

JOHN KENDRICK'S  
DARING AMERICAN ODYSSEY  
IN THE PACIFIC

MORNING  
*of* FIRE



SCOTT RIDLEY

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*Morning*  
— of —  
*Fire*

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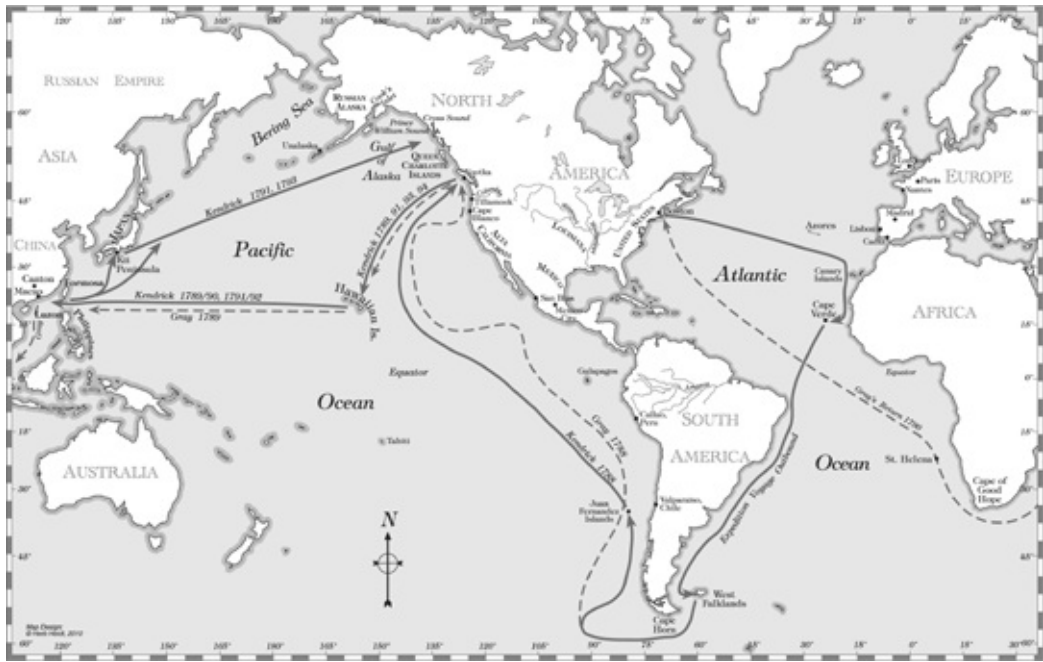
SCOTT RIDLEY

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*A voyage of such enterprise might truly be deemed a novel  
undertaking from a Country but so lately emerg'd from the  
ravages of a long, inhuman and bloody war...*

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—JOHN HOSKINS, BOSTON



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## *Morning of fire*

**MARCH 4, 1788**—through a gray, cloudy morning and against a rising wind, two small American ships made their way off the coast of Staten Land near the tip of South America. The *Lady Washington*, a sixty-foot sloop carrying eleven men, and the *Columbus Rediviva*, a snubhulled brig of eighty-three feet with a captain and crew of forty, scudded weathervane like specks in the vast ocean. Under the rising wind the seas were running high and irregular, setting a strong current from the southwest. The ships were headed around Cape Horn and arriving late for this passage. Storm season had begun, and gales could appear out of nowhere, whipping swells to monstrous heights. For the next fifteen hundred miles, they would be in one of the most treacherous stretches on earth.

Beyond that danger lay the immense realm of the Pacific, the worlds of native people completely alien to them, and the enmity of the Spanish, who would soon issue orders to seize these ships. Although they seemed to be alone at a remote end of the earth, they were caught in a volatile tide of events from which there would be no turning.

**THE LATE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY** was a time of global turmoil. For three hundred years, a papal edict had largely prevailed as a backdrop to territorial treaties and agreements. In 1494, seeking to settle a conflict over the discoveries of new non-Christian lands, Pope Alexander VI had divided the globe, granting the seas and new lands in the Eastern Hemisphere—Cape Verde through Africa, India, and Asia—to Portugal, and the Western Hemisphere—ranging from the Americas to as far as the Philippines—to Spain. By the late 1780s, Portugal's fortunes had faded, and the overstretched Spanish Empire was starting to disintegrate. Driven by the ambition of merchants, a renaissance in science, and new philosophies of freedom and self-government, the myths and superstitions that held the Old World together began to fall away and modern nations started to stir.

At the heart of that change, the fledgling United States faced a future that was fragile and uncertain. The Revolution left the new nation weak, divided, and deeply in debt. Although America had won an impossible war against one of the world's superpowers, independence

was not yet secure. Britain had largely shut down American trade. The economy was starving, and internal dissent was rising. In 1788, America's first ambassador to Britain, John Adams, headed home from London, frustrated that he was unable to break the British stranglehold. The prevailing opinion of the British court was that America's experiment with democracy would soon fail and the devastated colonies would come clamoring to rejoin the empire.

