleasant. This may be said without disrespect to Capt. Biddle, who is reported to be a very excellent officer, (and we know that he is a brave one)—fond of keeping things about him in a way that could not be expected to exist with such a family on board."⁴

Rodney, a man of great popularity in Delaware, chose to disregard the warning. Our first minister plenipotentiary to the Argentine Republic, he had enjoyed a nearly continuous career in public service since 1796. During this twenty-seven-year period, Rodney had served in both houses of the Delaware legislature, in the Congress and Senate of the United States, had been Attorney General for both Jefferson and Madison, and in 1817 had served as a member of a

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³ James Biddle to Thomas Cadwalader, Hampton Roads, May 16, 1823, Cadwalader Collection, HSP.
⁴ *Niles' Weekly Register*, XXV, 321 (Jan. 24, 1824).
special commission to South America. It was unfortunate that he accepted the post of minister to a distant country in 1822, for from the day that the Congress sailed out of Delaware Bay, Rodney had but one more year to live.  

It was also unfortunate, as far as his relations with Captain Biddle were concerned, that Rodney found it necessary to take with him an unusual amount of baggage. "In consequence therefore of all this furniture being on board, my pride has been severely mortified at the unsightly appearance of every part of the ship and at the ridicule produced by it to the service in the eyes of Foreign Officers," Biddle complained. In addition to some articles loaded at Norfolk, the following property of Rodney's was taken aboard the Congress at Wilmington:

- 1 new Carriage with Harness
- 1 old Phaeton with Harness
- 1 old Cart with Harness
- 1 Plough
- 2 Churns for making butter (old)
- 1 Patent washing machine (old)
- 1 Wooden Horse for drying Cloths (old)
- 2 Hampers contents unknown
- 4 Casks contents unknown
- 3 Quarter Casks wine
- 1 Quarter Cask Vinegar
- 1 large Crate supposed to be Crockery ware
- 1 large Tierce of Kitchen utensils
- 2 large quilting frames (old)
- 1 large Chest
- 26 Trunks
- 1 Side Board
- 17 Tables
- 11 Bureaus
- 1 Secretary and Book case (old)
- 8 Pine board book cases (old)
- 1 Set Pine board shelves (old)
- 1 large Walnut Desk (old)
- 1 Piano Forte (old)
- 1 large Mirror
- 1 large easy chair (old)
- 107 Chairs 47 of them old
- 1 Sofa
- 2 Settees
- 1 Fancy stool
- 2 foot Stools
- 11 Bedsteads (old)
- 3 Pine Cotts
- 6 Sacking bottoms (old)
- 2 Bed cords (old)
- 1 Cradle (old)
- 2 Setts of Testers (old)
- 10 Beds (old)

5 Rodney was born in 1772 and died on June 10, 1824.
6 "Statement of Capt. Biddle respecting Mr. Rodney" (not in Biddle's hand), Cadwalader Collection, HSP. A copy of this file is among the James Biddle papers owned by Charles J. Biddle.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item Description</th>
<th>Quantity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>4 Mattress’ (old)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 Ship with ordnance</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 dogs. 5 Goats</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 mans Saddle (old)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 mans Saddle (new)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 Female Saddle (old)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>86 Boxes Contents of most of them unknown</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>54 barrels Contents of most of them unknown</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16 Kegs contents unknown</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Jars contents unknown</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 Role Blankets (old)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 Bundle Bedquilts (old)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Mahogany Candle Stands, old</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8 washing tubs old</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 wash stands (old)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 Pails (old)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 Horse Buckets (old)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 Crickets &amp; Arm Chairs for children (old)</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>1 Seal Press</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Kitchen tin Roasters</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 Tubs jars containing Pickles</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7 Baskets of different sizes</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 Waiters (old)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 Tea Canister</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>1 Tea Chest empty</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 Demijohn</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>2 Oil Cloths (old)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 old Carpet</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 Hearth rug (old)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 pair of Tongs (old)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 pair of Andirons (old)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 Shovels (old)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 Shafing dishes (old)</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>1 Iron pot (old)</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>1 Chopping knife</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 Frying pan (old)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 Wine cooler (old)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 Coffee mill broken</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 Fish Kettle (old)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 Knife tray (old)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 drip Stones</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 small Bags of Stores</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Mortified as Biddle was by the appearance of all this luggage, his feelings were in for an additional series of shocks. From Gibraltar, the first port of call on the cruise, word had come to Philadelphia and Wilmington of complaints which Rodney had made against him. In December the excitement produced by such accounts was greatly enhanced when additional grievances were received by way of Rio, where the Minister left the Congress.

