JOHN ASHMEAD, Philadelphia mariner, had the unique distinction of performing one hundred voyages in a long, exciting, useful life. The accomplishment was never exceeded, and, perhaps, never equaled in the era of sailing ships. He was twice a prisoner during the French and Indian War, rendered distinguished service in the American Revolution, established an enviable reputation in the West India trade, and concluded his days as Master Warden of the Port of Philadelphia.

In his latter years John Ashmead penned his own epitaph in stately verse:

In life’s hard bustle o’er the troubled seas
Through many a storm and many a prosperous breeze
Through summer’s heat and winter’s chilling blast,
From torrid to the frigid zone I’ve passed.
Through sickly climes where each contagious breath,
Spreads desolation by untimely death;
One hundred voyages, through unnumbered toils,
I’ve sailed at least five hundred thousand miles;
Been taken, sunk, and oft times cast away,
Yet weathered all, in this close port to lay,
Where a dead calm my wearied bark doth find,
Oblig’d to anchor for the want of wind.
Here, undisturbed, at rest, I shall remain
Till the last trump calls up all hands again;
And what new peril I shall then go through,
No human reason ever yet could shew;
But the same pow'r who leads through earth and sea,
Will doubtless lead me through eternity.¹

This is the odyssey of that versatile seaman, whose modest, rhythmic memoir fails to do justice to his colorful career.

The snow New York lay in the Delaware off Philadelphia in the spring of 1758, awaiting the lifting of an embargo upon outward-bound vessels. Her destination was the Danish island of St. Croix in the West Indies. She was owned by Benjamin Mifflin, merchant in the Lower Delaware Ward, who had loaded her with flour and barrel staves. Square-sterned and of sixty tons burden, she had been taken from the French the year before. Her master was Edward Walsh, and her supercargo, John Ashmead.²

This was nineteen-year-old Ashmead’s initial adventure on shipboard. Not since the days of his great-grandfather, another John, who had crossed the Atlantic in 1682 from Gloucestershire, England, to Pennsylvania, had any of the family gone to sea. The Ashmeads through three generations had been content to live as farmers in Cheltenham township, or as tradesmen in Germantown. Young John Ashmead had been unwilling to follow the pattern of his forebears. Born on September 29, 1738, he had received a good education, and then had forsaken the Germantown hills to journey down

¹ "The following epitaph was written by Capt. Ashmead, a very old and respectable citizen of Philadelphia, who died at an advanced age a few months since," Franklin Gazette (Baltimore), Nov. 5, 1818.

² Register of the snow New York, May 4, 1758, “Ships Registers 13 Oct 1756 and ending 27 June 1758,” The Historical Society of Pennsylvania (HSP); “Voyages of Captain John Ashmead of Philadelphia Pa Between The Years 1758 and 1780 As Written by Himself,” printed in the Germantown Telegraph in three installments, Feb. 16 and 23, and Mar. 1, 1876. The original manuscript of Ashmead’s voyages was in the possession of Joseph Ashmead Clay, a grandson of John Ashmead, who submitted a copy to the editor of the Telegraph in February, 1876, with a note remarking that in the Centennial year everything appertaining to “the time that tried men’s souls” would be of interest. He added that “the Captain’s many extraordinary experiences and remarkable escapes are told in a terse, quaint and unassuming manner.” Careful checking in contemporary documents and newspapers discloses that Ashmead’s memory, while faulty here and there as to dates, had fallen into few errors. Present location of the manuscript is not known. A typescript is in HSP. This source is hereafter referred to as Ashmead’s Voyages.
to the city, where he secured a clerkship in Benjamin Mifflin's mercantile house. Whether Mifflin's sixteen-year-old daughter Mary was an incentive which brought him to the merchant's establishment, or whether he met her later, is not in the record. In either event, a romance blossomed to which papa Mifflin very apparently gave approval. Realizing that young Ashmead was restless with a quill pen, he encouraged the lad's desire to go to sea. Opportunity came with the purchase of the snow. A tall, slim chap, with dark brown hair, John was intent upon mastering the arts of navigation and seamanship while performing the duties of supercargo. But as long as the embargo lasted, there was little for him to learn and little to do.

The third year of the French and Indian War was drawing to a close. Major General James Abercromby, the British commander in chief in North America, had decreed that His Majesty's service required closing the harbor. Abercromby was assembling his force for an attack upon the French fort on Lake Champlain. He wanted no word of his movements to reach the enemy either through unfortunate capture of a merchantman, or loquacity of a British seaman in a West Indian port. Notification of the embargo had been sent by Governor Denny of Pennsylvania to the collectors of customs at Philadelphia, New Castle, and Lewes on March 18. A letter to the commander of the fort at Wicacoa contained instructions "to use his utmost Endeavours to prevent any outward bound Vessells from Passing the said Fort." As the newspapers, disclosing only that an embargo was laid, gave no inkling as to why, resentment

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4 As Ashmead a few years later "married the boss's daughter," the statement is a safe assumption.

5 The description of Ashmead is drawn from the back of his master's commission to the brig Molly, Sept. 29, 1781, where he is identified as "Stature 6 feet, dark brown hair and a fresh complexion." Papers of the Continental Congress, 196, X, 77, National Archives, hereafter referred to as Papers CC. His leaness is attested to by Thomas Twining, Travels in America 100 Years Ago (New York, 1893), 2, where he is described as "a tall, thin, upright man."

6 Votes of Assembly, Mar. 18, 1758, Pennsylvania Archives, Eighth Series, VI, 4751-4753. This was the expedition which ended so disastrously at Ticonderoga on July 8, 1758.

7 Minutes of the Provincial Council of Pennsylvania, Mar. 18, 1758, Colonial Records, VIII, 39.
among shippers, owners, and masters grew as days passed. It had been in force better than a month when Mifflin bought and registered the New York. It was almost three months old when Captain Walsh determined to sail despite the interdict. Undoubtedly he had Benjamin Mifflin’s blessings upon so dangerous an undertaking.

“We ran away at the time of an embargo,” wrote Ashmead, “and were very near being taken by Government, but luckily passed ye fort before they could get the guns loaded.” Once clear of the capes, they steered for St. Croix. A French agent there offered the best price for the cargo, and the supercargo had no qualms about selling to the enemy. Later, when they entered the Delaware, they found that word of their misdeed had preceded them. “The vessel durst not return to Philadelphia on account of one of the men lodging an information that we had sold our cargo to the French,” recorded Ashmead. So the New York dropped anchor off Wilmington, discharged its sugar at a profit, “loaded from thence for St. Croix,” and made a second voyage.

By then it was well into 1758. Ashmead had mastered navigation and could hand, reef, and steer as well as any able seaman and better than most. Before sailing from Wilmington, Benjamin Mifflin, as an evidence of confidence, had commissioned him to buy a ship if a good cheap one could be found in some West Indian port. Learning of a prize sent by the French into neutral St. Eustatius, he left the New York at St. Croix and took passage in a sloop for that Dutch island. Contrary winds protracted to eight days a trip which should have consumed but one or two; the prize ship had been sold the day before Ashmead reached his destination.

“Just as I arrived,” he recounted, “a sailor had been swimming alongside of ye vessel he belonged to, when ye other men called out a shark, and he swam to ye vessel and had got hold of the chains, when the shark rose up and bit him off at the waist. The arms and upper part held fast, and were taken in and buried.”

Ashmead wasted no time in St. Eustatius. A schooner belonging to Jonathan Copeland of Philadelphia was departing next day for

8 “Saturday last an Embargo was laid on all Vessels outward Bound,” Pennsylvania Journal, Mar. 23, 1758; “Last Week an Embargo was laid on the Shipping in this Port by his honor the Governor,” Pennsylvania Gazette, Mar. 23, 1758.

9 Register of the snow New York, May 4, 1758.
the continent. John took passage in her. That same afternoon, when she dropped anchor in Basseterre road in the island of St. Kitts, he went ashore, being assured by her master, a Captain Kennedy, that she would not sail until the following day. "In the Evening," John reported in disgust, "Kennedy sent my chest and bedding on shore, and it was landed just clear of the town on ye beach, where by mere accident I saw it and I got it to my lodgings at dusk; and in ye night Kennedy ran away with the schooner." He could have added that Kennedy ran away with his passage money also.

Better fortune attended the next effort. Two days after Kennedy disappeared, the ship John and Sukey, Alexander Ogilvie, master, passed by St. Kitts on her way to Philadelphia. Ogilvie came ashore in his boat, and John greeted him and engaged passage. They arrived in the Delaware in mid-October, 1759, after passing through one of the most severe fall gales ever experienced on the American coast. "More than 100 sail of vessels were damaged and perished in it," Ashmead wrote later. "Out of 40 sail that came out in a fleet from Virginia the day before we passed the Bay, none but 16 ever arrived. The rest were foundered, or disabled, and left at sea." Contemporary newspaper accounts confirm the ravages of that storm.

When Ashmead reached Philadelphia, Edward Walsh had been "turned out" of the New York. Her new master was Henry Bass of Boston, and she had been renamed the Chance. Mifflin loaded her again for St. Croix, but winter closed the port. On March 16, 1760, they dropped down into Whorekiln road. "That night came on a dreadful snowstorm from the northeast," Ashmead wrote, "and 14 sail were lost on the beach. Two rode out ye gale, of which one went ashore after it was over." The Chance parted her cable early in the gale, made all the sail she could, thumped hard on the shoal called the Shears in trying to get out of the bay, drove on the western flats, and wound up in a place named Mahawn's Ditch. "We had the greatest Fall of Snow, that we have had for Twenty Years past,"

10 Ashmead's Voyages.
12 Ashmead's Voyages.
14 Ashmead's Voyages.
the *Pennsylvania Journal* reported, and the *Gazette* printed “the disagreeable account,” with a partial list of vessels lost.\(^{15}\)

The *Chance* sustained such damage that Captain Bass returned to Wilmington, unloaded his cargo, hove down for repairs, and re-loaded.\(^{16}\) In May she cleared the capes. Two weeks later a French privateer brig gobbled her up. Bass, Ashmead, and the crew were transferred to their captor, which, with the *Chance*, set off for Port-au-Prince on the island of Hispaniola.\(^{17}\)

“In going in a Frigate fired three broadsides into us within musket shot,” Ashmead related, “and two forts fired about 40 eighteen and twenty-four pounders, but providentially did not hurt a man.” The privateer captain had neglected to send in an advice boat as the brig and prize approached the roadstead. The trigger-happy French were taking no chances. “This was one of ye most hazardous and curious scenes I ever passed through,” said John. His escape seemed less due to providence than to the notorious poor aim of French gunners.

Since the *Chance* was an unarmed merchantman, the French commander in Port-au-Prince liberated the captured crew. Ashmead and four companions supped together on the Saturday before they were to depart for home in a brig bound to Rhode Island. The main dish was fish, and John recorded that all were taken sick and three of the men “were buried by Wednesday morning.” He thought they had been poisoned, but it turned out to be a touch of yellow fever. On the northward passage, the fever broke out anew. Ten men were taken ill, and two died.

From Rhode Island, Ashmead took passage for Philadelphia in the sloop *Abigail*, James Card, master. When they were one day out a heavy gale struck the little vessel. She careened madly toward Montauk Point, on the tip of Long Island, driving into five fathoms of water before her master managed to get her head around. Then, on another tack, with the storm howling at her heels, she brushed death on Block Island. Captain Card took her back into Narragansett Bay, and John, for the present, had had enough of storms at sea.

\(^{15}\) *Pennsylvania Journal*, Mar. 20, 1760; *Pennsylvania Gazette*, Mar. 27, 1760.

\(^{16}\) Ashmead’s Voyages.

\(^{17}\) *Pennsylvania Gazette*, July 10, 1760.
"When we got to Newport again," he wrote, "I bought a Horse and rode Home where I found ye ship had been 2 or 3 days before me."18 The Abigail had arrived at Philadelphia on November 26, 1760.19 Ashmead’s impatience in Newport had been that of the expectant bridegroom, for, on January 28, 1761, two months after he reached Philadelphia, he and Mary Mifflin were married.20

During his absence, Benjamin Mifflin had entered into partnership with Samuel Massey, another Philadelphia merchant. The new firm had rented Richard Hockley’s wharf at the “south-east corner of the city,” beginning December 1, 1760, and had named it Mifflin’s wharf.21 On February 2, 1761, the snow Young Edward, a French prize condemned in the Jamaica high court of admiralty, was purchased at vendue.22 When John and Mary Ashmead returned from their honeymoon to their new home “in Third-street nearly opposite the city alms house,” the Young Edward had been renamed the Live Oak and was being converted from a snow to a ship as she lay berthed alongside Mifflin’s wharf.23

With savings from previous voyages and, perhaps, money inherited from his father, who had died in 1750, Ashmead took a one-third interest in the Live Oak, and was selected to command her.24 The owners armed her with three guns, two bought from John Mifflin and one from Samuel Carson, and “2 Blunder Bushes.”25 They registered her, “a Square Sterned Vessel of Eighty Tons,” under her new name on June 8, 1761, and entered her at the Custom House for Jamaica.26 John had also acquired a third interest in her cargo, a rich one valued at almost £1,600. It consisted of barrel staves, hoops, and headings, pine and oak lumber, shingles, corn,

18 Ashmead’s Voyages.
19 Pennsylvania Gazette, Nov. 27 and Dec. 4, 1760.
20 Ashmead’s Voyages; Ashmead Genealogy.
21 Mifflin and Massey, Ledger A (1760-1763), f. 85, HSP, hereafter cited as Ledger A; Advertisement in Pennsylvania Gazette, Oct. 21, 1762; “A plan of the City of Philadelphia Capital of Pennsylvania from an actual survey by Benjamin Eastburn Surveyor General, 1776,” HSP.
22 Register of the ship Live Oak, June 8, 1761, “Ships Registers 1761 to Jan'y 1762,” HSP.
24 Ashmead’s Voyages.
26 Register of the ship Live Oak, June 8, 1761.
The *Live Oak* cleared the Port of Philadelphia in mid-June, 1761, and two weeks later was taken by the French privateer schooner *Levenette*, whose eight carriage guns, fourteen swivels, and seventy men were too much for the ship's light armament. It was a sad conclusion to John's first command. Ashmead and his hands were carried into Jérémie in the bight of Léogane, Hispaniola. There he said he lay for eighty-nine days until a flag of truce sloop arrived from Jamaica.