THE VOYAGE OF THE *LADY WASHINGTON* and *Columbia Rediviva* was a desperate bid to break the British stranglehold on trade and gain an American presence in the Pacific. It marked America's first expedition of enterprise and discovery. The commander, John Kendrick, had been a charismatic captain of privateers during the Revolution. A master navigator and visionary, he was a man fate had a habit of casting into the middle of events. In a historical letter to the Continental Congress in 1778, Benjamin Franklin informed the anxious delegates that France had at last decided to join the United States in its rebellion against Britain. As evidence of France's sincere faith, Franklin wrote that King Louis decided to grant Kendrick and another captain four hundred thousand French livres for capturing two prize merchant vessels. The award and stories of Kendrick's daring eventually made him a well-known figure on the Atlantic seaboard.

While no known portrait of John Kendrick exists, contemporaries describe him as being physically impressive and possessing great strength—a bold thinker, a trusted captain, a man who plunged into the unknown wilderness and, according to some, turned into a renegade and leader of a “banditti of renegadoes.” Born of a stock of blue-eyed Yankee farmers and sailors, Kendrick had a clear gift to charm potential adversaries and win the loyalty of his men. His dry sense of humor easily took in more serious gentlemen and puzzled historians. The favor he showed his crews, at times over his officers, grew from his own rise from below deck and an egalitarian sense of humanity backed by a hatred of tyrants. In a time of stiff-necked and whitewigged ship's officers, Kendrick was the rare commander who was unafraid to break rules or protocol or to adopt the dress and learn the languages of the people he came among. His generosity and ability to entertain made him the favorite of native people. But he also possessed a patriarchal seriousness that could give way to fury. And sometimes that fury turned deadly. Although not strict in his religious beliefs, Kendrick was deeply ingrained with the sense of sacrifice and determination of his Congregational forebears. Through years of



voyaging, he maintained an uncanny ability to persevere despite setbacks and fierce odds. Somewhere in him was a blind faith and an iron constitution that allowed him to survive the disease and deprivation that wasted many other men. He also possessed a subtlety that made him a surprisingly good strategist and frontier diplomat. From that generation which had achieved an unimaginable victory in winning independence, Kendrick remained dedicated throughout his life to what was known as the “glorious cause” of liberty. Franklin, Jefferson, and John Adams knew of him, as did George Washington. In time, other presidents would come to know his name as well, as they attempted for nearly fifty years to probe the events and claims left in his wake.

**KENDRICK'S LIFE AND HIS LANDMARK VOYAGE** embodied that harsh morning that was the turn of the eighteenth century. Born in 1740 on a small hilly farm in East Harwich, Cape Cod, John Kendrick was the third of seven children of Solomon Kendrick and Elizabeth Atkins. Their home bordered lands known as “Potonumecut” that stretched east along Pleasant Bay and held the remnant native tribes of the outer Cape: the Pamet people, the Nauset, the Monomoyick, the Saquatucket. Kendrick grew up among these native people and a close-knit group of relatives along the marshy shore. To the south was the farm of wild Sam Crook, Monomoyick who ran his own whaling vessel. To the west were his cousins, the Snows. To the north on Tar Kiln Creek lived his uncle Jonathan Kendrick, the local physician. At the edge of Round Cove was the cedar bark *wetu* of old Wahenanun, who still spoke the Wampanoag language and practiced the ways of her people. And a half mile to the south was the grave of the Pilgrim guide Squanto, hidden on the high bank of Muddy Creek.

Kendrick's grandfather, Edward Kendrick, had arrived in Harwich around 1700 and married Elizabeth Snow, the granddaughter of Nicholas Snow, a holder of extensive lands and one of the “old-comers” from Plymouth who first settled the Cape. Kendrick's father, Solomon, born sometime during the winter of 1705/6, was master of a whaling vessel who was famous in local lore for having his boats attacked by a whale they had wounded far offshore on George's Bank. “Tis a wonder they were not all destroyed,” a contemporary account read, “for the Whale continued striking and raging in a most furious manner in the midst of them destroying one boat and killing a man. Kendrick's boyhood was spent in his father's formidable shadow. Following local tradition, Kendrick went to sea with him by the time he was fourteen. By his late teens, he was sailing with crews of men from Potonumecut.

1762, he came ashore briefly at the end of the Seven Years' War to serve under a cousin, Jabez Snow, on a militia mission to the frontier of western New York.

As trouble with Parliament and the king mounted in the 1760s, his father moved off to Nova Scotia where he became one of the proprietors of the town of Barrington.

Staying behind, John Kendrick came of age in the defiant atmosphere of the coffeehouses and taverns of Boston. Here, he was in the midst of the firestorm of opposition to Parliament's Stamp Act of 1765 and the hated Townshend Acts, which usurped local authority and levied an array of onerous taxes. As strife increased on the waterfront, he may have been involved in the widespread boycott of British goods and the burning of Boston's customhouse, or riots over seizure and impressment of American sailors for British ships.

During this time, Kendrick also frequented the south coast of Massachusetts, where talk of liberty and independence was rife and smuggling was rampant. Perhaps through his grandmother Atkins's family on Martha's Vineyard, he met Huldah Pease, the daughter of an Edgartown seafaring clan. Shortly after Christmas in 1767 they married and settled for a time on the island. Subsequent colonial records show that Kendrick mastered the whaling brig *Lydia* to the grounds off Cape Verde, and took the schooner *Rebecca* into the Gulf of Mexico where he negotiated his way out of being seized by the Spanish *garda costa*.