Rodney’s popularity at home may be gauged by the reaction in Wilmington where, on January 3, 1824, Captain Biddle was burnt in effigy. A few days later the Senate and House of Representatives of Delaware newspapers were kindly furnished me by Miss Gertrude Brinkl6 of the Historical Society of Delaware.

7 “The burning of Captain Biddle in effigy was the act of a few mischievous boys, most certainly no respectable man in Wilmington can be named who would say such an act was contemplated...” American Watchman, Jan. 30, 1824. This and other quotations from Delaware newspapers were kindly furnished me by Miss Gertrude Brinkl6 of the Historical Society of Delaware.
Delaware unanimously adopted a resolution calling for an investigation of Biddle’s conduct, noting: “The General Assembly of the State of Delaware have learned that Caesar A. Rodney, a distinguished citizen of this state who was recently appointed by the President of the United States minister plenipotentiary to the Republic of Buenos Ayres and for whose accommodation and that of his family and effects, the U. S. frigate Congress was especially appropriated, after a series of studied insult and contumely on the part of the Commander, Captain James Biddle during the voyage, has been compelled by the conduct of the commander to leave the ship with his family at the Port of Rio Janeiro, twelve hundred miles distant from the port of his destination. The affection and respect they are bound to cherish for a fellow citizen whose public services and private worth are recorded in the hearts of every Delawarian [sic], induce this General Assembly publicly to declare the indignation they feel at the conduct of the commander of the frigate Congress. They regard it also as a solemn duty they owe to the Union of which the state they represent is a member to express a conviction that the unprecedented and disrespectful conduct of the commander of the Congress toward a citizen invested with the high character of a representative of this nation, is an insult offered to the national dignity and sovereignty which requires a prompt and ample atonement.”

When word of the initial stages of the difficulties first reached Philadelphia in November, 1823, Charles J. Ingersoll addressed an inquiry to Hugh Nelson: “The Friends of Capt'n. Biddle have heard with regret that Mr. Rodney has complained of a want of proper treatment on board the Congress. Suffer me to inquire if you experienced anything of the kind or if within your observation it was shewn to Mr. Rodney. Desirous as I feel in common with Capt'n. Biddle’s other friends of knowing the truth of this, which may prove an injurious statement and not having an opportunity of as prompt communication with Mr. Rodney as with you, I take the liberty to

8 *Journal of the House*, Jan. 9, 1824. This resolution produced violent newspaper reactions of a partisan nature. A sensible reaction is found in a letter to the editor of the *Delaware Gazette*, Jan. 16, 1824, which noted that the legislature had acted incautiously, since Rodney had made no official complaint. Whatever complaints others may have had, they were not shared by Biddle’s crew who went to the extent of publishing in the newspapers their “sincere thanks for your affectionate and impartial conduct towards them during the time they had the honor of being under your command.” *The National Gazette*, Dec. 29, 1823.
Midshipmen James & Edward Biddle Joining the Frigate *President* at New York, July, 1800

This pencil sketch and the others contained in this article are from a series of pictures depicting scenes from the career of Capt. James Biddle, drawn by a member of his crew during one of his last cruises. The group, together with many others, was later copied into a book in more finished form. The pencil sketches belong to Nicholas B. Wainwright.
trouble you with this inquiry. I hope it may have been said for Mr. Rodney without his authority, or if such is his impression, that Captn. Biddle may have notice of it with a view to whatever explanations he may think proper to give.”

From Madrid Nelson replied to Ingersoll:

“I regret to learn from yours of the 10th of November which I received two days since—that the gossiping tales which circulated at Gibraltar after our arrival there, had finally reached the United States, and were giving pain to Biddle’s connections. That they were conveyed thither by Mr. Rodney I cannot believe, when I landed at Gibraltar on our first arrival I had never heard the slightest whisper or insinuation of discontent on board the congress during the whole voyage. To those who know Captn. Biddle I am sure I need not say, that I had never perceived in his deportment to all on board anything but the most gentlemanly conduct—so unconscious was I of the existence of any suspicion on the mind of any of the passengers, that had I been called on Judicially or in any other manner I should unhesitatingly have become spokesman for the whole and have pronounced that entire satisfaction had been given during the voyage.