"I went on board in ye evening by permission of ye Governor to proceed to Jamaica," Ashmead continued, "but in two Hours came on one of the violent cul de sacs, as they are called, and the sloop soon foundered at her anchors, having struck in 6 or 7 foot of water more than she drew, and 22 of us went on shore in and on an old canoe, which was split in two from end to end by the sloop's channel catching her wide as ye sloop was sinking. We all escaped wonderfully through the surf."

The following day he bought the long boat from the *Live Oak*, and he and fourteen others again set off for Jamaica. They were nearly set in a squall off the southwestern tip of Hispaniola, and were upon by a French fort which mistook them for picaroons coming to steal Negroes. Again poor marksmanship saved them, for the guns, at less than one hundred yards distance, had been loaded with langridge. They rowed out of range, but hovered off the coast for several days. It was September hurricane weather and they feared venturing the Jamaica channel in an open boat. Then, nearing Kingston harbor, a tender from the ship of the admiral commanding on the station took them. Some of Ashmead's companions were pressed on board the man-of-war. His long boat was seized in the belief that it belonged to the flag of truce sloop, whose master was accused of carrying flour to the French in Hispaniola. John con-

28 *Pennsylvania Gazette*, June 18, 1761.
vinced them otherwise, and the long boat was restored. He sold her at Kingston for what she had cost him in Jérémie.

From there he took passage in the privateer brig *Phoenix*, Captain J. Washington, for Philadelphia. She dropped down to Port Royal, where all her officers except the gunner ran away. Captain James Cobourne, another Philadelphian, who had been in the long boat from Hispaniola, agreed to act as first lieutenant, and Ashmead, as second.

“When we got out we chased everything we saw,” John recorded, “and near Cape Nicholas chased a Frigate.” Luckily for them, she proved to be British. Two days later, they set off after two French privateers, but a heavy squall threw the *Phoenix* on her broadside. The lee guns had to be tossed overboard before she could be righted, and even then she carried away foretop and main topgallant masts. They quickly got up spare masts. Off Cape Hatteras on October 23, 1761, while chasing a ketch, which turned out to be British, a heavy gale of wind drove them shoreward. “We endeavoured to claw off and carry,” Ashmead wrote, “till we carayed away two suits of sails, the Main Top sail and Cross Jack Yards and Head of ye Fore Top Mast again and drove into 9 fathoms, hove all ye remainder of our guns over and narrowly escaped destruction. The Ketch was lost and about 20 People perished.”

The *Phoenix* picked up a pilot off Cape May at the end of October, and Ashmead went ashore in the pilot boat and “rode up to town.” He reached Philadelphia a day before the privateer, whose captain reported that “Last Friday se-nnight we had a violent Gale of Wind, in which he was obliged to throw overboard most of his Guns, and sprung his masts.” Insurance covered most of the loss of the *Live Oak*. Upon final accounting, the underwriters paid off all but about £300 on the ship, and fourteen pounds on the cargo. Ashmead’s loss, of course, was one third of each amount.

About the time that John was arguing with the admiral at Jamaica over the *Live Oak’s* boat, Mifflin and Massey had acquired a second vessel. She was the schooner *Pitt*, of thirty tons burden, and had

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30 Ashmead’s Voyages.
31 *Pennsylvania Journal*, Nov. 5, 1761.
32 Ledger A, ff. 131, 194.
been a French privateer captured in 1758. She had had several owners before Mifflin and Massey bought her at public vendue in September, 1761. When Ashmead arrived home she was loading for Jamaica with barrel headings and ship's bread. He took command and also acted as supercargo, all goods on board being consigned to him. The Pitt cleared the Delaware Capes on December 1, 1761, and on her southward passage leaked badly until, despite the pumps, she had four and a half feet of water in her hold. "She was an old crazy vessel wrecked to pieces in privateering," John reported. At Jamaica he sold her for £159 5s., a loss of £332 5s. 2d., but offset that by securing a profit of £531 15s. 10d. on her cargo. The purchaser of the Pitt sailed to Havana in her, and Ashmead learned later that the old schooner sank at her moorings in Havana harbor.

For the fourth time in four years, John Ashmead was left in the West Indies without a vessel. He took homeward passage in the ship Granby, Samuel Appowan, master, replacing a mate who had left the vessel clandestinely the night before she sailed from Kingston. After but a few days at sea Captain Appowan discovered that the mate, before running off, had sold five barrels of ship's bread and pocketed the money. For the remaining seventeen days of passage, the crew was rationed to one half ounce of bread a day. Off Cape Hatteras, in February, 1762, they were nearly run down in a hard gale. It was an extremely dark night. Ashmead saw the light of the oncoming vessel. The glass panes in all the Granby's lanterns had been smashed. He snatched up one of the lanterns, lighted it, wrapped his handkerchief around it, and swung it over his head. The signal was seen. "The vessel just had time to steer clear of us," he

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33 Register of the schooner Pitt, June 19, 1760, and Nov. 16, 1761, "Register Book 1759 and 1760" and "Register Book 1761 to Jan 1762," HSP.
34 "Schooner Pitt, John Ashmead Master Dr," Ledger A, f. 152.
35 "Adventure to Jamaica p' Schooner Pitt Consign'd John Ashmead," ibid., f. 166.
37 Ashmead's Voyages.
38 Ledger A, ff. 152, 166.
39 Ashmead's Voyages.
40 Ashmead identified the vessel as the Carrington. Evidently he confused her with a vessel Appowan had previously commanded.
41 Ashmead's Voyages.
42 Joseph Ashmead Clay to the editor, Germantown Telegraph, Mar. 1, 1876.
related later. "As she was scudding, she broached too and overset close under our stern in an excessively cold night." Her identity was never determined. The Granby came up the Delaware in the last week in February.

In the summer of 1762, Ashmead took a third part of another schooner, the Industry, purchased by Mifflin and Massey on June 18. She was destined for Havana, and he was to command her. The partners changed their minds, however, wanting him for another ship they were about to purchase. After some negotiating, they secured his agreement to quit the Industry and his share in her cargo upon payment of £30 as "Supposed Profitts in y' Voyage." His new command, in which he was again one-third owner, was the ninety-ton ship Mercury, built in New York nine years before but still a tight vessel. The greater part of her cargo (the usual manifest) was on board when the owners, on October 21, 1762, advertised her as bound for Jamaica, and spoke proudly of her "extraordinary Accommodations for Passengers."

Ashmead cleared the port at the end of November, and made an expeditious and profitable voyage. He was too expeditious, in fact, for the ice was still thick in the river when he entered the Delaware upon his return. The Mercury and a number of other inward-bound vessels tied up at Marcus Hook on February 23, 1763. John came to town overland and imparted to the Philadelphia editors the news from Jamaica, chiefly reports of privateering operations against the French and Spanish in a war that was languishing toward a close. The Mercury sailed up to Mifflin's wharf on March 3, disgorged her cargo of rum, sugar, and molasses, reloaded with staves, lumber, and corn, and cleared early in April. Another rapid and successful voyage to Jamaica brought her back by the end of July. Ashmead stayed at home during the next voyage. His first mate, James Steel,
commanded the Mercury to Dominica and returned with her safely in mid-February, 1764.\textsuperscript{52}

Ashmead then took over for a voyage to Cork, Ireland, beginning the first of April and concluding without untoward incident in mid-September. One month later, he was off again in the Mercury for Jamaica.\textsuperscript{53} On this his third voyage in her to that island, he sold the ship, a sale directed because the partnership of Mifflin and Massey was ending. Benjamin Mifflin was moving to Sussex County, Delaware, and Charles Massey was joining his brother in a new partnership.\textsuperscript{54}

For his fifth shipless return from the West Indies, Ashmead took passage in the brig Ranger, a Captain Forsyth, for Baltimore. They were fourteen days trying unsuccessfully to get through the Windward Passage, and John’s distrust of Forsyth’s ability grew with each passing day. The Ranger’s master kept no watch himself, set no lookout at night, and would take no advice. “I saw such carelessness that I never could rest a moment at night,” Ashmead wrote, “but after ye lights were out below I went on deck to look out where any danger was nigh.” That northern voyage was a nightmare to him. Having failed to negotiate the Windward Passage, and narrowly escaping losing his brig on Morant Key, Forsyth bore away for the Gulf Passage, intending to stop at Bluefields to fill his water casks.

Ashmead related what happened: the erratic skipper “ran in so nigh that he struck, but laying all sail aback got off and ran to leeward, intending next to touch at ye Grand Caimans [Cayman] for water. Here again he was near losing ye vessel on a reef but gott to an anchor and after waiting 3 days filled but 1½ casks of water, made sail again and was near running on Cape Comentes [Corrientes] in ye night. Christmas day at noon was very nigh lost on ye south part of the Collerados. About two weeks after this we ran on Key Sal, entirely by his obstinacy. 3 nights after we were very near being

\textsuperscript{52} Pennsylvania Gazette, Oct. 6, 1763, Feb. 16, 1764.
\textsuperscript{53} Ibid., Apr. 12, Sept. 12 and 20, Oct. 25, 1764; Pennsylvania Journal, Sept. 13 and 20, 1764, Jan. 31, 1765.
\textsuperscript{54} Ashmead’s Voyages; “Journal of a Journey from Philada to the Cedar Swamps & Back, 1764, By Benjamin Mifflin,” The Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography (PMHB), LII (1928), 140; Register of the ship Mercury, Apr. 4, 1765, “Ships Register Decem’ 1764 to May, 1767,” HSP.
lost on the Martins. About a fortnight after had a very narrow escape at Hatteras Shoal, and about 4 days after that contrary to all advice ran into Virginia Bay, in a thick fog and ran on ye middle ground, but very fortunately got off again as tide flowd, then ran into the channel and anchored, but in about four hours parted a new cable and drove to sea.”

That was enough for Ashmead. When Forsyth ran in close to the beach and anchored, John prevailed upon him to let the six passengers go ashore. In fairly moderate weather next morning, they landed on a barren coast and set off in search of some habitation. A two-mile tramp brought them to a house, whose owner provided horses to convey them inland to Norfolk. Here they hired a thirty-ton schooner to carry them to Baltimore. The weather was dismal. Nearly freezing, they put into Annapolis. There, ironically, they found the Ranger, which had arrived the day before. At Annapolis, Ashmead hired horses for himself and James Steel and rode to Philadelphia, arriving January 22, 1765. It was, said Ashmead, “the day the Ox was roasted on the ice opposite ye City.”

With no hint of the perilous passage, the Pennsylvania Gazette reported that Captain Ashmead from Jamaica “advises that Captain Leybourne, in a Schooner belonging to South-Carolina, was lost on the Grand Camines homeward bound from Jamaica.” How near disaster on those same islands and elsewhere he himself had been, Ashmead omitted telling the editor.

Samuel and Charles Massey had their place of business in Water Street between Chestnut and Walnut. They had not renewed the lease on Hockley’s wharf, but had become part owners of a wharf next to the Crooked Billet, almost at the foot of Chestnut Street. They had also bought a ship on the stocks, which was launched in late March and registered at the Custom House on April 4, 1765. She too was named the Mercury and was of the same tonnage as the Mercury Ashmead had sold in Jamaica. Upon John’s arrival he accepted a one-third interest in her. She sailed for Lisbon on her

55 Ashmead’s Voyages.
56 Pennsylvania Gazette, Feb. 7, 1765.
57 Locations are established in advertisements of proposed ship sailings in Pennsylvania Journal, Sept. 12, 1765, and Sept. 11, 1766.
58 Register of the ship Mercury, Apr. 4, 1765.
first voyage with a cargo consigned to Thomas Horne, a merchant in Portugal. James Steel commanded her, Ashmead staying home, "not being able to get a Mediterranean pass." Steel returned about September 1, and John took over at a time when the first cries of outrage over the Stamp Act had been succeeded by violence.

For her second voyage, the Mercury's destination was Cork. She cleared Philadelphia at the end of September, and returned on January 31, 1766. Ashmead brought back the cheering information that "the people of Ireland are highly pleased at the opposition the Stamp Act meets with in America." Healths had been drunk there, he said, with such toasts as "Destruction to the American Stamp Act," and "The noble spirit of the Americans, a continuation of that Spirit." By contrast, when he came back four months later from a voyage to the West Indies, he reported that "they had Advice of the Repeal of the Stamp Act at Barbados, but the Inhabitants did not shew the least Sign of rejoicing there on that glorious Occasion."