Family tradition holds that on the rainy night of December 16, 1773, John Kendrick was part of the legendary band that boarded two East India Company ships at Griffin's Wharf in Boston and dumped 342 chests of tea into the harbor. Thumbing his nose at the British, shortly after, he is said to have been master of the brig *Undutied Tea*.

At the outbreak of the Revolution, Kendrick may have smuggled powder and arms from the Caribbean with the sloop *Fanny*, whose owners were under contract with a secret committee of the Continental Congress. In May 1776, the *Fanny* delivered a cargo of muskets, double-bridged gun locks, and cannon and pistol powder for the secret committee. In December, the owners applied to the Massachusetts Council for Kendrick to embark on the *Fanny* as a privateer. Onshore at Dartmouth (New Bedford), Kendrick made the sloop into a brigantine by adding a second mast and rerigging her sails. On July 10, 1777, he departed with 104 men for the English Channel and the French port of Nantes, where American privateers gathered. Here the *Fanny* became known as the *Boston*, and his crew the "Boston men."

His first large prizes were the West Indiamen *Hanover Planter* and the *Clarendon*, which

Kendrick and the *General Mercer* out of Cape Ann took after a battle with two twenty-eight-gun frigates. The prizes were carrying rich cargoes of muscovado sugar and rum from Jamaica to London, and tried to disguise themselves as vessels from a neutral port. Brought into Nantes in mid-August 1777, the captured ships caused an international stir. France had not yet entered the war, and Kendrick's prizes tested French neutrality and engaged Benjamin Franklin in correspondence with King Louis XVI and Congress. Discussion of the prize ships among the king's ministers helped to precipitate the entry of France into the war. In the fall of 1778, Kendrick returned home a hero and was initiated into St. Andrew's Lodge of Freemasons, which owned the Green Dragon Inn where the Boston Tea Party had been planned. Members of the lodge included Paul Revere and many of Boston's revolutionaries. With his prize money from the French king, Kendrick bought a house, wharf, and store at a riverfront site called the Narrows in the village of Wareham on the south coast of Massachusetts and built the first public school there.

Settled in the Narrows that winter, Kendrick's family was safe from the British fleet that had raided the coast, stripping Martha's Vineyard of livestock and food stores and reducing the population to near starvation. Up the tidal Warnick River, the warehouse and store were also safe from warships shelling the shore and burning ships and fishing vessels where they lay at anchor. Anguished at what was happening, Kendrick sailed off in late winter to command another privateer, the *Count d'Estaing*, which he owned in partnership with the New York patriot Isaac Sears. Southwest of the Azores island of Flores, he encountered a British frigate, the twenty-eight-gun *Brutus*, and her tender with ten guns. Kendrick was forced to strike his colors, and he and his crew were locked below as prisoners on the *d'Estaing* from April 8 to 22. The British captain forced as many prisoners as possible to sign on with him. Finally, impatient with those who held out, he set Kendrick and thirty of his men in a boat. They made a thirty-mile trip to Graciosa—one of the central islands of the Azores—where they were well treated by the inhabitants. After two weeks, they embarked in their boat again for the main island of Terceira, where the governor of the islands hosted them for two weeks and arranged passage on a Swedish vessel to Lisbon, a thousand miles to the east.

At Lisbon, with no money and only the shirt on his back, the affable Kendrick won the support of a local American sympathizer, Arnold Henry Dohrman, who fed and housed him and his men. On Sunday afternoon, June 13, 1779, Kendrick wrote to Benjamin Franklin from

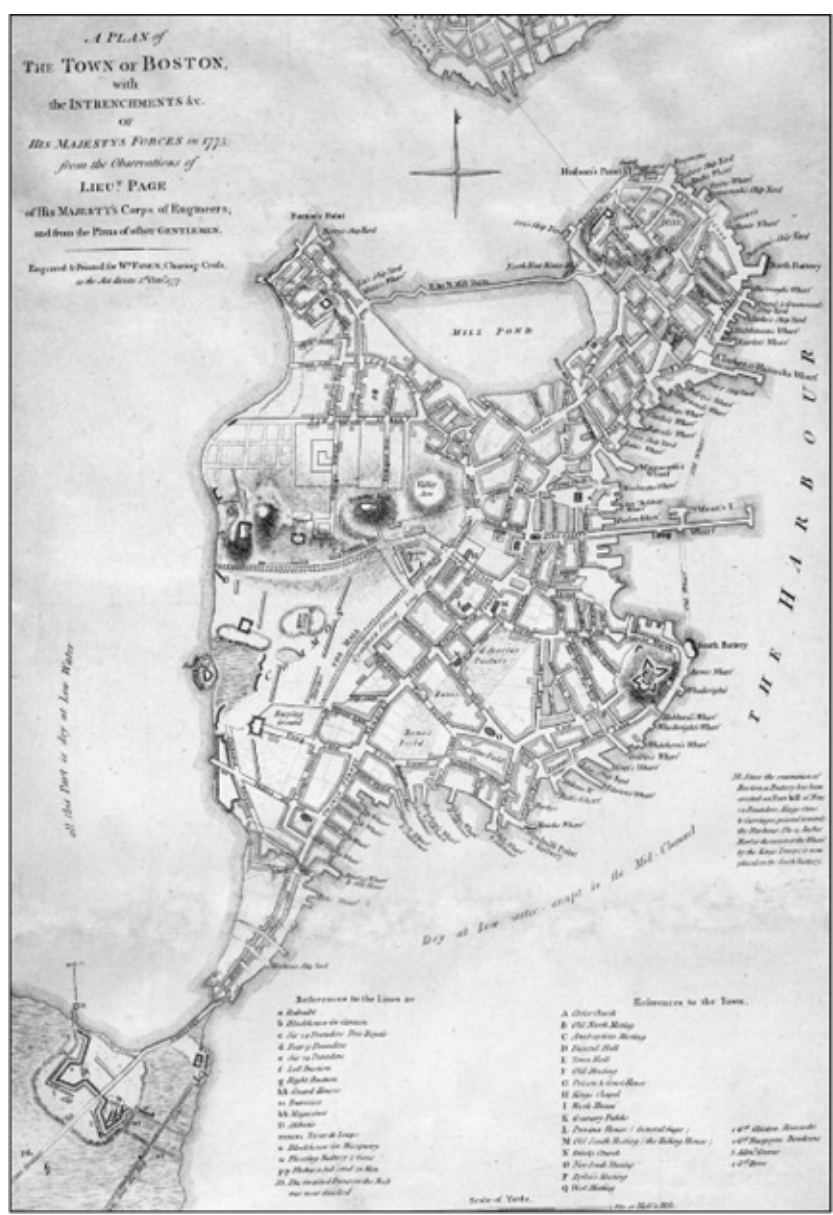
Lisbon reporting the capture of his vessel and praising the kindness of the people of the Azores and Dohrman, “a Sensiar Friend to the Cause of Liberty.” Kendrick said he and his men were setting out that day for Spain, the first leg of a long trek back to France.