“When the period arrived for us to make the experiment in the Frigate to enter Cadiz, Mr. Rodney with his family landed, I again went on board, we made the attempt and returned disappointed. I landed again, and Mr. Rodney with his family resumed the ship. I then heard of tales circulated in Gibraltar in which Captn. Biddle’s ill treatment of Mr. Rodney and family was propagated but the whole appeared to me to have grown up, during our visit to the French Squadron, and I considered them as trifling and unworthy

11 At Gibraltar.
12 The Congress arrived at Gibraltar on July 15, 1823, saluting the garrison with fifteen guns, a compliment which was returned. On July 23 the frigate sailed with Nelson for Cadiz. When near that harbor, Biddle “beat to Quarters & cleared ship for action, a French Frigate bearing down for us, back’d the Main Topsail for her to come up, when she informed us the Port of Cadiz was in a state of Blockade and could not in consequence enter it. Made sail and stood for the French fleet at Anchor.” After Biddle’s senior lieutenant had gone on board the admiral’s ship in a final futile effort to obtain permission to land Nelson, the Congress returned to Gibraltar. Log of the Congress, HSP.
of notice. During this time I believe Captain Biddle had not heard a syllable of the rumours, a few days before the ship sailed for South America I went on board to spend a little time with my friend Rodney, previous to his departure, on the day preceding his commencement of his new voyage. I was with Mr. Rodney when he complained under a degree of excitement that surprized me, of the Captain's ill treatment of his family. I at once protested against it, & assured Mr. Rodney that I was perfectly convinced that there was some mistake between them, and that I was quite confident that on Capt'n. Biddle's part there was no design to wound their feelings on any account. I found Rodney's feelings so deeply rooted that my asseverations did not produce the effect of removing it.

"Captain Biddle came on Board soon after this conversation between Mr. Rodney and myself, and I believe he then learnt for the first time from his Purser the discontent of Mr. Rodney, and that he had been making trial of procuring another ship to transport him and his family to B. Ayres. Capt. Biddle then mentioned to me what he had learnt from Mr. Hambleton and I confirmed to him by stating Mr. Rodney's conversation with me that a discontent had arisen by some means in the mind of Mr. Rodney, and I urged him not to suffer this circumstance to operate on his mind so as to induce any unkindness on his part to any of the family which he promised me to do and which I doubt not he fulfilled. Poor Rodney when he arrived at Gibralter was in most wretched health indeed he was so low when he recommenced the voyage to the South that I really feared that he would never reach Buenos Ayres. I therefore make great allowance for his feeble state of health and considered that an uncommon degree of sensitiveness had arisen as a consequence of his bodily infirmity, from which these suspicions had proceeded. But that they should ever be embodied in the form of complaint to the government against Capt. Biddle I presume is impossible. I had considered them as springing up in Gibralter as affording a fruitful theme for the table talk of the Ladies, as likely to have but an ephemeral existence but certainly never to float across the ocean to disturb the existing harmony between Philadelphia and Wilmington for one moment. For myself I must say that I saw nothing in the deportment of Capt. Biddle during the whole voyage which as his

13 Samuel Hambleton, the purser.
personal friend and the friend of his public character and reputation I could have wished to be changed in the slightest degree."

With respect to the public action taken by the state of Delaware, Biddle received a letter from William L. Gordon, his senior lieutenant, which throws some light on events occurring after Nelson left the ship. Gordon wrote: "On seeing a resolution that had passed the Legislature of Delaware, in which it is stated that Mr. Rodney was compelled to leave the congress 1200 miles from his port of destination in consequence of (what they choose to term) your unofficer like conduct towards him, I deem it my duty in justice to you to assure you that in repeated conversations with Mr. Rodney on our passage to Gibraltar and after we left that place he related to me that it was his intention to quit the Ship at Rio, and had he been on the best terms with you I was led to believe by him that he would have left the congress at Rio through motives of economy and convenience in as much as it would be attended he said with great hazard to disembark his family at Montevideo during the Pampero months (at which time we should have arrived there had we proceeded on our voyage) and as that place (Montevideo) was beseiged, it was doubtful whether a proper vessel could be procured there to take his effects and family from thence to Buenos Ayres at so moderate a rate as could be procured at the former place (Rio.) while we were detained off Rio by adverse winds and fog I proposed to Mr. Rodney to request you to bear up for Montevideo as in all probability we should have arrived there as soon if not sooner than at Rio. he then unequivocally stated to me it was not his intention to proceed in the Congress immediately to the River but wished to remain at the latter place (Rio) until a more moderate season and to procure a vessel that would take him direct to Buenos Ayres, without any detention in the River, or if detained by heavy winds a merchant ship would be enabled to make a good and safe port. Mr. Rodney assured me both then (off Rio Janeiro) and at Gibraltar that should an opportunity present itself he would with pleasure do you any service in his power notwithstanding the unfortunate misunderstanding that had taken place between you."