Before departing for another voyage to Barbados, he left with the treasurer of the Captains of Ships Charitable Club his subscription of sixty shillings, and was duly elected a member in absentia on July 7, 1766. For the ensuing ten years, he would be at sea for twenty-six of the forty quarterly meetings of the Society.

Upon his return from Barbados in September, 1766, John and Mary moved to Spruce Street, between Second and Third. There their son John was born, the first of nine children to grace their union. There, also, the advertisement announcing the pending departure of the Mercury "for Jamaica to touch at Dominica" stated that applicants for freight or passage might apply.

59 Ashmead's Voyages.
60 Pennsylvania Gazette, Sept. 5, 1765.
62 Pennsylvania Gazette, Sept. 26, 1765; Feb. 6, 1766; Pennsylvania Journal, Feb. 6, 1766.
63 Pennsylvania Gazette, Mar. 13 and June 5, 1766.
64 Ibid., June 26 and Sept. 4, 1766.
65 "Remarks of the Society from July 4, 1765 to Jan. 1, 1781," Papers of the Society for the Relief of Poor and Distressed Masters of Ships their Widows and Children, HSP, hereafter referred to as Shipmasters' Club.
67 Pennsylvania Journal, Sept. 11, 1766.
The *Mercury* departed early in October, clearing for St. Kitts, Dominica, and Jamaica. Off the latter island on November 16, Ashmead rode out a gale which sent four or five vessels ashore in the several outports. He brought back a hold full of “Muscovado Sugar in Hogsheads, Tierces and Barrels, Barbadoes Rum and Jamaica Spirits,” arriving home December 27, 1766.\(^{68}\) Another voyage to Jamaica was concluded June 4, 1767,\(^{69}\) and John was preparing for departure in September when illness intervened. James Steel took charge at the last moment and sailed the *Mercury* to Kingston and back between September 1 and November 10.\(^{70}\) Ashmead then resumed command and made his last voyage to Barbados in the *Mercury*. He arrived home on February 13, 1768, with a long tale of gales, dismasted vessels, and shipwrecks. One of the unfortunate masters, James Montgomery, late of the ship *Eleanor*, came passenger with him. The *Mercury* had escaped unscathed.\(^{71}\)

The Masseys had more goods for Thomas Horne, the Lisbon merchant, and Ashmead made two voyages to that port before the end of the year 1768.\(^{72}\) On the second trip, he discovered that Horne had failed “with ye whole of ye first cargo in his hands.” The merchant had to give security for the second cargo before John would leave it.\(^{73}\) The *Mercury* returned on October 28, “in 44 days from Lisbon.”\(^{74}\)

“In ye winter S & C Massey chartered ye ship to go to New York with a load of flour, at so low a freight that I sold out at a great loss,” Ashmead recalled.\(^{75}\) The change in ownership necessitated a new register, which was effected on November 23, 1768.\(^{76}\) John nevertheless continued as master, and “on my Passage had very near been lost, after all hands being severely frost bitten.” He left the *Mercury* at New York, and “returned by the stage.”\(^{77}\)

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\(^{68}\) *Pennsylvania Journal*, Jan. 1, 1767; *Pennsylvania Gazette*, Jan. 8, 1767.

\(^{69}\) *Ibid.*, Mar. 5 and June 4, 1767.


\(^{71}\) *Pennsylvania Journal*, Feb. 18, 1768.


\(^{73}\) Ashmead’s Voyages.

\(^{74}\) *Pennsylvania Journal*, Nov. 3, 1768.

\(^{75}\) Ashmead’s Voyages.

\(^{76}\) Register of the ship *Mercury*, Nov. 23, 1768, “Ships Registers June 1767 to July 16, 1770,” HSP.

\(^{77}\) Ashmead’s Voyages; *Pennsylvania Gazette*, Dec. 1, 1768.
In the spring of 1769, the Masseys purchased the sloop Polly, a little vessel of twenty-five tons burden, which had been built at Salem, New Jersey, the year before.\(^7\) In this tiny craft Ashmead essayed a voyage to Lisbon “to try and settle some part of ye broken voyages to Mr. Horne.”\(^7\) The Polly sailed about July 10,\(^8\) and at Lisbon John was able to collect “a little of the money.” He returned in the fall, and “fortunatley by having a long passage missed an exceeding destructive Hurricane on ye coast in ye latter end of September, in which 50 or 60 sail suffered much and many totally lost.”\(^8\) The Polly was recorded “inbound from Lisbon” at the Custom House on October 26.\(^8\)

She loaded for Charleston, South Carolina, during December, being tied up at the wharf next to the Crooked Billet.\(^8\) Clearing the port a week before Christmas,\(^8\) in company with Joseph Blewer in the sloop Sally, the vessels sailed together to Charleston, where Ashmead took in a cargo of rice and naval stores for St. Eustatius. The Polly returned to Philadelphia in March, 1770. After two voyages to Barbados that year,\(^8\) the Masseys, for reasons not apparent, transferred Ashmead to the brig Nancy, of sixty tons burden, a French prize condemned in the Bahamas in 1762, which they had purchased in the spring of 1770.\(^8\) She was entered at the Custom House on September 27, as outward-bound for Barbados under Captain Valentine Welsh, but she cleared two weeks later with John Ashmead as master.\(^8\) He remained in command for four voyages to Barbados over a period of eleven months. In only one voyage, the second, did anything remarkable happen. Southward-bound in January, 1771, the Nancy rode out a storm which had devastating effects upon other shipping. Ashmead supplied the Philadelphia ed-

\(^{78}\) Register of the sloop Polly, June 30, 1769, “Ships Registers June 1767 to July 16, 1770,” HSP.
\(^{70}\) Ashmead’s Voyages.
\(^{80}\) Pennsylvania Gazette, Oct. 26, 1769.
\(^{81}\) Ashmead’s Voyages.
\(^{82}\) Pennsylvania Gazette, Oct. 26, 1769.
\(^{84}\) Pennsylvania Gazette, Dec. 21, 1769.
\(^{85}\) Ibid., Apr. 5, June 7 and 21, Aug. 23, 1770.
\(^{86}\) Register of the brig Nancy, May 2, 1770, “Ships Registers June 1767 to July 16, 1770,” HSP.
\(^{87}\) Pennsylvania Journal, Sept. 27 and Oct. 11, 1770.
iters, upon his return in March, with a long account of the vessels which had suffered heavy losses, including one which had had captain, mate, and all but three hands washed overboard and drowned, and another which had had thirty horses swept from her deck. 88

In the fall of 1771, John parted company with his good friends the Masseys. He remained at home until the fall of 1773, when Hezekiah Williams, a Philadelphia merchant, engaged him to command the brigantine John, a fair-sized vessel of seventy-five tons burden, which had been built in Maryland three years before. Her destination was London, with a cargo of tar and turpentine. She was registered at the Custom House on December 7, 89 but did not clear the port until January 1, 1774. 90 It proved an exciting and hazardous voyage. Ashmead remarked that he suffered extreme hardships and risks, and lost one man overboard, "the first I ever lost."

As the John neared the British Isles Ashmead's troubles multiplied. "Near the [English] Channel met bad weather," he recorded, "and drove up ye Bristol Channel, then into the Irish Channel, then through the Hats and Barrels and most miraculously escaped through those dangerous Rocks, 91 and at 7 or 8 o'clock Scud in between the two Light-houses at ye entrance of Milford Haven, and got up opposite to Hubbinson and ran on a Mud bank before we would tell where we had got to, although we could see ye mountains on each side of us about 11 o'clock of an excessive dark night and the gale continuing. I had not closed my eyes in sleep for 5 nights and days, and no one on board had ever been on ye coast."

Twice he put out of Milford Haven and each time was driven back from near Land's End. The third time he made it round into the English Channel, but off Plymouth a southeast gale, which dispersed one hundred and eighty sail in his sight at the time, forced him to seek shelter in Plymouth harbor, the last of forty-eight sail which had fled to that haven. He "got in about 7 at night very fortunately." The John finally reached London on April 3, 1774. 92

89 Register of the brig John, Dec. 7, 1773, "Ships Registers July 1770–December 1773," HSP.
90 Pennsylvania Gazette, Jan. 4, 1774.
91 A group of rocks lying about ten leagues west of the coast of Wales in 51°37' N. Lat.
92 Ashmead's Voyages.
Long before then England had learned how Boston had received its shipment of East India Company tea, and the House of Commons had passed the Boston Port Bill.\textsuperscript{93} Amid British consternation over that world-shaking tea party, Ashmead loaded the \textit{John} expeditiously and sailed for home, where he arrived July 25.\textsuperscript{94}

During the time that the First Continental Congress in Philadelphia was deliberating upon what course should be pursued against England, the \textit{John} made a voyage to Barbados. "On ye passage out lost one man overboard and had 3 men disabled in a gale of wind," Ashmead reported later, "and none but ye mate, a boy and myself to stand ye deck for 17 days, when we arrived safe."\textsuperscript{95} On his return in October, he learned of the Continental Association, the nonintercourse agreement of Congress which provided that after December 1 no goods should be imported directly or indirectly from Great Britain, and that after September 10, 1775, all outward trade with the British Isles and her West Indian islands should cease.\textsuperscript{96}

Hezekiah Williams had time to export at least four cargoes to Barbados before the deadline set in the Continental Association. The \textit{John} spent just two weeks in port that October, 1774, and but a single week in January, 1775. She sailed on her third voyage toward the end of that month.\textsuperscript{97} "I was at Barbadoes at the time of ye Battle of Lexington," Ashmead recalled.\textsuperscript{98} He completed the voyage around May 23, and a week later was off again.\textsuperscript{99}

During this absence, His Majesty's ship \textit{Nautilus} arrived at New Castle, Delaware. She came, her captain said, for the protection of trade; in plain English, remarked a newspaper, "to pick our pockets and try to enslave us."\textsuperscript{100} Ashmead, homeward-bound about August 5, very "fortunately got into our bay, and in a fog passed ye men of war without being seen."\textsuperscript{101} There was still time for one more ad-
venture to Barbados. The *Nautilus* sailed down the bay and off for Boston before August ended, and the *John* followed her out a day or two later.\(^{102}\) On this last voyage, Ashmead stopped at Antigua to collect some money due Hezekiah Williams. To his disgust, "ye Merchant would not or could not pay." Since all notices of ship departures and arrivals in the newspapers had been discontinued as a measure of security,\(^{103}\) the exact date of the return of the *John* is not available. Ashmead recorded only that "ye Brig was laid up when I got home." Then, too, he remarked, "ye American Revolution war came on."\(^{104}\)

John Ashmead's active participation in the Revolution began in January, 1776, just a few months past his thirty-seventh birthday. The Continental Congress the month before had authorized the building of thirteen frigates and had named a Marine Committee.\(^{105}\) This committee had selected commissioners to oversee the construction of the four ships allocated to Pennsylvania.\(^{106}\) These commissioners, in turn, had appointed Ashmead clerk in the Wharton and Humphreys shipyard in Southwark, where frigate No. 2 was to be laid down. His duties, along with Woolman Sutton, the superintendent, were to form a muster roll of all employees, keep time records, hire extra labor when needed, provide work for smiths and other tradesmen when wanted, and "in short do every service and tender . . . every assistance" to the builders.\(^{107}\) John's salary was eight pounds per month, Pennsylvania currency.\(^{108}\)

As the frigate took shape on the ways, Ashmead added extracurricular duty by enrolling in Captain Joseph Cowperthwait's company of militia. Composed of Quakers or descendants of Quakers,
the company was popularly known as the Quaker Light Infantry.\textsuperscript{109} John qualified because the Ashmeads came from Quaker stock, although his grandfather had become a Baptist early in the century, and all descendants had continued in the Baptist faith.\textsuperscript{110} So, by day Ashmead fingered a quill pen, and in the evening handled a musket.

Early in June, frigate No. 2 became the \textit{Randolph}, and Congress appointed Nicholas Biddle, a Philadelphian then at sea in a Continental brig, to command her.\textsuperscript{111} She was launched on July 10,\textsuperscript{112} and immediately thereafter Ashmead’s marine and military obligations conflicted. Cowperthwait’s company and the rest of the associated militia of Philadelphia were ordered to Trenton for the defense of New Jersey.\textsuperscript{113} Congress provided, however, that militiamen employed in making cannon, gunlocks, or powder should be detained from marching.\textsuperscript{114} This would not exempt John from shouldering his rifle, but the Marine Committee stepped in. His attendance at the yard to take care of the matériel after the \textit{Randolph}’s launching was considered such “very necessary business,” that the committee requested he “not go on the proposed expedition to the Jerseys.” It provided him with a letter to be shown to his commanding officer, which “will prove a satisfactory reason for your stay.”\textsuperscript{115}

When the \textit{Randolph}’s affairs were completed, the Marine Committee appointed Ashmead to superintend the construction and later to be master of a Continental brig to be used as a packet. She was laid on the stocks at the end of July, and was called the \textit{Mercury}, a name so reminiscent of two of his earlier commands that John no doubt had a part in selecting it.\textsuperscript{116} In December, when the brig was ready for launching, shipwrights and riggers dropped their tools and joined Washington’s army. After Trenton and Princeton, they re-

\textsuperscript{109} Autobiography of Charles Biddle, Vice President of the Supreme Executive Council of Pennsylvania (Philadelphia, 1883), 82, hereafter cited as Biddle.
\textsuperscript{110} Ashmead Genealogy.
\textsuperscript{111} Journals of Congress, V, 423 (June 6, 1776).
\textsuperscript{112} Marion V. Brewington, “Designs of our First Frigates,” American Neptune (Salem, Mass., 1945), VIII, I, 24.
\textsuperscript{113} Journals of Congress, V, 519 (July 5, 1776).
\textsuperscript{114} Ibid., 530 (July 9, 1776).
\textsuperscript{115} Marine Committee to John Ashmead, July 12, 1776, copy, Button Gwinnett Correspondence, 229, HSP.
\textsuperscript{116} Petition of John Ashmead, Mar. 30, 1779, Papers CC, 41, I, 29, hereafter referred to as Ashmead Petition.
turned, but it was early February before the newly created Navy Board of the Middle District could get “the Tradesmen & others to Work.”