After surviving a two-month, thousand-mile journey with his remaining crew, Kendrick returned to America with the French fleet. He then left for the Caribbean with the *Marianne* to take at least one more rich prize, a Dutch merchant vessel from the plantations of Suriname carrying five tons of cotton, eight tons of cocoa, and one hundred fifty tons of coffee.

Shortly before the British surrendered at Yorktown in 1781, Kendrick came ashore. In his sporadic visits home he had managed to father six children, and now he buckled down to making his way in the new nation. Like many of those who survived the war, the rich and dangerous life he led seemed to become part of a storied past. He had no idea that his greatest adventures still lay ahead. In the harsh morning that was rising, as much as any major military campaign or act of government, the odyssey he would embark on would spark changes that would shape world history and the future of the new nation.

PART I

# The Journey Outward



## *Out of a Time of Great Peril*

### *Boston*

FEBRUARY–OCTOBER 1787

**J**OSEPH BARRELL HURRIED along the snow-cruled lane of Marlborough Street in the weak light at the end of the day. It was early February, 1787, and the chill wind off the harbor carried the smell of the tide. Under his greatcoat, Barrell clutched a packet of papers, a detailed plan he had worked out to launch a daring expedition of two ships into a little-known part of the world. The voyage would be America's first across the broad expanse of the Pacific, and shipmasters in the next generation would regard it as one of the most remarkable journeys ever undertaken by the United States. It marked a desperate venture at a perilous time.

After the victorious Revolution and euphoria of the Peace Treaty of 1783, an economic depression had settled over villages and farms. Port cities and their harbors were left reeling from the war. Inflation was rampant. There was no common currency, state governments were weak, and representatives to the Congress of the Confederation bickered over fundamental issues, threatening to secede. Heavy debts owed to Britain for damages in the war were due, and the prospects for international trade and revenue were bleak. In a punishing move, the king had closed all British ports from Canada and the British Isles to the Caribbean to the remaining American ships. France and Spain, likewise, offered no viable trade agreements for their harbors or colonies. Each of those kingdoms wanted the United States as a dependent client nation hemmed in between the Appalachians and the Atlantic.

Securing independence was far from certain, and Barrell, a prominent merchant who had been a member of the clandestine Sons of Liberty, feared along with many others that the blood and suffering of the long revolution might come to nothing. Frustration in the countryside had grown to the point that a popular uprising had broken out. As he trudged along the street, hired militia were hunting through heavy snows in the hills of western

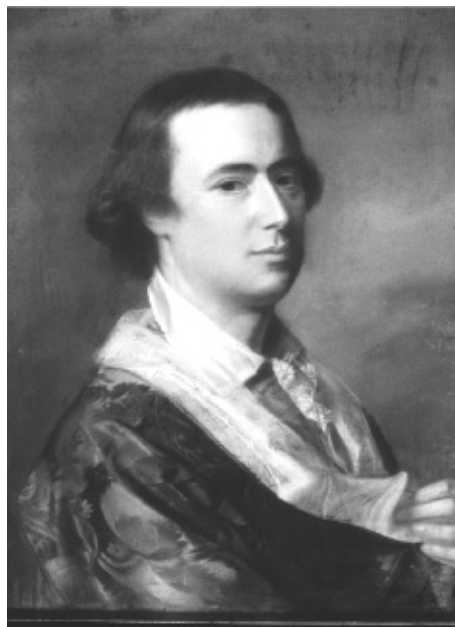
Massachusetts, searching for farmers and shopkeepers who had taken arms against what they saw as a corrupt state government. The unrest had been spreading for a year and a half in Massachusetts, Connecticut, Rhode Island, and New Hampshire over high taxes, controversial court procedures, and the taking of farms and homesteads for nonpayment of bills. Courts had been blocked from holding session in order to stop the seizures. And in a violent confrontation on January 25, three rebel regiments totaling fifteen hundred men attempted to capture the Springfield Armory. They were led by Captain Daniel Shays, a veteran who was once honored by the Marquis de Lafayette for his bravery. Some believed a new revolution was brewing.