In February Biddle wrote the Secretary of the Navy the following account of his own views on the matter:

It is now more than a month since the General Assembly of the State of Delaware adopted resolutions to obtain an official inquiry into my treatment of Mr. Cesar A. Rodney. Supposing that such an inquiry might be instituted & feeling an extreme repugnance to newspaper controversy, I have forborne to notice these proceedings knowing that on any proper occasion my whole deportment in that matter, could be readily and satisfactorily explained. Not having heard from the department I feel it due to myself no longer to remain silent under the calumnies circulated against me & I therefore transmit to you the accompanying statement of all the transactions between Mr. Rodney & myself. You may possibly think that I am giving you unnecessary trouble, since no blame is imputed to me by the Government, to which only as an officer I am responsible. But you will I trust excuse me for wishing to remove all doubt if any should exist on your own mind, and that the Public whose favourable opinion it has always been my ambition to merit should also be satisfied of the correctness of my deportment. It is scarcely necessary for me to remark upon the intemperate conduct of the individuals composing the Legislature of Delaware, their rash and unfounded assertions, their unwarrantable interference in a matter which they had no concern.

The universal disapprobation which has been expressed at their proceedings renders it superfluous for me to say more and will I hope save the Legislative character of the Country from ever again incurring a like reproach.

. . . In April 1823 I was ordered to proceed in the Congress Frigate from Norfolk to the Delaware to receive on board Mr. Nelson and Mr. Rodney, upon arriving at New Castle I wrote to Mr. Rodney informing him that I was ready to receive him, that it was my intention to abandon the whole of the after cabin and the starboard state room, to the ladies of his family, and that I had directed the first Lieutenant, to make whatever alterations in these apartments the Ladies might suggest as conducive to their further accommodation. They did suggest alterations and they were all made by the Ships Carpenters and Sailmakers.

Ibid.
A day or two after the arrival of the Ship at New Castle, Mr. Rodney called upon me in Philadelphia, and asked if the ship was not coming higher up the river. I answered that she was not, but as he appeared solicitous about it, I added that if he desired it, I would have her moved. He said he would be much gratified by it, and accordingly the ship was moved as near Wilmington as she could be. I did this solely to gratify Mr. Rodney although the situation was very inconvenient in many respects and subjected us to the necessity of sending to the distance of four miles every day for the fresh provisions of the officers & crew.

Mr. Nelson and myself went down to Wilmington to be present at a dinner given there to Mr. Rodney, and before my return to Philada. he fixed a day for embarking. After this Mr. Nelson hearing of Mr. Forsyth’s arrival at New York, went there to see him, but the very day on which Mr. Nelson left Wilmington for that purpose Mr. Rodney wrote to me at Philadelphia fixing an earlier day for embarking than had originally been appointed and before which Mr. Nelson could not possibly return from New York. Altho’ this circumstance rendered it of course impracticable to sail on the day now appointed, I considered it respectful to Mr. Rodney to be on board to receive him and accordingly I repaired there on the day designated. He however did not come nor did he afterwards come until the day he had originally named.

Altho’ he did not however come himself much of his furniture was already there and the rest soon followed. It is not easy to convey any adequate idea of the quantity and quality of these articles, the inconvenience they occasioned nor the disgust they were calculated to excite. There was probably enough to fill a large merchant ship and in fact a large one was chartered to carry it from Rio Janeiro. In order to make room for some articles which Mr. Rodney wished to have put in the Hold no less than one hundred barrels of the ships provisions were brought up from the Hold and stowed on the birth.