“She was launched in Feb’1777,” Ashmead recorded, “was Fitted, Loaded and Ready for Sea in May following, and soon after ordered Down to the Piers.” It was June 24, 1777, that this order was issued by the Navy Board, along with directions “that the Captains of the Continental Vessels now in this Port, shall every Monday Morning deliver into this Office regular and exact Muster Rolls of the Officers & Men belonging to their respective Vessels . . . not doubting that you will govern yourself accordingly.”

The Mercury got no farther down the river than Fort Island piers. British ships of war had blocked the Delaware, bottling up the entire Continental fleet, or that part of it then based on Philadelphia. By September, 1777, with Howe’s army approaching Philadelphia overland, and escape by sea cut off, the Navy Board ordered the Mercury up to the city. She with the unfinished frigates Effingham and Washington lay alongside wharves at the foot of Chestnut Street, where their skeleton crews toiled to take on board naval stores and slops, as well as all the books and papers of the Navy Board, Pay Office, and Commissioners of Naval Stores. Ashmead’s orders had taken him so by surprise, and the notice granted him was so short, that “he had not time to get the whole of his Furniture out of his house, but left therein Cloathing Furniture & other Articles to the value of about Forty Pounds, which as the British took possession of his House he lost.”

While the British were occupying the city, the Mercury and the two frigates were moving up the Delaware to Bordentown. At that little New Jersey hamlet the Navy Board set up headquarters, and the emergency cargoes were landed. Books and papers were sent off

117 Robert Morris to President of Congress, Feb. 4, 1777, Papers CC, appendix, 136–141.
118 Ashmead Petition.
119 Navy Board Middle District to John Ashmead, June 24, 1777, copy, Button Gwinnett Correspondence, 229, HSP.
121 Navy Board Middle District to Marine Committee, Oct. 7, 1777, Emmet Autograph Collection, New York Public Library.
122 Affidavit of John Ashmead, c. 1778, copy, Button Gwinnett Correspondence, 227, HSP, hereafter cited as Ashmead Affidavit.
to Easton. Stores and provisions were stowed "in Places of Secrecy at some Distance from the Water." Ashmead established his wife and growing family—four boys and three girls—at Bordentown. Through the autumn they listened to the distant rumble of cannon until the defenses of the river pass below the city collapsed in November, and the British obtained complete control of the Delaware from the capes to Philadelphia. Only when winter set in early did they feel safe from British incursions northward.

In the spring, Francis Hopkinson of the Navy Board, expecting an enemy attempt to destroy or take possession of the shipping in the upper river, ordered Ashmead to find some suitable place where the Mercury could be prepared for sinking. When the spot was chosen, John was to have two holes bored in her bottom and plugs inserted "so that in Case of alarm the Plugs being drawn she may sink forthwith." Hopkinson recommended that secret marks be made by which the holes might easily be found should there be opportunity to raise her again. The same day these orders were given, Ashmead signed the new oath of allegiance that the Continental Congress had decreed in February. Biles Creek, lying behind an island of the same name, a few miles south of Trenton on the Pennsylvania side of the river, was selected as the most remote and best place to moor the packet. She was prepared for scuttling as directed, and a guard was kept on board while Ashmead spent most of his time in Bordentown.

When the much-feared British attack came, it was almost without warning. The enemy force had sailed the night of May 6—British light infantry, convoyed by galleys, armed schooners, and gunboats—but heavy rains and an ebb tide forced it to anchor twelve miles north of Philadelphia. It was underway at 5 o'clock next morning and by noon was abreast of White Hill, where the frigates Effingham and Washington lay partly under water. Their upper works were set on

123 Navy Board Middle District to Marine Committee, Oct. 7, 1777.
124 Ashmead Petition.
125 Francis Hopkinson to John Ashmead, Apr. 8, 1778, Charles Roberts Autograph Collection, Haverford College Library.
126 Francis Hopkinson's certificate, Apr. 8, 1778, copy, Button Gwinnett Correspondence, 228, HSP.
127 Ashmead Affidavit.
fire and burned furiously. The countryside had not been aroused until the frigates were fired. By then the British infantry was on the march to Bordentown. "Notice was so short," Ashmead's subsequent petition relates, "that he could not possibly stay to Save any of his own Effects, but was obliged to Repair Immediately on board the Packet and sink her agreeable to the orders of the Continental Navy Board ... in which Time the Enemy Plundered & destroyed almost Every thing in His House, Leaving Himself, Wife & Seven Children without a second Shift of Cloathing."  

Having despoiled Bordentown and destroyed all vessels there and in Crosswicks Creek, the British troops re-embarked and landed on the Pennsylvania side. Two galleys and some gunboats rowed up to Biles Creek on May 8, "where several vessels were set on fire." Among them was the Mercury, only partly submerged, which they looted. Ashmead figured his losses grimly—the goods left behind in Philadelphia, the destruction of his property in Bordentown, and the articles taken from the packet—at about £170 sterling, "agreeable to a List then taken, but which List is since Lost or mislaid."  

Thereafter, the enemy expedition returned down river, having achieved such exploits, snarled a newspaper editor, "as have characterized the British arms since the commencement of this cruel and unnatural war."  

In June, the British evacuated Philadelphia. In July and August, Ashmead weighed the brig without too much difficulty, thanks to the secret marks locating the holes. He took her down river. "She had been burnt to the whale," he reported, "and she was rebuilt with only one deck." Rebuilding proved a long and tedious task because of the chaotic conditions in the city. "Lodgings in Phila is from 7 to 8 pounds the Weack," wrote one sea captain whose spelling left much to be desired. "they have Raised the frigats but God Knows when thay Will be Repaird they have no Carpenters no Ships or Sailors nor nothing dowing but what M' Moris does."  

129 Ashmead Petition.  
130 Pennsylvania Ledger, May 13, 1778.  
131 Ashmead Affidavit.  
132 New Jersey Gazette, May 13, 1778.  
133 Ashmead's Voyages.
added, further, that "Mr. Moris has left the Marien and Everything is Going to the devel as fast Can." Without the push and vigor of Robert Morris, who had been the spur in all matters marine, Ashmead found progress bad indeed, even though the Navy Board kept pressing the Commissioners of Naval Stores to furnish him "such Articles . . . as may be wanting for the Brig Mercury Packet in addition to the Stores and materials belonging to her." 

Far worse was Ashmead's personal financial burden. Congress had never bestowed a Continental commission upon him. Apparently, it considered a packet captain beneath such a distinction, and his wages had always been low. He took his troubles to the Marine Committee in a petition in March, 1779. He recited his tribulations from the moment he had built the packet in 1776-1777 until the British expedition in May, 1778, had wiped out his resources.

"These losses, and being so long in the service constantly sinking by the Lowness of his Pay," he pointed out, "has rendered him incapable of Reinstating himself, and he finds it Impossible to Subsist on the Present nominal Pay of 48 Doll* P.M* & 40 s P Week Subsistence As from the amazing Depreciation of the Paper Currency it is not more than 9d or 1 s P Day Value in the Necessaries of Life. He Therefore Hopes that your Honorable Board in Consideration of the Times will be Induced to Augment his Pay or Subsistence in some Proportion to the Price of Provisions—As he has no Rank, only to have a Letter of Marque he thinks he can with great Propriety make this application."

The Marine Committee pondered the petition. It had no authority to increase either pay or subsistence money, but it sympathized with him and thought of a happy solution. The strict attention which Ashmead had always given to the public interest and his faithful discharge of duty induced the committee "to Move to Congress that an Allowance of One Thousand Dollars be made to him in consideration of his heavy losses." This recommendation Congress ignored.

134 Thomas Bell to John Paul Jones, Nov. 3, 1778, John Paul Jones Manuscripts, 6879, Library of Congress.
135 Navy Board Middle District to James Wharton, Feb. 4, 1779, copy, Button Gwinnett Correspondence, 228, HSP.
136 Marine Committee report appended to Ashmead Petition.
Nevertheless, John carried on. The *Mercury* was nearly ready for sea by mid-April, 1779, and was renamed the *Eagle*. She carried ten four-pounder carriage guns, and the Navy Board instructed him to ship a crew of thirty men. “She will be fitted as A letter of Marque,” the Board stated, “& you are to Ship your Crew for any port in the United States not in possession of the Enemy.” Ashmead shipped them for Charleston, and wondered why so much mystery was involved.

It was all quite confusing. While the *Eagle* continued to be considered a Continental packet, her ownership had passed from Congress to the Philadelphia mercantile firm of James Searle and Company. A letter of marque commission was issued to Ashmead on June 12, after he, Searle, and Joseph Pennell, secretary of the Navy Board, had entered bond for $10,000. Searle was a Pennsylvania delegate to Congress and a member of its Commercial Committee, and it was that committee whose orders Ashmead should obey when the Marine Committee sent him seaward on June 13. He sailed after a long detention, he wrote, “on an errand for Powder, though I did not know what I was after till I arrived at Martinico, nor where I was going until I had opened my orders at Sea.”

The mission was a vital one. The committee wanted arms and as much powder as the brig could bring. It estimated the *Eagle*'s capacity as 1,000 whole barrels, half cannon and half musket powder. If powder was not available in Martinique, Ashmead should try for it at St. Eustatius. “As this is a transaction in which the very safety of America may depend,” the committee wrote to the American agent at St. Pierre, “and as a disappointment might be attended with fatal consequences we wish you would use every means in your power to prevail on the Count d’Estaing to let a Frigate convoy the Brig with her cargo of Powder out of danger of the West India Cruizers.”

137 Navy Board Middle District to John Ashmead, Apr. 16, 1779, copy, Button Gwinnett Correspondence, 228, HSP.
138 Ashmead’s Voyages.
139 Ashmead’s commission is in Papers CC, 44, 367; the bond, in *ibid.*, 196, IV, 57.
141 Ashmead’s Voyages.
142 Commercial Committee to William Bingham, June 11, 1779, Simon Gratz Autograph Collection, uncatalogued letters, HSP.
There was no powder at Martinique. Ashmead received a shipment of 2,500 stand of arms, and sailed to St. Eustatius. "There I got 580 casks large and small," he stated, "and 200 barrels ordered from St. Martins which was taken up by ye British within 4 miles of me in the Road at Statia." He had landed the arms to make room for the shipment which the enemy had intercepted. Now he took them in again and sailed for Philadelphia, with no frigate from the French fleet to escort him.

"On my way home," he continued, "I was chased from ye Latitude 26 deg. to 34 deg 30 min. by a British Privateer Brig of 12 guns, being three days and 4 nights, and she never out of gunshot, and frequently did fire. The 4th day in ye morning she got within Musket and Pistol shot, and engaged in a running fight for two hours and a half, and then she left me, with loss of 11 killed and wounded." He did not explain how he determined the British casualties. That last day's engagement had been in calm weather and both the Sagle and her opponent had their sweeps out. Ashmead himself sighted the last gun fired, and the shot carried away every sweep on the near side of the enemy brig.

"My damage was not much," John reported on a note of satisfaction, "a number of shot holes through the sails and running rigging cut; foremast wounded in three places and bowsprit in one place, with three men slightly hurt. I got safe [in] and the Powder was taken out in an hour after ye brig was at anchor, as our army at the time was said to have 6 Rounds a man." The return of the Eagle was noted in the newspapers: "By Capt. Ashmead, arrived here in three weeks from St. Eustatia, we learn that Count d'Estaing and Admiral Byron's fleets had been out at Sea for some time, but they had no account there from either of them, when he sailed." Perhaps that was why no French frigate had appeared to convoy him through the islands.