At Mount Vernon, where he had retired after the war, the usually reserved George Washington became apoplectic when he was told there were as many as fifteen thousand disaffected yeomen in New England ready to take up arms. To his friend Henry Lee, Washington wrote, "I am mortified beyond expression when I view the clouds that have spread over the brightest morn that ever dawned in any country.... What a triumph for the advocates of despotism, to find that we are incapable of governing ourselves ..."

A push was on for a new federal government. But without trade, without customs revenue, and without taxes, it would be impossible to support a new central government and succeed in securing independence. Shipping was the soul of early commerce, and breaking the Old World stranglehold on American vessels was essential to the survival of the fledgling nation. Barrell's plan held a way to travel beyond the Atlantic ports closed to American ships, open an American gateway to the Pacific, and establish a base for the new nation on the far side of the continent. It was an audacious leap to send two ships and a relatively small crew of fifty men into the largely unknown reaches of the globe.

When he arrived at the home of Thomas Bulfinch on Bowdoin Square, Barrell was brought into the parlor before a warm fire. Among a circle of trusted friends he laid out his plan. Next to Barrell's packet of papers, Bulfinch opened a leather-bound copy of James Cook's journal from his third voyage, which described the exotic and unknown expanse of the Pacific and served as the inspiration for Barrell's expedition. In 1776, Britain's King George III had dispatched Cook to the Pacific with two ships in search of the Northwest Passage, rumored for centuries to be a link between the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans. While Cook didn't find the prized passage, he "discovered" the Hawaiian Islands and a treasure of rich furs on the northern Pacific coast of America. In China, furs that Cook's men had purchased from the

American natives in return for trinkets sold for as much as one hundred and twenty Spanish dollars for a single sea otter pelt. This was more than double a full seaman's wages for a year. The prospect of gathering fortunes sent the crews of Cook's two ships into near mutiny and they returned to the American coast. Two seamen "seduced by the prevailing notion of making a fortune" stole a fixed-oar cutter and disappeared, never to be seen again. Duty and the lack of a ship drove the rest of the crew homeward. The fortune in furs was still waiting for those daring to venture out.



Joseph Barrell by John Singleton Copley. Joseph Barrell was a member of a large Boston merchant family with relatives posted at offices in the Caribbean, London, and India. An ardent federalist, he supported the vision of an expanding nation and later became a prominent land speculator in Ohio, Kentucky, and Georgia.

Barrell had already been involved with the first two American ships sent to China on the established track eastward around Africa's Cape of Good Hope. The *Harriet* had gone out from Massachusetts on an aborted voyage in 1783. And the *Empress of China*, which carried three tons of Barrell's New England ginseng, left New York in 1784. Although the *Empress* made a moderate profit, Barrell found that the market for ginseng was limited and Chinese merchants wanted silver and gold coins, which were scarce in the new republic. Reading Cook's journal, he seized upon the idea of using the highly prized furs as a substitute for money. Following the pattern described in Cook's journal, Barrell outlined a triangular trade of New England goods and trinkets for sea otter furs from Pacific Northwest tribes; an exchange of furs for tea, silk, and other goods at Macao; and a homeward voyage laden with rich Chinese cargo. There were two chances at profits, and Barrell worked out costs and contingencies in detail. He concluded that in a short time a rich trade with the East could prove "superior to any other



country enjoys at present.” To firmly secure this trade, the Pacific expedition would also seek to purchase lands on the Northwest Coast. Barrell wanted to establish an American outpost “at least equal to what Hudson’s-bay is to Great Britain,” and extend the new nation’s claims of possession. And even more dramatic, Barrell proposed that the expedition search for the legendary Northwest Passage. If it could be found, the waterway would unlock the vast interior of the continent and open a new trade route to the East for Americans.

The brazen plan reflected Barrell’s personal ambition and his broader desperation for the new nation to succeed. He calculated that the expedition’s ships, supplies, men, and trade goods would need an investment of forty-nine thousand dollars, a small fortune at the time. But despite the cost and wild reach of Barrell’s plan, his reasoning was convincing and the prospect for trade was attractive. Fourteen shares were soon divided among his circle of friends as a joint venture. Barrell took four shares, and two shares each went to his new partners: young Charles Bulfinch, who would become America’s premier architect; Crowell Hatch, a Boston captain; Samuel Brown, a Boston merchant and shipowner; John Derby, a Salem merchant whose family owned and provisioned ships; and John M. Pintard, a financier based in New York.