16 John Forsyth (1780-1841), the previous Minister to Spain.
17 A Philadelphia paper later observed: "The Congress frigate remained for some time below this city—she was visited, from motives of curiosity and business, by many of our citizens, who returned almost universally disgusted or confounded with the spectacle which they had witnessed: some of them were wicked enough to note down a part of the deck lumber;—the spectacle and the inventory became common subjects of discourse at dinner and tea tables." The National Gazette, Dec. 8, 1823.
deck, on the same Deck were erected by the Ships Carpenters three store rooms one of 21 feet by 9 and in addition there were on the birth deck large boxes for which no place could be found either in the Hold or store rooms. These were all encroachments on the space allotted for the crew to sleep in. They interfered seriously with their comfort and in the hot and rainy latitudes into which the ship went, the confined condition of the seamen was a source of distressing anxiety to me and of apprehension to the surgeon of the ship. Nor was this all after every part of the ship below was crammed, there remained a portion of these things for which there was no other place on board but the quarter deck. There they lay the refuse apparently of Mr. Rodney's Garret and his Stable, old churns, old saddles, an old cart, an old Phaeton, an old washing machine, old chairs and old Pine tables. These were arrayed on the quarter deck, the part of the ship which is generally the most fastidiously clean, the scene for the reception of strangers, the chosen part of a man of war. How galling this was to my feelings cannot be conceived. I however suppressed the expression of them, and altho urged by some of my friends not to tolerate such an abuse, I did not from a sentiment of kindness to Mr. Rodney remonstrate with him but 'tho I was content to waive every subordinate consideration I could not and would not permit myself to waive the higher considerations of duty to the service. The honor of the Flag is never safe unless the Ship which bears it is prepared for any attack however sudden and unexpected. Every man of war should be always ready for action, and I could not consent to put the honor of the navy and my own at hazard from any tenderness towards a parcel of old furniture. Before leaving Wilmington therefore I stated distinctly to Mr. Rodney that beside the luggage on the quarter deck there was some on the gun deck which interfered with the armament of the ship, and must be brought up when we got to sea and that in case of going to quarters on meeting a strange man of war all the baggage on deck would probably be thrown over board. Mr. Rodney seemed uneasy at such a prospect but sent none of his furniture on shore and all that he brought on board remained except some hay, which I thought it too hazardous to carry with us and therefore sent on shore.

We went to sea and Mr. Rodney expressed to me his satisfaction at the arrangements made for the accommodation of his family.
During the whole passage of thirty seven days to Gibraltar Mr. Rodney and myself had not the slightest difference, nor did he ever express to me nor in any way indicate the least dissatisfaction. On arriving at Gibraltar I found British, French & Dutch men of war lying in the Bay, and it was natural to expect the visits of their officers. But instead of feeling a pride in the condition of my ship as I had always hitherto done, instead of seeking opportunities of displaying to Foreigners this Frigate which is one of the most beautiful in the navy, I felt only chagrin and mortification and a repugnance to seeing any strangers come on board, and therefore to avoid being present when these visits were made I went to lodgings on shore as soon as the ship was secured. Still however so totally unconscious was I of any dissatisfaction on the part of Mr. Rodney that after he landed at Gibraltar I called to make him a friendly visit during the whole of which he seemed to be, as I really was, on the usual terms of civility and kindness. I left him at Gibraltar when I went to Cadiz with Mr. Nelson and on my return to Gibraltar he again came on board. In a few days after I informed him that the ship would be ready to sail on the ensuing Sunday and he answered that he was ready. Yet at this very moment as it afterwards appeared he was negotiating for a merchant vessel to carry him to Buenos Ayres, alledging that he had not been treated by me with the civility to which he was entitled.

The first intimation on board the ship of this design was given by one of the officers who heard it in a Tavern at Gibraltar. I at first did not think it possible. I inquired of Mr. Nelson who had not before heard it and did not believe it, yet it was literally true. I confess it made on my mind a most unfavourable impression. Here was a person living in the same cabin with Mr. Nelson and myself who without complaining a word to me, without any communication with Mr. Nelson, without the knowledge of any officer of the ship, allows us to learn for the first time from the conversation at a Tavern in Gibraltar that he was so ill treated on board my ship, as to oblige him to leave her and take refuge in a merchant man. Besides the want of fairness in such conduct, besides its manifest injustice to me per-

18 When the Congress arrived at Gibraltar, there were in the harbor a Dutch squadron, an English frigate, and a French brig of war. The Dutch admiral visited the Congress on July 16, 1823.
personally, it was disgraceful to our Country by circulating in a foreign port the belief of a state of things between an American minister and an American Officer, which if true was disreputable, and if false, as it most unquestionably was, had a still greater tendency to bring one at least of the parties into discredit.

Mr. Rodney however did not leave the ship, why I no longer inquired nor cared. For a few days after we sailed from Gibraltar Mr. Rodney & myself maintained a very formal and constrained intercourse from which I was soon relieved by a total and mutual silence between us. Upon my arrival at Rio Janeiro I found British and French men of war lying there, and in consequence, as soon as the ship was moored I hastened to lodgings on shore as I had done at Gibraltar, to avoid receiving visits on board. Sir Thomas Hardy and the French Admiral both sent messages of compliment to me before we got to the anchorage. With Sir Thomas Hardy I had dined twice during the late war with Great Britain and it would have afforded me high satisfaction to have returned the civilities I had received from him but it was wholly out of my power in the then condition of the ship.