Because of an embargo upon any exportation of foodstuffs in the latter part of the year 1779, the Commercial Committee of Congress had to obtain clearance from the Supreme Executive Council of

143 Ashmead's Voyages.
144 Joseph Ashmead Clay to the editor, Germantown Telegraph, Mar. 1, 1876.
145 Ashmead's Voyages.
146 Pennsylvania Packet, Sept. 9, 1779.
Pennsylvania for Ashmead’s second voyage in the *Eagle*. Congress had ordered that provisions be sent to the French fleet in the West Indies,147 and two hundred barrels of pork and sixty of bread had been taken on board.148 As the pressing demand for powder and woolens for the Continental Army continued, Congress also directed that the packet again be sent to St. Eustatius, where these articles were available. Application was made on October 13 and granted next day by the Pennsylvania authorities.149 No secrecy was involved this time. Ashmead received his orders on October 18: pork and bread should be landed at St. Eustatius, where the Continental agents would provide a return cargo, and “as the principal article will be Gunpowder we must recommend to your particular care to see it securely stowed.”150

The *Eagle* sailed from the Delaware Capes on October 26.151 All went well until she entered the Anegada Passage on November 12, where she was chased, Ashmead wrote, “all round the Island of Anguilla by a frigate, but escaped in the night.”152 At dawn, within three leagues of his destination, John discovered a large ship to the northeast and a brig and schooner directly between him and St. Eustatius. They were British cruisers, all converging upon him. The only way open lay westerly toward the volcanic cone of Saba, a tiny Dutch island where a small fort, perched several hundred feet above sea level, offered slim protection to a vessel anchored in its open roadstead. He had a light wind to assist him. Amid the booming of cannon, all fired at too great a distance to be effective, the *Eagle* came safely under the sheer cliff of Saba in midmorning. She dropped anchor and handed her sails.

Thomas Dinzey, governor of Saba, aroused by the gunfire, hurried to the fort and learned from Thomas Winfeild, captain of the burgh-

147 Commercial Committee to Pennsylvania Supreme Executive Council, Oct. 13, 1779, Simon Gratz Autograph Collection, Government Officials, Case 1, Box 23, HSP.
148 Deposition of John Ashmead, Mar. 21, 1780, Papers CC, 44, 326, hereafter referred to as Ashmead Deposition.
150 Commercial Committee to John Ashmead, Oct. 18, 1779, copy, Button Gwinnett Correspondence, 227, HSP.
151 Diary of John Fell, Oct. 26, 1779, Burnett, IV, 498.
ers, that there was no powder in the magazine for their two nine-pounders and they had but twenty-eight cannon balls. He sent the captain tumbling down the two hundred steps from fort to shore and off to the *Eagle* in a canoe with a request for powder. Ashmead obliged with fifty pounds in a barrel. Winfeild returned; the barrel was hoisted to the fort, and presently a shot was fired ahead of the ship, the nearest of the pursuing vessels. She hauled off and was joined by the brig and schooner. All three lay off and on close to windward. Another request came from the governor, this time for a few muskets and cartridges. Nine muskets and about sixty rounds of cartridges were delivered to the canoe, and Ashmead, seeing his way to St. Eustatius completely blocked, accompanied the weapons ashore. He considered it prudent to lodge his letters and papers in a safe place and to make official entry of brig and cargo at Saba. Just at noon, the enemy vessels stood in for the road.\(^{153}\) Ashmead and the governor eyed them uneasily from the porch of the latter's residence.

"Will you defend yourself if the privateers attempt to board you?" the governor asked.

"Being at anchor in a neutral port I must not fire on them unless they first fire on me," Ashmead replied, "but I will trust to the protection of a neutral harbor."

"I will give you such protection as is in my power," was the assurance he received.\(^{154}\)

With this promise, John returned to the *Eagle* and proceeded to unbend her sails and unreeve halliards and rigging. He sent a towline ashore and veered away nearly twenty fathoms of cable, bringing him as near to the rocks as he dared venture. Nevertheless, the British vessels came so close that the enemy brig, when she brought up, carried away her ringtail boom under the *Eagle's* fore yardarm. Her consorts, now including another schooner and a sloop, anchored but little farther off.\(^{155}\) Their identities had been established: the ship *Robust*, Captain Payne, and brig *Tryal*, Captain Saunders, letters of marque out of Bristol, England; the schooner *Greyhound*, Captain Dunlap, of St. Kitts; the sloop *Hawke*, Captain Hartman, of Anguilla; and the schooner *Fame*, Captain Rivers, of Antigua. All were

\(^{153}\) Ashmead Deposition.

\(^{154}\) Protest of John Ashmead at St. Eustatius, Nov. 18, 1779, Papers CC, 44, 335–338.

\(^{155}\) Ashmead Deposition.
heavily armed.\textsuperscript{156} None of them seemed to contemplate any overt act, so Ashmead went ashore again to secure a certified copy of his official entry and to hire a boat to send to St. Eustatius with an account of his beleaguerment.\textsuperscript{157}

After dark, the \textit{Eagle}'s first mate, John Taylor, discovered the brig \textit{Tryal} dropping alongside. As he ran forward, there came a hail from her. "We are coming aboard! Make no resistance, or you'll get no quarter!"

The \textit{Tryal}'s men came over the bow and seized Taylor and all but twelve of the crew. That dozen leaped over the stern and swam ashore. While some of the Britishers cut the cable and began to reeve halliards and rigging, others hustled Taylor and his fellow prisoners on board the \textit{Robust}.\textsuperscript{158} The turmoil reached the ears of Captain Winfeild in the fort above. A few minutes later, the gunner's mate and a seaman, dripping with water, came panting up the steps, gasping that the British were cutting out the \textit{Eagle}. Ashmead and the governor were just finishing their business when a messenger from the fort brought them the dismaying news. Three muskets fired from the governor's porch was the recognized alarm which sent the burghers of Saba speeding to the fort. By the time John arrived, Captain Winfeild had hailed repeatedly and, receiving no satisfactory answer, had fired at the \textit{Tryal}.\textsuperscript{159}

"The Privateers returned the fire of the Fort about an hour," Ashmead reported, "when they had all got away but one brig [the \textit{Tryal}] close under ye guns. She could not make sail on account of ye negroes firing my muskets at ye men on ye yards from ye beach till all their ammunition was expended, as well as the Forts guns, the last of which, by my direction, was loaded with stones for want of shot. I cut away the Brig's foresail from ye yards nearly. She was hulled once or twice and had 5 men killed and wounded. No damage was done to ye fort. I had a small piece of stone, struck off from a rock, by one of the ship's shots, stuck into my wrist, which bled a good deal, but of no consequence."\textsuperscript{160}

\textsuperscript{156} Pennsylvania Packet, Dec. 28, 1779.
\textsuperscript{157} Ashmead Deposition.
\textsuperscript{158} Affidavit of John Taylor, Mar. 21, 1780, Papers CC, 44, 331.
\textsuperscript{159} Protest of John Ashmead at St. Eustatius, Nov. 18, 1779, \textit{ibid.}, 335–338.
\textsuperscript{160} Ashmead's Voyages.
It was all to no avail. British boats towed the *Eagle* beyond range, and carried her into the island of Nevis, where she was subsequently condemned and sold.\textsuperscript{161} Next morning, Ashmead, in a Saba canoe, went over to St. Eustatius and entered a protest with Peter Runnels, captain commandant of the Dutch Islands.\textsuperscript{162} An exchange of angry notes with the British governor of Antigua brought the amusing contention that the *Eagle*’s crew had seized the Dutch fort and turned its guns upon the privateers before they had attempted to take her.\textsuperscript{163} Various affidavits and copies of the correspondence were in John’s custody when he sailed from St. Eustatius as a passenger in the brig *General Reed*, Captain Hugh Stocker. Ice in the Delaware detained the brig in Whorekiln road in February, 1780, so Ashmead “landed at Cape Henlopen, hired a light wagon, and 6 of us went to town.”\textsuperscript{164}

The Board of Admiralty, which had succeeded the Marine Committee during his absence, listened to his report. More depositions and affidavits came to hand, all of which were submitted to Congress on March 23, 1780.\textsuperscript{165} A committee considered the mass of evidence, and two days later its report was adopted: that “authentic copies thereof . . . be transmitted to their High Mightinesses the States General of the United Provinces, by the Minister Plenipotentiary of the United States at the Court of Versailles, and that he be directed to apply to them for their aid in procuring satisfaction for the loss of the said brig Eagle and cargo, and for some assurances that the flag of the United States of America shall be protected from insults when in the Ports of the United Provinces.”\textsuperscript{166} Unfortunately, by the time their High Mightinesses had the papers, the Dutch were also at war with Great Britain and in no position to demand reparation, apology, or assurance.

Shortly after his return from St. Eustatius, a pair of Philadelphia merchants employed Ashmead to purchase a copper-bottom British ship of twenty-six guns, reported to have been carried into Port-au-
Prince by the French. A blank letter of marque commission was secured, naming Ashmead captain, and Jonathan Mifflin and Anthony Butler & Co., owners. Supplied with bills to cover ship cost and a return cargo, John boarded the brig Delaware, Captain James Collins, and sailed for Hispaniola about June 1. She was a tidy vessel of one hundred twenty tons burden, with a crew of fifty-three and twelve guns, but she was scarcely a match for three British frigates, the Phoenix, Lowestoffe, and Pomona, which pounced upon her on June 15. Instead of a ship at Port-au-Prince, Ashmead found a prison in Kingston, Jamaica.

Because he was a passenger rather than a combatant, after some delay he secured liberty to go home on parole. Means to that end turned up when he met a Captain Joseph Dean, whose ancient sloop, the Two Brothers, was clearing for New York and sailing with the fall Jamaica fleet. The sloop was under false colors, for Dean intended for Boston as soon as he could elude the convoying frigates.

"Off Charleston we attempted to run away from the fleet in the night," Ashmead recalled, "but long before day found it would be impossible to get far enough off to be out of sight, tacked and stood for ye fleet again, and several other vessels did ye same, which had been following us, and about 4 o'clock one large ship standing for ye fleet again, ran as foul another both end on, and made a tremendous crash and after one or two rolls, one of the ships went down and the other was so damaged that she had to put into Charleston."

A hurricane off the Virginia Capes on October 7 solved their problem. Ashmead in his recollection confused it with the disastrous storm of 1782. It was bad enough, however, to dismast two British frigates cruising along the Jersey coast, and force a third to throw all her guns overboard. The Jamaica fleet was completely dispersed.

167 Ashmead's Voyages.
169 "List of Sir Peter Parker's prizes, transmitted March 16, 1781," Public Advertiser (London), June 21, 1781.
170 John Kessler, "Rough Draft of What I furnished ... the Editor of the Port Folio," copy in Library of Congress.
171 Libel against sloop Two Brothers, Oct. 20, 1780, Pennsylvania Packet, Oct. 21, 1780.
172 Ashmead's Voyages.
“Our old sloop tho’ like a Basket, neither wind tight nor weather tight, weathered the gale,” Ashmead continued. “But ye Captain, Joseph Dean, dyed in the night, and one or two men at a few days apart, ye latter with yellow Fevour. The Captain by excess of drinking.”

Rather than attempt to make Boston, the mate turned toward the Delaware Capes. They encountered the Continental ship Saratoga, Captain John Young, who seized the sloop as British property, and sent her into Philadelphia. The Two Brothers was libeled against and tried in Admiralty Court on November 10. The mate produced “a let pass from Congress, authorizing the Captain to go to Jamaica to collect debts for ye owner Mr. Penny, of Boston, and the sloop was cleared.” Ashmead was home with far less difficulty than he had anticipated, and fortunately was exchanged almost immediately for a passenger who had been taken in one of the Saratoga’s other prizes.

During the winter of 1780-1781, Ashmead built a brig for three Philadelphia merchants—Robert Morris, William Semple, and William Turnbull. She was completed in the spring, was about forty tons burden, had a crew of eighteen, and was named the Molly. In her, John sailed for Cape François with a cargo of tobacco and flour. On his outward passage, he had a narrow escape. Five of his hands, refugee Tories whom he had shipped unsuspectingly, had entered with intent to seize the brig.

“They left me in the dead of night at Gloucester Point,” he wrote, “boarded a small schooner with only two men on board of her; these they robbed and murdered and sunk ye schooner. On my going out of the Capes we discovered a part of the plunder and overheard them in ye night talking of what they had done, and kept such a strict lookout that they could not put their plot in execution, and at Cape François they ran away.”

174 Ashmead’s Voyages.
175 Pennsylvania Journal, Oct. 18, 1780; see also William Bell Clark, The First Saratoga (Baton Rouge, La., 1953), 81.
176 Libel against sloop Two Brothers, Oct. 20, 1780.
177 Ashmead’s Voyages.
178 Thomas Bradford Papers, Naval Prisoners, Correspondence, I, 70, HSP.
179 Commission of the brig Molly, Sept. 29, 1781, Papers CC, 196, X, 77; Pennsylvania Packet, Oct. 27, 1781.
At the Cape he found Admiral DeGrasse and a large French fleet, which sailed shortly thereafter. Ashmead was unaware that DeGrasse was headed for the Chesapeake and his historic rendezvous with Washington. The *Molly* returned to Philadelphia on September 10, after "being nearly taken by the Refugee boats in the River."\(^{180}\) John reported that just before he sailed a flag of truce from Jamaica had brought word to Cape François of a hurricane which had driven ashore fifty or sixty sail of the homeward-bound Jamaica fleet, many of which were lost.\(^{181}\)

For his second voyage in the *Molly*, he was loaded with tobacco and flour for St. Eustatius. He sailed from the Delaware Capes about October 13, in company with the privateer ship *Royal Louis*, Captain Stephen Decatur, and the letter of marque brig *Active*, Captain Charles Biddle.\(^{182}\) They had been warned of two British frigates cruising off the coast, and took every precaution to avoid them. Biddle succeeded.\(^{183}\) Ashmead and Decatur fell afool of his Majesty's ships *Nymph* and *Amphion*, and were carried into New York on October 16.\(^{184}\) "After being 2 or 3 weeks paroled on Long Island," Ashmead recalled, "Lord Cornwallis was taken, and all masters of vessels, about 140, were suffered to go home on parole—myself by interference [intercession] of some old acquaintances at New York without condition of exchange."\(^{185}\)

Opportunity for a new command arose in December, 1781, a short time after John came home from his Long Island captivity. James Josiah, a younger mariner of Philadelphia, had arrived from France in the letter of marque ship *Anne*, from which he resigned as master to be married.\(^{186}\) The owners offered her to Ashmead, and a new bond and commission were issued on January 7, 1782. The *Anne* was of one hundred twenty tons burden, mounted ten guns, and carried a

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\(^{180}\) Ashmead's Voyages.

