

LOG OF THE EMPRESS OF CHINA

The following are excerpts from logs of the *Empress of China*, the first American ship to sail to China after American independence. The ship left New York on February 22, 1784 and reached Canton on August 28. All excerpts are taken from March, April, and June 1784.

March *Sunday, 14th.* First part cloudy with light rain. Latter part, fair. It being Saturday evening, according to custom drank to sweethearts and wives in “cherry punch”—capital tipple. Songs by those who could sing. All appeared very happy (could it have been the punch?) An albacore weighing 20 lbs. caught. Last turkey killed for tomorrow’s dinner.

Monday, 15th. Moderate breezes and pleasant weather. At 10 AM discovered land, which proved to be the island of Palma, one of the Canary isles. Here, the gentlemen closed their reckoning. Some of the gentlemen were within six miles. Capt. Randall was within 90 miles. Here we take a fresh departure.

Thursday, 18th. Commences with clear pleasant weather. Middle part, hazy. Passed a large shoal of porpoises. People employed drying corn and salt that had become wet; also employed making fenders for the pinnace. Ship under royal and topgallant-steering-sails.

Friday, 19th. Light breezes and hazy weather. At 3 (PM) the wind hauled aft. Hauled up the spank[er] and squared the yards. People employed setting up the rigging. Carpenters, coopers, &c. employed at their various avocations.

Wednesday, 31st. Capt. Green observed a small shark close under the stern of the ship, he ordered a hook to be baited and thrown over. The ravenous fish immediately seized it and was brought on deck. A suck-fish was sticking to his belly. I have preserved this curious fish in spirits. It’s extraordinary with what firmness the fish applies itself to any solid body. The crew employed getting the potatoes on deck and picking them over. They find that more than one half of them rotten and threw them over-board.

April *Friday, 9th.* First part pleasant and steady breezes and cloudy weather. People variously employed. Latter part, variable winds and cloudy weather.

Saturday, 10th. First part, moderate breezes and pleasant weather. At 6 (AM) set the main-top-gallant-staysail, royal, spritsail, and spritsail topsail. Carpenters employed fixing blunder-busses in the gunwales fore and aft.

April Sunday, 11th. First part, pleasant breezes and cloudy. At 3 (PM) squally with rain. Clewed up the topgallant sail and hauled down the staysail. At 5 AM set them again. Latter part, fresh breezes and dark cloudy weather and frequent squalls

Wednesday, 21st. The fore part, finished our wooding and got all our water on board. Peter Richard disobedient to command. Insults his officers. Drew his knife on Mr Hodgkinson. Swore he would murder every officer in the ship. In struggling to get the knife out of his hands, he cut Mr Fitch, the 2nd mate's, finger. Ordered him in irons, hands and feet. The night moderate. At 3 A.M., hoisted in our boats, and soon after the *Triton* made signal for getting under way. Hove up in company. The winds ESE but in the offing and at noon NE: a-beating to windward. Thermometer 85. Two men sick. Variation 51^m West.

June Tuesday, 20th. [Sunda Straits] At daylight, sent the boats wooding and watering. The carpenter repairing the head. The boatswain and a gang repairing the rigging. The latter part, scrubbed and cleaned the gross of ship's sides and bends. This day two Dutch ships came through the straits, showed their colors, and passed to the NE. Winds SE. Thermometer 86^d. Latitude observed 6^d45^m South. Very sultry.

Philip Smith, *The Empress of China*. Philadelphia: Philadelphia Maritime Museum, 1984.

● QUESTIONS

1. Why does the author note the weather every day?
2. What aspect of the weather seems especially important?
3. What kinds of activities occupy the crew?
4. What do people do to entertain themselves and keep from getting bored?
5. In addition to sailors, what other occupations are represented in the crew?