In the harbour of Rio Janeiro Mr. Rodney lived on board the Congress exactly one month, and then removed to the merchant ship in which he had taken his passage to Buenos Ayres. I thought it probable that Mr. Rodney might come to some explanation with me at the moment of separating and therefore requested Mr. Hambleton, the Purser, to be present when Mr. Rodney left the ship to hear any conversation that might pass between us. I was present at the Gangway when Mr. Rodney left the ship but he passed me without looking

19 On Aug. 3, 1823, Hugh Nelson left the Congress as the ship fired a fifteen-gun salute and the crew manned the yards. After this ceremony the frigate unmoored and sailed for Rio de Janeiro where she arrived on Sept. 18. Log of the Congress, HSP.

20 During the War of 1812, Sir Thomas Hardy's squadron had blockaded Decatur's command in New London. Biddle, at that time in command of the Hornet, was sent out to Sir Thomas to propose a duel between two American and two English frigates. However, it was not possible to arrange terms acceptable to both sides. Henry Simpson, The Lives of Eminent Philadelphians Now Deceased (Philadelphia, 1859), 70–77.

21 Sir Thomas Hardy, however, did come on board the Congress on Sept. 19 with the captain of his flagship and the English consul to visit Rodney. On Sept. 22, “Visits were exchanged between Capt. Biddle and Sir Thomas Hardy, and also the French Admiral.” Log of the Congress, HSP.
Commodore James Biddle Dining with his Officers
at or speaking to me. As I have already stated I never had any
difference whatever with Mr. Rodney, nor did he ever complain to
me, all therefore that I know of the causes of Mr. Rodney's dis-
satisfaction is what he stated to the officers of the ship or what I have
casually heard or read since my arrival in the United States, all of
which so far as they occur to me I will now proceed to enumerate
and explain.

Mr. Rodney stated to Lieutenant Gordon that he had not received
from me those delicate attentions, which he had received from the
Commander of the Congress with whom he went to South America
in 1817. I do not know what Mr. Rodney meant by delicate atten-
tions, but I always treated him with civility and respect and his
family with much kindness. During the whole voyage to Gibraltar
Mr. Rodney was ill and the Surgeon constantly expressed to me his
opinion that he could not live to get across the Equator. Confined
to his Cot the greater part of his time and surrounded by his wife
and eleven children it seems singular he should have expected from
me what is usually meant by delicate attentions to a sick man.

The discipline of the ship as respects the officers was very much
relaxed. I tolerated and encouraged it, because I wished the females
on board to have all the gratification which the ship could afford.
Every evening on the Passage to Gibraltar the young ladies and the
officers danced when the weather was good.

Mr. Rodney also stated to Lt. Gordon that he had no doubt Mr.
Nelson and myself had plotted together to get him out of the ship at
Gibraltar. I had mentioned to Mr. Rodney that my orders from the
navy department were, not to go to Cadiz, what then could I expect
by going thither? The very utmost I could hope was that I would
not be censured; I could never expect praise for disobedience of
orders nor could there be any gratification to me in visiting Cadiz
since I had determined not to go on shore myself and to sail immedi-
ately on Mr. Nelson's leaving the ship, so that the French blockading
squadron and every one that might be watching the motions of the
Frigate Congress should see that she had gone to Cadiz for the

22 On Oct. 14 when Rodney and his family left the ship, the Congress fired a salute of 15
guns. The Congress sailed on Oct. 23, and on Dec. 17 arrived in Hampton Roads. Ibid.
23 Biddle's officers included six lieutenants and twenty-one midshipmen.
purpose of landing the minister and for no other purpose. The reason of my going to Cadiz was this, shortly after arriving at Gibraltar Mr. Nelson requested me to take him to Cadiz. I answered that my orders were not to go to Cadiz. He said that his instructions were to Land at Gibraltar and travel thence to Cadiz, but that Cadiz was now surrounded by French Troops which rendered it impossible for him to get there by the route contemplated in his instructions. He said moreover that the French blockading squadron turned off all merchant vessels bound into Cadiz, that our squadron in the Mediterranean was not expected soon, and that therefore after seeing my orders he again requested me to take him to Cadiz upon his responsibility and upon his assuring me it was important to the Public Interest that he should get into Cadiz with as little delay as possible. I told Mr. Nelson that my order not to go into Cadiz was probably given in consequence of my having on board a minister to South America and that therefore if Mr. Rodney would land with his family at Gibraltar I would take him to Cadiz, but I added that it must be his business to get Mr. Rodney to land as I considered it most delicate in me not to say any thing to Mr. Rodney to influence him to go or to stay. I should think that a Gentleman would have readily understood and appreciated this delicacy. Mr. Rodney however did not, and he inferred that I was plotting to get him out of the ship.