They knew that carrying out the voyage was fraught with difficulty. Spain would resist any encroachment in the Pacific, and the route westward around South America’s Cape Horn was greatly feared. The two ships would have to withstand immense punishment, and there were few vessels available. Boston, like other port cities, had been devastated by the British during the first two years of the war. Shipyards were wrecked, and hundreds of ships up and down the coast had been seized and taken to auction at Liverpool or burned to the waterline when they lay anchored. New ships were hard to come by. The shipyards that survived were shorthanded, and the few ships being framed were going to foreign owners who could pay cash. Adding to the expense, the hulls of the expedition’s ships would need to be sheathed in copper to ward off wood-boring teredo worms, barnacles, and rot.

The voyage would also be extraordinarily long—more than two years—and require a large amount of provisions, as well as a mountain of trade goods and ship stores to maintain the vessels. There was also a question of whether seasoned men would sign on. Although there was an exotic allure to the Pacific, colored by tales of island paradises and unrestrained sex with beautiful women, the ships were headed for dangerous, uncharted waters, and it was well-known that long voyages like this commonly lost a quarter or more of the crew.

scurvy and other diseases.

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The key to attracting good men and ensuring success for the expedition rested on finding the right commander. New England was full of blue water captains, but this one would have to be both a seasoned warrior and a diplomat who could negotiate dangers at sea and along unknown coasts. It would take someone experienced in the care of a crew on such a long journey, someone who could hold the hearts of his men and fire their determination through soul-wrenching events. Moreover, he would have to be a master navigator who appreciated the dream of an American outpost on the Pacific and was willing to risk his life in the venture. Whatever candidates they considered, the choice came down to one broad-shouldered captain who literally stood above the others.

By the early summer, Barrell sent word for John Kendrick to meet him at his counting house at Boston's Town Dock. Kendrick had been a whaling captain for twenty years, and was well-known for his command of privateers during the Revolution. Upstairs from the cavernous storeroom, they sat in Barrell's office overlooking the waterfront. Dressed in his velvet jacket and ruffled shirt, Barrell appeared very much the wealthy patrician. Kendrick, his rough-hewn counterpart, was tanned and wrinkled and worn by years at sea. He was tough but possessed a charm and confidence that easily won others over. The two men were nearly the same age: Barrell forty-eight years old and Kendrick forty-seven. They had come to manhood during the turbulence and protests in Boston before the Revolution, and both had risked their lives and fortunes in the war. Barrell knew that Kendrick would see the expedition as more than just a trading mission. Like many of the founding fathers, they shared the naive belief that the Revolution could be carried out into the world through open ports and free trade. Markets opened by American ships, as much as the concept of liberty, would undermine secret pacts between Old World nations and topple corrupt monarchies. This new trade with China was a stroke in that direction. If they were successful, they would gain the money they were desperate for and contend with the ancient empires that sought to contain the new republic. Barrell rolled out a map, and Kendrick watched his keen eyes and fine hands as the merchant traced out the voyage.

The two ships would carve an American trade route around Cape Horn to the Far East, Barrell told him. They would sail the whole coast of the Americas and barter for furs in the north, then cross the Pacific and stop at the Sandwich Islands on the way to Macao, China. The trip homeward would cross the Indian Ocean and round Africa's Cape of Good Hope.

would be the first circumnavigation by American ships, and more than just a historic trading voyage, Barrell explained he wanted to establish an American presence in the Pacific. He said the captain would have to evade Spanish warships and ports, and build ties with native people in order to purchase lands from them for an outpost on the Pacific. If land could be purchased, Barrell assured Kendrick, he could get Congress to approve it. Added to this was the tantalizing prospect of finding the legendary Northwest Passage before Britain, Spain, or Russia, to secure a permanent advantage.

The plan offered a grand vision, undoubtedly considered madness by some captains. Beyond the formidable dangers of the voyage, the expedition put the ragtag former colonists in the position of challenging the Old World empires. Compared to the wealth and power of Spain, Britain, and Russia, the new American republic was an impoverished backwater. Boston had a population of only eighteen thousand, Philadelphia, twenty-eight thousand, and New York was the largest city with about thirty-three thousand people. Aside from state militias, there was only a token remnant of the Continental army and no navy; the two ships would be on their own on the other side of the world. They would be sailing into unknown waters peopled by tribes rumored to be cannibals, remote Asian coasts infested with pirates, and a region that would be jealously guarded by Spain.

Kendrick surely recognized what they were up against, and the odds might have been painful if not for what appealed to him. Listening to Barrell, he saw this as the voyage of a lifetime. The prospect of adventure and glory made a stark contrast to the monthly packet run he was currently mastering up and down the coast between Boston and Charleston, South Carolina. This venture could help set a new course for the nation. It was an opportunity to make his mark in trade and carry the seed for an “empire of liberty” envisioned by Thomas Jefferson and others to the Pacific coast. He knew a chance like this would not come again, and so, after their discussion, Kendrick agreed to command the expedition.

**BARRELL SENT HIS PARTNER** John Pintard to Congress on August 18 with a request for a sea letter for the voyage, a document intended to ensure passage and protection in foreign waters. The request was put aside. Congress had recently passed a law to allow the creation of new states, and tensions with Spain had increased over the disputed “middle lands” between the Appalachians and the Mississippi River. Talk of war with Spain was in the air. And pressed by popular unrest in New England over Shays’ Rebellion, Congress was also anxiously awaiting

the results of the constitutional convention in Philadelphia. Within a few weeks, the Constitution proposing a new national government was received at Federal Hall in New York and Congress approved it, on September 17. The following weekend, a committee consisting of Melancton Smith of New York, John Kean of South Carolina, and Nathan Dane of Massachusetts reviewed Pintard's letter. Although they were aware that the expedition would need to pass through hostile Spanish waters, the committee noted only that the ships were "bound on a voyage to the Northwest coast of America" and were owned and manned by Americans. On Monday, September 24, the twenty-eight members of Congress gathered at Federal Hall, approved and issued the sea letter. Pintard immediately dispatched the document by post rider to Boston, more than two hundred fifty hard miles away.