\(^{181}\) *Pennsylvania Packet*, Sept. 13, 1781.

\(^{182}\) Ashmead's Voyages.

\(^{183}\) Biddle, 152, 153.


\(^{185}\) Ashmead's Voyages.

crew of thirty. She was destined for France, via Cape François, and cleared the Delaware Capes in mid-January.

"On my way a large ship of 20 short 18 pounders got up within musket shot while I lay becalmed, and fired upon me," John reported, "but the moment I took the wind he could come no nearer. I therefore pleyd my stern chase till there was not a piece of glass as large as one's nail left in ye cabin windows and he could not get any advantage, but both of us towed from 7 in the morning till 4 in ye afternoon when I got out of gun shot and he gave over chase." His pursuer was likely His Majesty's ship Santa Margaritta, which was reported to have engaged at about that time in chase "of a Rebel 20 Gun Ship," and whose armament somewhat coincides with Ashmead's description.

Two days after his escape, Ashmead got into Cape François, eluding two British frigates by a ruse. They were within gun shot of him, and he was about a mile short of the flag staff at the harbor entrance. He proceeded to take in all sails, as if confident of getting in, whereupon both frigates went about and abandoned the chase. If they had fired upon him, the leeward pursuer was so close that, to escape capture, he said he would have had to run upon a reef to windward.

Reglazing the cabin windows and loading with "a fine cargoe of sugar and coffee, all consigned to myself, and a large Privilege on board," Ashmead sailed from Cape François for L'Orient. For nine of the ensuing eleven days he was either chased or tacking to elude suspicious sails. On the eleventh day, near Bermuda, he encountered his Majesty's forty-four-gun ship Assurance and fled eastward with all the sail the Anne could carry.

"The first evening after chasing ye whole day she got within gun-shot and fired on me for an hour," Ashmead recalled. "I returned stern chase but never struck her. Next day in the evening she got up again so that her 24 pound shot went so far over me as she was from me but did not hit me, so I returned my stern chase again more than

187 Bond and commission for ship Anne, Jan. 7, 1782, Papers CC, 196, I, 64.
188 Ashmead's Voyages.
189 Public Advertiser, Mar. 1, 1782.
190 Ashmead's Voyages.
191 A "privilege" was permission to carry goods for the captain's private account.
an hour, but the guns being very ordinary could never hit her yet I blew my cabin windows to atoms again as on ye outward passage and shook every plank off between the cabin windows and some of the counter plank between the stern posts out of ye cabin, where ye guns were mounted on solid platforms which were rediculous con-trivances. About 10 at night ye Assurance wore and gave over chase.”

Ashmead had won out on that long flight, but he was in more serious peril—the reefs around Bermuda. As John expressed it, he “smelt the Bottom or ledge of ye Rocks plainly.” He wore, standing after the British ship, and in a few minutes, when going about six or seven knots, the Anne struck. She scraped over the first reef, then plunged upon the second with a splintering crash, and stuck fast. The rudder broke and she listed slightly. They cleared a gun and fired signals of distress through the night. At daylight, the Assurance was visible but in chase of a brig to leeward. No help could be ex-pected from her.

The signals had been heard upon the island, and a number of boats could be seen putting off from shore. With the wind blowing a near gale and the sea rolling high, Ashmead doubted if many of them would reach him. He ordered British colors hauled to the masthead, intending to pose as a Liverpool vessel bound home from the north side of Jamaica. Meanwhile, the ship beat over the reef and came to anchor, but, as a topmast hand called down, they were surrounded by rocks. One boat reached them after a six-hour pull, during which time the Anne’s crew had tried vainly to rehang the rudder. A pilot came on board and surveyed the situation. The only way out, he informed Ashmead, was to beat over the bed of rock between them and the island, if the vessel would stand it.

“The cable was cut and sail made,” Ashmead said, “and the first thump she gave ye rudder [was] entirely lost. She had a large hole in her bottom and one pump constantly going before, and now all hope of saving the ship was over. I ordered ye British colours hauled down . . . and told the Pilot ye truth that we were Americans and he might make ye most of the ship he could.”

After striking very heavily eight or ten times, the Anne cleared the last reef and the pilot anchored her in a small, clear, sandy bottom. The crew launched jolly and long boats. In the former piled the second mate, Johnson, and five men. They pulled away, reached
the west end of Bermuda, escaped capture, and sailed the next day for St. Thomas, not knowing what befell their comrades. Ashmead and the balance of the crew in the long boat, "after extreme hazard," landed on another part of the island and were taken prisoners. The following day they were marched to St. George where the hands were put in a prison ship. The captain, first and third mates, captain of marines and surgeon were left at liberty to hire a house and maintain themselves.\textsuperscript{192}

Nineteen or twenty captains and their crews already were enjoying the Bermuda climate as prisoners of war. They were "well supplied with provisions and in every respect treated with great humanity."\textsuperscript{193} "After about 6 weeks upwards of 80 of us were put into a miserable old and rotten flag of Truce schooner with scarce 10 floor timbers left in her," wrote Ashmead. She carried them safely, however, to Hampton, Virginia, although off Cape Henry, despite their flag, they were plundered by two New York privateers, whose crews took the best part of their clothes, especially new articles they had purchased in Bermuda.\textsuperscript{194} Affidavit was later made to this indignity, which Robert Morris, as Agent of Marine, sent to General Washington on July 5, 1782, to be forwarded to New York to the attention of Admiral Robert Digby.\textsuperscript{195} There is no indication that it brought restitution.

"After getting to Hampton I hired a small river schooner, perhaps 10 tons burden, to go to the Head of Elk," John wrote, "and several times were nearly oversetting in her for want of sufficient ballast. From Elk I walked up to Philadelphia, accompanied by no one but my doctor, a Mr. Porter, the others all having given out by the time we got to Wilmington. On my getting home my family were most agreeably surprised . . . as the 2d mate's account by way of St. Thomas had reached Home 4 or 5 days before my arrival, stating that none but self and boat's crew were safe."

The Ashmeads held a joyful family reunion in the home on Spruce Street that summer of 1782. There was a new brig on the ways wait-
ing for John, but by the time she was launched and outfitted, the American Revolution had come to a successful conclusion. Some-
time during the years when the issue had been in doubt, Ashmead had tried his hand at versifying, or, maybe, copying from an un-
dentified bard. His four-line stanza ran:

Behold what a Judgement america cries
George Looses his Senses—North Loses his Eeyes
when he taxed America all Europe will find
The Monarch was Mad & his Minister Blind!  

For five years following the conclusion of the war John Ashmead's life was uneventful, almost routine, as he amassed thousands of sea miles in thirty voyages. Twenty-two of them were round trips to Charleston, South Carolina. Interspersed were five voyages to Fredericksburg, Virginia; one to Port-au-Prince, one to St. Eustatius, and one to Cape François, via Charleston. His vessels, in sequence, were four in number:

Brig *Betsey*, built in Philadelphia in 1783, thirty-five tons burden, owned first by John Redman, Philip Moore, James Hood and Joshua Humphreys, and later by William Sadlier; seven voyages from October 20, 1783, to April 30, 1785.

Brig *Betsey* built in Philadelphia in 1781, sixty tons burden, owned by Leeson Simmons, C. Bartling, and Hezekiah Williams, and later by Williams alone; nine voyages from May 20, 1785, to October 13, 1786.

Brig *Phoebe*, built in Philadelphia in 1785, sixty-five tons burden, owned by David McCullough and Matthias Keely; three voyages from November 17, 1786, to April 30, 1787.

Brig *Robert*, built in Philadelphia in 1787, eighty tons burden, owned by Hezekiah Williams; eleven voyages from May 1, 1787, to February 15, 1789. After the sixth voyage, she was renamed the Charleston.  

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196 Ashmead's Voyages.
197 This stanza is penned upon an unnumbered page in Ashmead's journal for the ship *India* (1797-1798), HSP, hereafter cited as Journal of the *India*.
Cargoes outward-bound were largely flour, bread, potatoes, apples, cider, bar iron, earthenware, salt and a variety of general merchandise. Inward cargoes were rice and naval stores from Charleston; sugar and rum from Port-au-Prince, St. Eustatius, and Cape François; and tobacco, cordage, and hams from Virginia. During one of his absences, in June, 1784, Ashmead’s father-in-law, Benjamin Mifflin, died in Sussex County, Delaware. Otherwise, nothing of moment occurred to him during this long period.

The China trade, first opened to American ships in 1784, engaged Ashmead’s attention early in 1789. Two Philadelphia ships, the Canton, Thomas Truxtun, and the Alliance, Thomas Read, already had made profitable voyages to “far Cathay.” The Canton had sailed again in December, 1787, followed by the Asia, John Barry. The Federalist, Richard Dale, had cleared the Delaware Capes for Canton in January, 1789, and the Sampson, Samuel Howell, Jr., a few days later.

Ashmead became the sixth Philadelphia skipper to venture the long voyage. His command was “the beautiful new ship Union,” built and partly owned by Thomas Penrose. She was constructed of live oak and cedar, was “handsome and well found,” and of one hundred eighty-six tons burden. Her cargo heavily insured, she cleared the port on March 22, 1789. John kept a record of her outward voyage: ninety-seven days and 8,900 miles to the Cape of Good Hope; twenty-one days and 2,728 miles to the little island of St. Paul in the southern Indian Ocean; twenty-six days and 3,033 miles to Java Head on the strait between Java and Sumatra; and thirty-six

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200 A manifest of the first cargo shipped on board the Betsey, Oct. 22, 1783, which is typical of subsequent ones, lists twenty-five shippers, nine of whom consigned their wares to Ashmead. The manifest is among recently acquired Custom House Papers, “Outgoing Coastwise Manifests, 1783,” HSP.

201 Custom House entry books as listed in Note 198.

202 Abstract of Wills of Sussex County, Del., typescript in Genealogical Society of Pennsylvania.

203 Josiah Quincy, The Journals of Major Samuel Shaw (Boston, 1847), 228, 259.

204 William Bell Clark, Gallant John Barry (New York, 1938), 336, 337.

205 Pennsylvania Packet, Jan. 28, 1789.


207 Pennsylvania Packet, July 13, 1790.

208 Insurance on cargo of ship Union, Feb. 26, 1789, Simon Gratz Autograph Collection, Ships’ Insurance Papers, HSP.
days and 2,489 miles to Wampoa on the Si-kiang river south of Canton, beyond which no foreign ship might pass. The total was one hundred eighty days, and 17,150 miles. 209 The Union dropped anchor at her destination on September 18, 1789. 210

Of Ashmead’s dealings at Canton, there remains only his notation that “Lycensang was head Clerk of our Hing [hong] Merchant in China.” 211 As Lysingsang, according to the spelling of the American consul, “became embarrassed in his affairs, kept himself out of the way,” and “was taken into confinement,” it may be hoped that John’s business with him ended before the Chinaman ran into financial difficulties. 212 At any rate, the Union arrived home on July 5, 1790, after an uneventful passage of a little more than five months, with the usual cargo of China teas, silks, and chinaware. 213 Her owners, for reasons which may point to the defaulting Lysingsang, announced her sale at public vendue at the Merchants Coffee House in Second Street, “if not disposed of before by Private Sale.” 214 However she was sold, Ashmead’s command of her ended.

Within six months he was again sailing a ship destined for the Far East, this time to the Province of Bengal in India, where American merchants for several years had been seeking a share in the trade long dominated by the British East India Company. His vessel was the Harmony, owned by Mordecai Lewis, a prosperous and highly respected Quaker merchant of Philadelphia. 215 Of this voyage, the first of seven he made to Calcutta, Ashmead left but a meager record. He cleared late in January, 1791, proceeding first to St. Jago (São Tiago) in the Cape Verde Islands, where he arrived on March 3, and, after taking on fresh supplies, headed southward a week later for the Cape of Good Hope. 216 The Harmony reached Madras on July 1, 217 and continued on to Calcutta. There she took in a cargo of taffetas,

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209 John Ashmead’s tabulation on an unnumbered page of Journal of the India.
210 “List of American vessels which arrived at Canton in 1789,” Dunlap’s American Daily Advertiser, July 28, 1791.
211 John Ashmead’s notation on unnumbered page of Journal of the India.
212 Quincy, 303, 304.
214 Ibid., July 13, 1790.
215 Advertisement of sale of ship Harmony, Dunlap’s American Daily Advertiser, June 19, 1792.
216 Pennsylvania Journal, June 29, 1791.
sugar, pepper and cotton, and five passengers, "Mr. Glassford, and Mr. Smith, of Calcutta; Mr. Worsley, of Boston, Mark Pringle and Capt. Bell of Philadelphia."