Mr. Rodney told Lt. Gordon that he was desirous of being intimate with me, but that I did not appear to wish to be intimate with him, and that once or twice when he was speaking to me on deck I left him abruptly. If it be true that I avoided an intimacy with Mr. Rodney I do not think it a legitimate subject for complaint, and if I left Mr. Rodney while he was speaking to me I am unconscious of it; a person not wholly occupied with the suspicion of being treated with neglect would readily have conceived a variety of occurrences on deck to attract my attention and to require my instant interference. Mr. Rodney also stated to Lt. Gordon he had no doubt that Mr. Louis McLane had done all in his power to prejudice me against him. The only time I saw Mr. McLane at Wilmington was at a dinner party

24 Louis McLane (1786-1857), at this time a congressman from Delaware, differed from Rodney on an important aspect of the slavery question.
at Mr. Duponts,\textsuperscript{25} and Mr. McLane did not once mention Mr. Rodney's name or any thing about him. Mr. Rodney knew that I had dined once in company with Mr. McLane, and with his characteristic suspiciousness he imagined that Mr. McLane had also been plotting against him. These are all the subjects of complaint mentioned to me by Lt. Gordon as having been communicated to him by Mr. Rodney.

Hitherto I have scorned to notice the slanders and misrepresentations of me which have been spread before the Country by the General Assembly of the State of Delaware, as well as those which have appeared anonymously in the public prints, and I never have had any agency whatever, directly or indirectly, in any publication respecting Mr. Rodney or his furniture; altho' I was the party who had the right to complain, and was also the party most malignantly abused, yet my abhorrence of newspaper discussion prevented me from defending myself or exposing Mr. Rodney or his family. I shall however avail myself of the present occasion to answer all the calumnies of me which have yet come to my knowledge.

The general assembly of the State of Delaware have asserted that I had been guilty of a series of studied insult and contumely towards Mr. Rodney and that Mr. Rodney had been compelled by my conduct towards him to leave the Frigate Congress at Rio Janeiro. I declare both these assertions to be false. My orders were positive not to proceed with Mr. Rodney further than Montevideo where of course it would be necessary for him to procure another vessel to go to Buenos Ayres, and it became a matter of calculation with him whether it were better to take a vessel at Montevideo or procure one at Rio Janeiro. The greater facility and cheapness of getting one at the latter place and the difficulty and danger of a transshipment at Montevideo concurred to recommend the procuring a vessel at Rio. The danger of the navigation of River La Plata and the dangerous anchorage of Montevideo were the subjects of conversation between Mr. Rodney and myself during the passage to Gibraltar, and I was thence led to infer that the Congress would probably not go further

\textsuperscript{25} Probably Eleuthère Irénée du Pont (1771-1834), or possibly his brother Victor Marie du Pont (1767-1827). It is of interest to note that Victor's son Samuel Francis du Pont, the Civil War admiral, was at this time one of Biddle's midshipmen.
than Rio Janeiro. Mr. Rodney repeatedly expressed to the officers of the ship both on our voyage out to Gibraltar and subsequently his intention of taking a vessel at Rio. From Mr. Gordon who is the only officer now here I enclose a letter to that effect. In his conversation with Mr. Raguet, our Consul at Rio, on the subject Mr. Rodney never hinted at his having been influenced to adopt this course by any misunderstanding with me. I was so informed by Mr. Raguet himself. If Mr. Rodney in any letter which he has written to this Country has stated that my conduct towards him produced his determination to leave the ship at Rio Janeiro, I can only say that it is contradicted by his own repeated declarations and must have been written for the purpose of injuring me by falsehood and calumny. That I treated him with a series of studied insult and contumely is equally false. No proof of such treatment has been or can be adduced.

Mr. Rodney after his arrival at Rio Janeiro, instead of escaping as soon as possible from my imputed ill usage remained with his family one month on board the Congress, and previously to his departure expressed to Lt. Gordon (as stated in his letter) his respect and good will for me notwithstanding our disagreement. If after such conduct and such language he has complained that I had previously treated him with studied insult and contumely it is difficult to conceive a more extraordinary instance of duplicity.