AT BOSTON HARBOR, the expedition's two ships were tied up at Hancock's Wharf. Barrell had purchased the best vessels available and had them hauled out on the ways to be refitted. The command ship, the *Columbia Rediviva*, was a three-masted brig, eighty-three feet six inches long on deck, with a 212-ton carrying capacity, snub-bowed and deep in the hull like the whalers Kendrick had once taken into the icy North Atlantic. Tradition claims she was built in the Scituate shipyard of James Briggs on the North River in 1773, where she escaped destruction by the British during the Revolution. Her name meant "dove reborn," which was symbolic of the new nation and perhaps also implied the biblical dove sent in search of new land and prosperity.

The *Lady Washington* was a coastal sloop of sixty feet and ninety tons, built low and tough in the shipyards north of Boston as early as 1750, probably with two-inch oak planking on her hull. Her single, gaffrigged mast was stepped at an angle and she had a certain romance to her. Commissioned as a privateer in 1776, she took at least one prize ship near Boston and once escaped four British war barges sent to sink her. Kendrick undoubtedly noted her similarity to his brigantine the *Fanny*, with which he had captured his first prizes in the Revolution. To the eye of any sailor, the *Washington* was much more the dove, and *Columbia* akin to the Ark.

As a steady stream of chandlers, riggers, and carters provisioned the ships, the sea letter arrived—it was a ribboned document, embossed with the seal of the Congress of the Confederation and signed by Arthur St. Clair, who presided over the chamber. The letter placed the ships under the patronage and protection of Congress and was addressed in

flourish to kings, princes, and officials of foreign ports. Although the document appeared official, it could mean very little in the farther reaches of the earth. Despite the peace and prosperity implied by the image of the dove, fitting out for sea included installing on the *Columbia* ten cannons, as well as several swivel guns that fired grapeshot. More cannons and a half-dozen swivel guns were placed aboard the *Lady Washington*.

News of the voyage appeared in Boston newspapers and spread down the coast. To most Boston merchants, the expedition sounded like a trip to the moon. Not only were they sailing around the Horn into unknown and hostile waters but the chance of success in the frightening void seemed to be pure speculation. Nevertheless, enthusiastic articles appeared and were reprinted from one newspaper to the next. They stated that the ships would be sailing for New Albion, or Kamchatka, or Northwest America. The truth was that the expedition was bound for an exotic wilderness harbor named Nootka by James Cook. It was located on the Northwest Coast at 48° north latitude, well within the domain claimed by the Spanish Empire.

The prospect of adventure and word of Kendrick's mastering the expedition brought on veterans of the Revolution and seasoned hands as well as young sailors. The voyagers were divided generally into four groups: ship's boys, seamen, craftsmen, and officers and "gentlemen." They came from Cape Cod, the North Shore of Massachusetts, Boston, and Rhode Island. Signing on were sailmaker William Bowles of Roxbury, gunner James Crawford of Georgetown, blacksmith Jonathan Barber of Boston, and carpenter Isaac Ridler, a British émigré who had served on privateers during the Revolution. Also brought on were up-and-coming Boston sailors: the highly regarded second mate Joseph Ingraham, whose father was a controversial merchant captain; the *Washington's* first mate, Robert Davis Coolidge of Roxbury; and carpenter's mate Joshua Hemmingway, who was Isaac Ridler's brother-in-law. From the North Shore came the cooper Robert Green, Otis Liscomb of Gloucester, and Miles Greenwood of Salem, whose father had owned privateers. Among younger sailors were the sons of two of Barrell's associates, John Cordis and Andrew Newell, and several ships' boys as young as twelve years old. Kendrick also enlisted two of his sons for the historic venture: Jonathan, eighteen years old, as fifth officer, and Solomon, sixteen, as a common seaman.

The "gentlemen" signed by Joseph Barrell included Richard S. Howe, the ship's clerk, and the Boston furrier Jonathan Treat. The third officer, nineteen-year-old Robert Haswell, whose father had been a Loyalist and lieutenant in the British navy, would become the unofficial

chronicler of the first two years of the voyage. And the *Columbia's* first officer, Simeon Woodruff, whom young Haswell referred to as "the aged gentleman," came aboard as a kind of celebrity. Woodruff was a Connecticut native who served in the British navy during the American Revolution and sailed with Captain James Cook on his third voyage of discovery. He had already seen the rich furs of the Northwest and the amorous women of the Pacific islands, and had fought off native attacks.

Serving under Kendrick as captain of the *Lady Washington* was thirty-three-year-old Robert Gray, who had grown up on Narragansett Bay and was the nephew of Samuel Gray, one of the four men killed in the Boston Massacre in 1770. Gray was a brash, one-eyed Rhode Islander who was said to have sailed in the Continental navy. He thought himself to be the better choice to command the voyage. Headstrong, arrogant, and focused on the merchant purposes of the expedition, he would continually chafe under Kendrick's command.