Ashmead left Calcutta at the end of January, 1792, and, four months later, on May 31, came up the Delaware. Homeward-bound, he had put in at Madras and procured newspapers which told of the success of British arms against Tippoo Sahib, giving Philadelphia the latest news of the Second Mysore War of 1790-1792. 218 Within three weeks of her return, Mordecai Lewis sold the Harmony at public vendue to provide funds for his 401-ton ship, the India, then on the ways, which John was to command. 219

The India was a flush-deck ship, launched in March, 1793, and carried a crew of twenty-two. 220 She was armed with six four-pounders, a defense against Barbary pirates or freebooters in the Indian Ocean, 221 and was by far the largest vessel Ashmead had commanded in his long career. Her maiden voyage was to Bengal, and she cleared the Port of Philadelphia on April 10, 1793. 222 John estimated the distance from the Delaware Capes to his destination as 14,375 miles, and he accomplished it in a little better than three months. 223 Meanwhile, hostilities had broken out between England and the new French Republic. When he sailed from Calcutta on January 5, 1794, he bore disturbing news: a Philadelphia-owned ship, the Canton, had been captured by a French privateer upon suspicion of having British goods on board, and had been carried into the Isle of France (present-day Mauritius). Ashmead brought word of this seizure (a prelude to the rapacity of French privateers which led eventually to an undeclared war with that nation) to Philadelphia when the India came up the Delaware on April 18, saluted the city with her four-pounders, and dropped anchor in the stream. 224 Mordecai Lewis, more interested in the contents of the India's hold than in the news she brought, advertised on April 25:

218 Ibid., June 6, 1792; Inward Index, Philadelphia Custom House Records, HSP.
219 Dunlap's American Daily Advertiser, June 19, 1792, July 1, 1793.
220 Twining, 2, 7.
221 Federal Gazette & Baltimore Daily Advertiser, July 26, 1800.
222 Dunlap's American Daily Advertiser, Apr. 11, 1793.
223 John Ashmead's notation on unnumbered page of Journal of the India.
224 Dunlap and Claypoole's American Daily Advertiser, Apr. 19, 1794; Pennsylvania Gazette, Apr. 23, 1794; Independent Gazetteer, Apr. 23, 1794.
The Cargo of the ship India,
Capt. John Ashmead, from Bengal,
CONSISTING OF
White and printed piece goods
Bandanno and Madras handkerchiefs
Black and coloured Taffaties
Sugar
Pepper, and
Cotton
Is now offered for sale by the subscriber
MORDECAI LEWIS

Ashmead's second voyage to Bengal in the India has special interest because of the observations upon the return trip of Thomas Twining, an English passenger. John had sailed from Philadelphia on December 17, 1794, and had arrived at Calcutta on June 9, 1795. From August first through November 9, he was engaged in his captain's privilege of buying bandannas and taffetas, while the supercargo attended to the major part of the cargo. The ship was ready to depart by the end of November, when Twining arrived from Santipur with a small Bengal cow, a Tibetan (Cashmere or shawl) goat, a doombah, a monkey, and other curiosities, and applied for passage to America for himself and his heterogeneous cargo. John consented and the Englishman's own arrival on board was preceded by hay for his livestock and ten fat sheep to vary the monotony of what he had been told was the "indifferent table" supplied by American captains.

Twining was impressed with Ashmead, whom he mistook for a Quaker of sixty or sixty-five years of age. Actually, John was fifty-seven and a Baptist. Twining went on to describe the captain as "a tall, thin, upright man . . . in whose respectable and pleasing appearance the usual mildness and simplicity of his sect, with a deep tinge of characteristic peculiarity, were visible. His thin, silvery locks curled round the collars of his old-fashioned single-breasted

225 Dunlap and Claypoole's American Daily Advertiser, Apr. 28, 1794.
226 Ibid., Dec. 18, 1794.
227 Ibid., Jan. 12, 1796.
228 John Ashmead in account with James Scott, Nov. 9, 1795, Ferdinand J. Dreer Autograph Collection, John Ashmead, HSP.
coat, with a row of large plain buttons down the front like a schoolboy's." The passenger had come out to India in a East India Company ship, and he was much impressed by the singular contrast between the loud, authoritative manner of the captain of the Indiaman, and "the cool, unassuming demeanor of Captain Ashmead." Orders were given in a mild, inoffensive tone, and were obeyed with cheerful alacrity. "There was no oath, nor threat, nor vulgar language," Twining noted, "no anxious exertion or fearful obedience."229

The _India_ sailed down the Ganges on December 9, 1795, with Twining's menagerie disposed of in or under the boats between the main and foremast, and the monkey in the care of the crew in the forecastle. The passenger thought the crew better dressed, though less robust, than the English sailors he had encountered. He had the mistaken impression that they were the sons of respectable families of Philadelphia and Baltimore, whereas, as events will show, the seamen in the _India_ were as hard-bitten as any British tar.230 One incident led him to revise his opinion about the captain. Toward the end of the voyage, in fairly calm weather, a brig was observed ahead and a boat was seen to leave her side.

"Our captain lay-to for it to reach us, but observed that the brig might be a pirate," Twining related, "and that it would be prudent to be on our guard while her boat was alongside and her people on board. Looking at the boat through his telescope, he said he saw only five hands, but that there might be more concealed under a tarpaulin at the bottom. Upon this he went down to his cabin . . . and returned upon deck with a brace of pistols, which he put into his coat pockets. For the old man was not a Quaker in any sense but one, and was resolved to be ready to repulse any hostile attack."231 The boat proved to contain only the five men and included the captain of the brig, bound for Boston from the Canary Islands, who desired to compare reckonings. There was a difference of many degrees, but, as "Captain Ashmead was an excellent mathematician," it was evident that the brig was far off her course.231 Thereafter, the _India_ proceeded northward and arrived at Philadelphia on April 7,

229 Twining, 1–8.
230 Ibid., 5; 7, 16–17.
231 Ibid., 18–19.
1796, where Twining and his animals and curios were landed without mishap.232

On May 30, 1796, less than two months after her arrival, the India was off again for Bengal, reaching Calcutta in September. Ashmead sailed for home on January 19, 1797, and one hundred five days later came up the Delaware.233 For the first time, he advertised the goods he had acquired under his captain's privilege—handkerchiefs, chintzes, checks, "Now landing from on board the Ship India, from Calcutta and Madras, and for sale by John Ashmead, No. 58 Union street."234

Batavia, on the Dutch island of Java, was the next destination selected by Mordecai Lewis for the India. The merchant's store was now amply stocked with goods from Bengal, but he needed sugar and coffee. The India carried no outward cargo, but Ashmead had in his cabin nine kegs containing $39,900 to purchase the desired commodities. Having on board all the ballast he deemed necessary, he put off from Penrose's wharf on August 25, 1797, rounded up his crew next day from the grog shops of Philadelphia, and ran into a near mutiny by the time the ship was abreast of New Castle, Delaware. Liquor was the cause of the riotous behavior of most of the men. Ashmead went up to Philadelphia on business on August 30, and the crew refused "to touch a handspike or do any duty" until he returned. First Officer John Farraday went ashore and found a magistrate, who issued warrants for the five most serious offenders. When a constable came on board, nine more followed ashore, insisting upon going to jail with their companions. The magistrate obliged.235 These were the same hands that Thomas Twining had pronounced refined young gentlemen.236 Ashmead later cajoled eight of the men back on board, shipped six new hands, and left six malcontents "in Jail for refusal of Duty and until they return their advance money."237 Magistrate, constable, and jail fees amounted to

232 Ibid., 29. The doombah, or Kabul sheep, was pastured on William Bingham's garden lawn in Philadelphia. It aroused considerable curiosity. Ibid., 34, 35–36.
233 Claypoole's American Daily Advertiser, May 31, 1796, Mar. 3 and May 29, 1797.
234 Ibid., May 30, 1797.
236 Twining, 16–17.
237 Journal of the India (Sept. 1–6, 1797).
£13 10s. and advances to the six new hands cost £67 10s., a bad beginning for a long voyage.238

The *India* cleared the Delaware Capes in the early morning of September 9. The outward voyage produced several occurrences worth noting. A seaman “got drunk & fell out of his Hammock,” Ashmead recorded, “& so his arm bleeding, which had nearly bled him to death before it was discovered.” Two months later, John found the “great part of our Porter has either burst the Bottles, or fired the Corks . . . Except it had been used in the river of which I had no Knowledge.” Perhaps the six in the New Castle jail could have enlightened him. Later, a two-decker showing the French national flag pursued them, but gave over after a half-hearted chase.239

On January 10, 1798, the *India* stood into Batavia road, and Ashmead went ashore to visit the shabunder and make a request to trade. Within a short time, he found that dealing with the Dutch in Java was but little better than dealing with the Chinese in Canton. Furthermore, he had arrived at the beginning of the rainy season, when winds blew too hard for lighters to take out his ballast, canals flooded, merchants refused to risk sugar and coffee in open proas, and malarial fever was rampant. Peter Purvis, second officer of the *India*, died on February 15, one of the hands on February 21, and another on February 26. On March 7, a Danish ship caught fire and, burning furiously, drifted toward the shipping in the road. “Fortunately for the *India* The wind was off ye Land,” Ashmead wrote, “& she went ¼ of Mile from her.”240

Next day, Ralph Shaw, first officer of the Philadelphia ship *Ceres*, Captain James Hodge, and eight haggard men arrived in a long boat with a harrowing tale of the murder of the rest of the crew of the *Ceres* by natives of the island of Angona, where the ship had been wrecked.241 Ashmead shipped two of the men and engaged Shaw as third officer, succeeding Nathaniel Forster, who replaced the dead

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238 “Copy of Seamen’s Jail Expences at New Castle,” and “Copy of my account against the Ship India sent up from New Castle,” loose sheets, *ibid.*

239 *Ibid.* (Sept. 9 and Nov. 28, 1797).


241 John Ashmead to his owner (Mordecai Lewis), Mar. 8, 1798, *Claypoole’s American Daily Advertiser*, June 28, 1798.
Purvis as second officer. All trials and tribulations seemed to have an end, and John congratulated himself on March 24 when the India, with a hold full of sugar and coffee, stood out of the road homeward-bound.

They were in the southern Indian Ocean, some nineteen degrees below the Equator and about six hundred miles east of the Isle of France, when disaster overtook them. The morning of Sunday, April 8, dawned with an uncommon fiery redness in the sky above dark tumbling clouds, and a wild wind whipping through the rigging. By eight o'clock it was blowing a gale, and by noon it had reached hurricane proportions.

"It Blew beyond all description," Ashmead recorded, "so that a man could scarce hold himself fast, nor see for the Rain and salt water that blew with ye Wind." Then the wind shifted suddenly from northeast to east-southeast, bringing the India into the trough of the sea. A gigantic wave crashed down upon her, breaking over her starboard quarter. John Farraday saw the tremendous crest looming above him and ran from the wheel to seek shelter. He was caught up and flung overboard. Ashmead was hurled into the scuppers and pinned beneath a hen coop, the thumbnail of his right hand being torn out to the roots. The ship's carpenter went to his assistance.

"On my first being helped up," John wrote, "I saw Mr Farraday hanging by an end of Rope on ye Lee Quarter Gallery and desird the Carpenter to let me go and [go] help him, but before he could get to him she rolled deeper to Leeward and Mr Farraday rolld under and was seen no more." The seaman who had been with Farraday at the wheel had also been washed overboard, as had six or seven others (all hands but four sick men being on deck). By clinging to the tangled wreckage about them, they had climbed back on board.

The India lay on her beam ends, with the water up over the main hatch, running into the cabin door and through the broken pantry windows. "The Ship would not Wear but appeared to be going over," Ashmead wrote. "I ordered the Miz’n Mast to be cut away. . . . She came too. Still she would not right nor wear, & was obliged to cut away ye Main Mast, when she righted a little."