Mr. Rodney I am credibly informed wrote to an officer of the Navy complaining that I would not permit him to invite the officers of the ship into the Cabin to Dinner. Waiving the consideration whether it was proper in Mr. Rodney to invite my officers to dine in my cabin, especially as his own family consisted of so many persons and especially too, as he was but very slenderly provided with stores, it is sufficient to state that what Mr. Rodney wrote to that officer is wholly untrue; Mr. Rodney never spoke to me on the subject, nor could I therefore have ever made any objection. What did happen was this. Mr. Rodney's son, a youth of 18 or 20 years of age, brought one of the midshipmen into my cabin one morning to drink wine with him. I was myself in the cabin at the time and felt some surprize at the occurrence, though I did not then say any thing. The next day young Mr. Rodney brought another of the midshipmen with him,

26 Condy Raguet (1784–1842), Philadelphia editor and economist, had accepted an appointment in 1822 as Consul to Rio de Janeiro.
Commissioner to Turkey, 1830
and, after drinking wine together, they left the cabin. After they had left the cabin I went on deck, sent for the two midshipmen, and told them they must not come into the cabin to drink wine in the morning upon the invitation of young Mr. Rodney. I never said a syllable to Mr. Rodney the father or the son. Yet from this incident Mr. Rodney has not hesitated to assert that I would not permit him to invite the officers to dine with him. I will add that the circumstance of the midshipmen thus improperly coming into the cabin is proof how much the discipline of the ship as respects the officers was relaxed, which, as already stated, I tolerated and encouraged for the sake of the females of Mr. Rodney’s family.

It has been asserted that while at Gibraltar I had kept one of Mr. Rodney’s old saddles constantly at the mast head. This is quite absurd. What did happen was this; one morning early at sea when I was on deck this old saddle of Mr. Rodney’s which was lying on the quarter deck was wet and offensive and I made one of the men run it up to the peak to dry; in about twenty minutes afterwards it occurred to me that this might be considered as done in derision and therefore I ordered it to be hauled down. It was early in the morning and no part of Mr. Rodney’s family were on deck or saw it.

It has been asserted that owing to my precipitately sending Mr. Rodney’s baggage out of the Frigate I had caused difficulties with the Custom House at Rio Janeiro, and that owing to my sending his furniture away in the rain, it had been injured to the full amount of his outfit. Both these assertions are false. I was living on shore at lodgings, and Mr. Rodney was living on board the Congress when the furniture was moved. I know not whether it did or it did not rain at the time, but certainly I had nothing to do with its removal while it was raining. With respect to the difficulties with the Custom House I had nothing whatever to do with them. Our ships boats were not calculated to move such heavy baggage. Mr. Rodney’s agent, an American merchant, was to hire suitable boats without men for Mr. Rodney and my orders to the first Lieutenant were to tow off the boats provided by Mr. Rodney’s agent and to transfer the baggage to the merchant ship which was to receive them. Mr. Rodney’s agent did procure the boats and a part of the baggage was removed. It was then ascertained that the order to exempt Mr. Rodney’s baggage from examination was misunderstood and the remainder of the bag-
gage was left on board the Congress until this matter was finally arranged. But it is quite absurd to say, that the difficulties with the Custom house were at all occasioned by this removal of part of Mr. Rodney's baggage. As soon as it was known that the Custom house officers claimed to examine Mr. Rodneys baggage its removal from the Congress was suspended, and that which was in the merchant ship remained there awaiting the decision of the Brazil Government.

It has been asserted that by my orders Mr. Rodney and his family were not allowed Boats to go on shore. This too is utterly false. My orders as entered on the orderly book, shew that I particularly directed, that Mr. Rodney and the females of his family should have the boats always at their disposal.

It is a relief to me to finish this miserable detail into which nothing could have induced me to enter but the necessity of vindicating myself from base aspersions. It will be perceived from it, I think, without entering into more minute incidents of the voyage that the whole of these stories have arisen from the querulousness of a person who was constantly jealous of his not being treated on the same footing with Mr. Nelson, and whose suspicions were perpetually on the alert to discover whether his dignity and his character were properly appreciated by me.  

27 The writing of this report enabled Biddle to blow off steam over something that was by no means a laughing matter. In time, however, he came to see the ludicrous side of what eventually took shape as merely another tempest in a teapot. The Secretary of the Navy, Samuel L. Southard, replied to Biddle on Mar. 5, 1824, advising him, in effect, to drop the matter. Apparently the Navy Department did not care to interest itself in the controversy. James Biddle papers, Charles J. Biddle Collection.