**ON FRIDAY, SEPTEMBER 28**, with the sea letter in hand, as well as letters from the Massachusetts Legislature and the French and Dutch consuls, Kendrick moved the ships to the channel off Castle Island. Under a nearly full moon, final preparations for the voyage went on late into Saturday night. On Sunday morning, September 30, freshly rigged and with the hulls painted black with a broad yellow band above the waterline, the ships sat at their moorings. Through the morning the crew's families and guests came aboard. At noon Kendrick arrived in a boat with the harbor pilot, accompanied by Joseph Barrell, the ship's clerk Richard Howe, and others. They had come from a service at South Church where a solemn prayer had been offered for the voyage.

With a light breeze out of the southwest, Kendrick gave command for the ships to make sail; the pilot took them out past Spectacle Island, faring seven miles to Nantasket Roads off the village of Hull. Anchored that night near the entrance channel to the great harbor, the ships staged a celebration. Pennants lay slack as speeches and song went rising into the still air. Seabound ships anchored nearby enjoyed the din as lanterns hung in *Columbia's* rigging glowed above the deck, dappling the black water. In the first entry of his journal, young third mate Robert Haswell wrote, "The evening was spent in mirth and glee the highest flow of spirits animating the whole Company."

Barrell presented Kendrick with instructions granting him broad authority:

*The ship Columbia and sloop Washington being completely equipped for a voyage to the Pacific Ocean and China,*

*we place such confidence in you as to give you the entire command of this enterprise. It would be impossible upon a voyage of this nature to give you with propriety very binding instructions, and such is our reliance on your honor, integrity and good conduct, that it*

*would be needless at any time. You will be on the spot, and as circumstances turn up you must improve them ...*

Barrell also handed out medallions engraved in pewter, copper, and silver to commemorate the voyage. One side of the medallions depicted the two ships under sail and read: "Columb and Washington Commanded By J. Kendrick." The reverse held the names of the ship owners and around the rim read: "Fitted At Boston, N. American For The Pacific Ocean."

One of those who received a medallion was the commander's wife, Huldah Pease Kendrick. She would have come up the day before from the village of Wareham. Still at home were three boys: Benjamin, Alfred, and Joseph, all under age twelve, and little six-year-old Huldah.

Although she was accustomed to frequent separations during twenty years of marriage, Huldah Kendrick faced a much deeper emotional strain now that two of her sons were shipping off. Torn between pride in their mission and apprehension at such a long journey, it was likely she lingered with her boys and husband and was among the last passengers rowed ashore.

Below deck, the men and boys arranged themselves, taking a measure of one another in the dim, lamplit space under the foredeck. Haswell made notes in his journal as the other officers settled into their narrow cabins. Amid the high hopes and emotion of the evening, no one could imagine what would unfold in an odyssey driven by Kendrick's perseverance and vision. In the years to come, word would drift back in scant letters and news from other ships of this man who became part legend, buying up a huge tract of land that would benefit the new nation, allegedly going renegade, and helping to push the world toward a global war. The obscure wilderness harbor they were headed for at Nootka would become a flashpoint around which the destinies of European empires would turn. For America, more than a decade and a half before Lewis and Clark, Kendrick would inspire voyagers and open a gateway to the

Pacific. But that was far ahead, unforeseen in the night's mix of anticipation and high emotion.

If they slept at all, it was not long. At the edge of this great harbor, in the early dark before dawn with a purple-gray light rising, the two ships made their way out of the channel for the open sea.

## *Passage to the Underworld*

### *Cape Horn*

MARCH–APRIL, 1788

**TUESDAY, MARCH 5**, east of Cape Horn—Five months into the voyage, memories of the last festive night in Boston had long faded. Kendrick had taken the ships on a shakedown cruise across the Atlantic to Cape Verde, off the western coast of Africa, where he reorganized the *Columbia's* hold and rested and fattened his men for the arduous months ahead. At the turn of the year, they ran down the coast of South America, staying well offshore to avoid Spanish patrols. At the desolate Falkland Islands they stopped for water and final preparations.

With more than a little trepidation, on February 28, 1788, they set out on a flood tide at dusk from the West Falklands and made their way into blustery winds and mountainous seas to round Cape Horn. Five days later, the bold, barren outline of Staten Land loomed north of them and a gale rapidly approached from the west.

The irregular seas began to lengthen into large, thick swells. From the pitching quarterdeck of the *Columbia*, John Kendrick watched the *Lady Washington* heeling and plunging in the waves behind them. Ahead, the gray mass of clouds was blackening into twisted peaks along the horizon. Kendrick ordered his crew to tack and the *Washington* followed.

Climbing over these steep southern swells, the *Columbia's* hold was filled with the bulk of their provisions for two years and an assortment of trade goods: tin mirrors, beads, calico, mouth harps, hunting knives, hatchets, files, and bar metal that could be worked into chisels. Despite breaking up the hold and repacking the ship at Cape Verde, she still handled like a box on ice. Kendrick could only hope they would not encounter the mammoth storms that could gather as the southern winter approached. It would be cold. It would be bitterly cold. The only certainty of the days ahead.



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