242 Journal of the India (Mar. 8–19, 1798).
243 John Ashmead to Mordecai Lewis, Mar. 24, 1798, loose sheet, ibid.
The hurricane abated around seven o'clock that evening, and at daybreak John surveyed the scene of devastation. By some miracle the *India* was still tight in the bottom, but the water coming out of the pumps was like molasses—an ominous indication of a ruined cargo. For the ensuing five days, they cleared away the wreckage, erected jury masts, and then set rags of sail in an effort to reach the Isle of France.\(^{244}\)

After a laborious passage of ten days, the *India* arrived at the island on April 25. More than three months later, on August 9, Ashmead was enabled to quit port, having sold much of her damaged cargo, paid duty upon every pound of sugar and coffee so disposed of, and become involved in so much French red tape that at one time he had despaired of ever being able to raise funds to defray the re-outfitting of his ship.\(^{245}\) That he was finally able to sail he attributed to the untiring efforts of the American consul.\(^{246}\) John could count himself fortunate, too, that word of John Adams' undeclared war upon the French Republic had not yet reached the Isle of France.\(^{247}\)

News of the hurricane and the death of First Officer John Farraday had been published in Philadelphia four months before the *India* put in appearance in the Delaware on December 7, 1798. Ashmead, upon reaching the Isle of France, had written in detail to Mordecai Lewis, who had given extracts of his letter to the newspaper editors.\(^{248}\)

That winter of 1798-1799, John began a calculation of the number of voyages he had made and the miles he had sailed:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Destination</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Miles</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Batavia</td>
<td>1 voyage</td>
<td>30,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Barbadoes</td>
<td>21 voyages at 4500 Miles each</td>
<td>94,500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cork</td>
<td>2 d° 7250 out &amp; home</td>
<td>14,500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Charleston</td>
<td>29 ditto 1550 ditto</td>
<td>44,950</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>China</td>
<td>1 ditto including river up &amp; down</td>
<td>33,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Calcutta</td>
<td>4 ditto 28,750 ditto</td>
<td>115,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispaniola</td>
<td>6 d° 3,000 d°</td>
<td>18,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Havana</td>
<td>1 d°</td>
<td>2,500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jamaica</td>
<td>9 ditto 3,500 d°</td>
<td>31,500</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\(^{244}\) *Ibid.* (Apr. 8-15, 1798).
\(^{246}\) Jacob Lewis, of Dorchester, Mass., was appointed consul for the Isle of France in June, 1797.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Type</th>
<th>Distance</th>
<th>Notes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>London</td>
<td>D°</td>
<td>7,500</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lisbon</td>
<td>D°</td>
<td>7,000</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Martinico</td>
<td>d°</td>
<td>4,000</td>
<td>84,500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New York</td>
<td>d°</td>
<td>700</td>
<td>1,400</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>St. Croix</td>
<td>d°</td>
<td>including river up &amp; down</td>
<td>7,200</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>St. Eustatia</td>
<td>d°</td>
<td>3,350 d°</td>
<td>10,050</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Virginia</td>
<td>d°</td>
<td>800 d°</td>
<td>4,000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

91 Voiages including Rivers up & down

Several Voiages round about, as from Hispaniola to Rhode Island & Home, from D° to Bermuda & Virgin in my way Home, from St. Croix to Statia & St. Kitts on my way Home, putting into Milford Haven River, on Passage to London, beats the Winter Coast once Six Weeks &c &c

add 2,000

441,100

Another voyage to Bengal, this time by way of England, was prescribed by her owner once that part of the India’s cargo not sold at the Isle of France had been discharged. Ice detained her at Marcus Hook, and while she lay there, Mordecai Lewis died at his home in Philadelphia. Ashmead had not learned of the death when he finally went to sea on March 16, 1799. He made a twenty-seven-day passage to Falmouth, and arrived at Gravesend on May 10. Toward the beginning of the year 1800 he reached Calcutta, and sailed from there March 1.

After a disagreeable and tedious passage of one hundred and eight days, John put into St. Helena on June 10. Two weeks later he left the island in company with the ship Mount Vernon, mounting sixteen six-pounders, Solomon Rutter, master, bound for Baltimore. Ashmead was fortunate in his consort, for the two ships, in a running fight on March 13 and 14, beat off and even pursued a heavily armed French privateer schooner. The enemy showed eighteen guns, and had the India with her six four-pounders been alone, John and his crew might well have experienced “the more retired pleasure of a

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249 Computation on unnumbered page of Journal of the India. Ashmead’s figuring was slightly inaccurate and has been corrected.


251 The Aurora, Mar. 22, 1799; Claypoole’s American Daily Advertiser, Mar. 2, 16, 19, 1799.

252 Ibid., June 14 and 18, 1799.
French gaol.”253 Parting with the Mount Vernon on March 21, the India came up the Delaware on July 24.254

Benjamin Rush who was Ashmead’s first cousin,255 met John the day after the India docked at Ross & Simon’s wharf. Their conversation held certain matters of interest which the celebrated Philadelphia physician noted that night in his commonplace book: “Capt. Ashmead informed me that he had been married 40 years, and had spent but 10 of them with his family. The remaining 30 he had passed at sea. He was a fond father and husband, and happy at home.” John had showed cousin Benjamin a first draft of the epitaph in verse he was composing. It contained but ten lines, all varying somewhat from the same ten in the final eighteen-line stanza. Dr. Rush was intrigued enough to include this also in his commonplace book.256

Ashmead said good-bye to the India at the conclusion of this voyage, and Mordecai Lewis’s son offered the stanch ship for sale on August 5.257 But John was not yet through with the sea. He went to Calcutta as a passenger in Stephen Girard’s ship Voltaire, Ezra Bowen, master, sailing in the winter of 1800–1801. He returned in March, 1802,258 with large purchases of Bengal goods for the store at 14 Dock Street, where he and his son Joseph were in partnership.259

One final voyage, this time as master of the ship Montezuma, owned by Snowden & North, Philadelphia merchants, completed his sea career. He sailed on April 9, 1804, arrived at Calcutta on August 18, departed from that port December 2, and entered in at the Custom House on April 8, 1805, one hundred and fifteen days from

254 Inward Index, Custom House, Philadelphia, HSP.
255 John Ashmead’s mother was Ann Rush; her brother, John Rush, was the father of Dr. Benjamin Rush. Ashmead Genealogy.
257 Gazette of the United States, Aug. 6, 1800.
258 Poulson’s American Daily Advertiser, Mar. 8, 1802.
Calcutta, with "Indian Goods, consigned to Snowden & North." That fall, he completed the tabulation of voyages he had begun in 1798:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{add for London Voyage Error} & \quad 441,100 \\
3 \text{ Voyages to India after this Calculation} & \quad 1,300 \\
\text{av. 28,750} & \quad 86,250 \\
\text{528,650} & \quad 260
\end{align*}
\]

Another Ashmead had gone to sea. John's youngest son, Thomas, had sailed on May 21, 1805, as supercargo of the *Montezuma*, bound for Batavia with John Ansley as master. John Ashmead had a third interest in her cargo, and, upon her return, a similar interest in a cargo under contract with the British Government for the Cape of Good Hope. His net return on the Batavia adventure was $9,475.95. The profit on the Good Hope contract was less, for the *Montezuma*, outward-bound, was blown out of the Delaware and had put into New York, where repairs and re-outfitting ran up a bill of more than $2,000. Thomas Ashmead disappears from the scene with the Good Hope voyage.

John Ashmead consolidated office and residence in 1805 in a building he purchased at 19 Sansom Street. Here he continued his trade in East India and Bengal goods alone, his son, Joseph Mifflin Ashmead, having died. John's interest, now that he was permanently at home, was renewed in the Society for the Relief of Poor and Distressed Masters of Ships their Widows and Children. He had always retained membership, but his attendance, because of long absences at sea, and had been infrequent. In January, 1806, he was elected one of the Society's managers, and was re-elected annually thereafter until his death.

260 *Poulson's American Daily Advertiser*, Apr. 9, 1804, Jan. 22 and Apr. 9, 1805.

261 Computation on unnumbered page of *Journal of the India*.

262 *Poulson's American Daily Advertiser*, May 21, 1805; "Acct Sales of Snowden & North ... received pr Ship Montezuma, John Ansley M' from Batavia," Ferdinand J. Dreer Autograph Collection, Snowden & North, HSP.

263 "Invoice of Merchandise Shipped ... on board the Ship Montezuma, John Ansley M', Master, for the Cape of Good Hope, May 23, 1806," *ibid*.

264 "Acct Disbursements Ship Montezuma ... September 1, 1806," *ibid*.


266 Shipmasters' Club, Minutes (1806-1832).
In that same year, Governor Thomas McKean appointed him an assistant warden of the Port of Philadelphia to fill the vacancy caused by the elevation of Captain Henry Hawkins to Master Warden.\textsuperscript{267} The Board of Port Wardens, comprising a master warden and six assistants, was in charge of navigation in the Delaware, including examination and appointment of pilots, regulation of size, alteration, or extension of wharves, and settlement of all disputes between masters and pilots as to fees. An example of their varied duties was given Ashmead at his first meeting on December 17, 1806, when the Master Warden was empowered to request the mayor to take steps to remove the great inconvenience to passage along the wharves caused by wood piled in the streets.\textsuperscript{268}

A change in state administration found Henry Hawkins out of favor, and on April 21, 1809, he was replaced by Ashmead, who was "appointed and commissioned" by Governor Simon Snyder.\textsuperscript{269} The minutes of May 1 record the result succinctly: "Capt" John Ashmead having received a Commission from the Governor investing him with the Title and Powers of Master Warden of the Port of Philadelphia—Capt" Hawkins this day delivered up the Office Books papers &c &c to Capt" Ashmead."\textsuperscript{270}

Having attained that post, as well as the age of seventy-one years, John executed a new will on October 12, 1809. To his wife, Mary Mifflin Ashmead, he bequeathed the dwelling house and lot in Sansom Street, together with household furniture and plate. The remainder of his estate was to be sold, or valued, and divided among his heirs. Mary was to receive $3,000, or the value thereof. John Ashmead, his eldest son, had died many years before. "Having had much assistance from me before his death," John wrote, "more than would have been a child's share, and his children now living being all grown up, I give and bequeath to each of them . . . three pounds." Benjamin, his second son, and Ann, his unmarried daughter, were each to receive $2,000. The two married daughters, Mary Ashmead

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{267} Pennsylvania Executive Minutes, Nov. 1, 1806, \textit{Pennsylvania Archives, Ninth Series}, III, 2295; 2296.
\item \textsuperscript{268} "Minute Book, Commencing January 21st 1807, ending 1st Oct 1825," Commissioners of Navigation, Bourse, Philadelphia, hereafter referred to as Port Wardens Minute Book.
\item \textsuperscript{269} Pennsylvania Executive Minutes, Apr. 12, 1809, \textit{Pennsylvania Archives, Ninth Series}, IV, 2669.
\item \textsuperscript{270} Port Wardens Minute Book, May 1, 1809.
\end{itemize}
Clay and Eliza Ashmead Croskey, were each to have $1,000. "To my son William who hath already had from me much more than would be a child's share," the testator wrote, "I give and bequeath the sum of fifty dollars." His oldest daughter Hannah and his sons Joseph Mifflin and Thomas, having died without issue, were not named in the will.

As an afterthought, Ashmead added a codicil in 1810. Should his wife die before him, or should she outlive him and neglect to make a will, that part of the estate left to her was to be divided among the children in the same proportion as he himself had specified for them.\(^{271}\) This provision was wisely made, for Mary Mifflin Ashmead died on May 18, 1814.\(^{272}\)

Duties as Master Warden absorbed Ashmead's constant attention through the years, including several efforts to have the original Wardens Law of March 29, 1803, revised and amended. Upon one occasion he was called to Lancaster to explain desired changes to a group of legislators.\(^{273}\) Upon another, he addressed a memorial in behalf of the board to Nicholas Biddle, Senator from Philadelphia at Harrisburg, pointing out how necessary it was that revisions be made.\(^{274}\)

One of his final acts showed the independent thinking of a man who had the interest of his city at heart. The Pennsylvania & New Jersey Steamboat Company had presented a petition requesting permission to place a floating frame at the public wharf at the foot of Cedar (South) Street for the accommodation of its steamboat. A full board considered it on May 19, 1817, along with the condition that the frame be removed if in the future the port wardens considered it a nuisance. All six assistant wardens voted to grant the petition, but Ashmead refused to make it unanimous. He stated his reasons: "in the first place, in his opinion, the Corporation had not the legal right to let a publick wharf, to, or for the benefit of a private company. And, in the second place, that such a floating frame would

\(^{271}\) John Ashmead's will, executed Oct. 12, 1809; codicil added Nov. 4, 1810; probated June 10, 1818. Will No. 68, Will Book 6, 583, Register of Wills, Philadelphia.


\(^{273}\) Charles Biddle to John Ashmead, Apr. 20, 1811, in David McNeely Stauffer's extra-illustrated edition of Thompson Westcott's *History of Philadelphia*, XIII, 953, HSP.

\(^{274}\) Port Wardens Minute Book, Feb. 6, 1817.
be a nuisance, as it would be injurious to that part of the Harbour, particularly to the River Craft.”

John’s last attendance at a board meeting was on March 28, 1818. Apparently he was taken ill that night, for on March 30, “as the Master Warden was seriously indisposed, it was necessary to appoint some one of the Board to take his place during the time he may be necessarily absent from his office.” He made one more public appearance on April 8, at a meeting in his own home of the Managers of the Society for the Relief of Poor Distressed Masters of Ships their Widows and Children. The Managers had been meeting quarterly or better in his Sansom Street office since the middle of 1809. At that April meeting, a very sick “Capt' Ashmead paid the Treasurer the Letter Money received at the Post office, for last quarter, amounting to Twenty one dollars ninety four cents.”

On a Saturday morning in June, the indomitable old sea captain breathed his last. “It is with regret we announce to your Excellency,” the port wardens wrote the governor, “the death of our worthy colleague Captain John Ashmead, Master Warden of the Port of Phil.” The epitaph he had composed in verse was far too long to be engraved upon his tombstone in the Baptist Cemetery, where he was laid to rest beside his beloved wife. Instead, the mason’s chisel carved the simple fact that John Ashmead, on June 6, 1818, had died in the eightieth year of his age.

_Brevard, N. C._

_WILLIAM BELL CLARK_