

FROLICKING IN THE OPIUM TRADE

The *Frolic* was constructed in Baltimore at 209 tons displacement weight, which means that the shipbuilders were paid just over \$5,000 for the hull alone. The hull form was that of the sharp pilot boat, a fast V-shaped rather than a generous U-shaped cross-section, and its two masts were mounted at an extreme rake angle, approaching 20 degrees. It was 97 feet from bow to stern and 24 feet ¹/₂ inches in beam width at its widest point, which means that it had a length-to-beam ratio of four, and was 10 feet deep, measuring amidships from the keelson up to the underside of the deck planking. It carried two main anchors and an auxiliary anchor, with three 90-fathom chains. Its deck had bulwarks, and initially there were two ships cannon on wheeled carriages, firing 9-pound balls through hinged gunports in these bulwarks. Fully rigged, the vessel set its owners back more than \$16,000, and by the time they had the ship completely outfitted and provisioned for its 1st voyage, their expenses had run to more than \$20,000.



1844

April: John James Dixwell (would he have been a descendant of the John Dixwell AKA James Davids who had been a regicide of King Charles I but had managed to marry and live out his life unmolested in New Haven, Connecticut?) arranged for William Gardner to build two clipper ships at [Baltimore](#), one a 140-ton schooner to be named the *Dart*, to be used as a coaster making [opium](#) deliveries along the China coast, and the other a 200-ton brig (actually it would weigh in at 209 tons displacement) to be named the *Frolic*, equipped with hermaphrodite rigging and sails, which is to say, square rigged on the foremast but fore-and-aft rigged on the mainmast, to be ready for a [China](#) run by about the beginning of September.¹



I have tried to describe a world system that ultimately linked Pomo Indians with Boston businessmen, Baltimore shipbuilders, Bombay opium merchants, smugglers on the coast of [China](#), and newly rich consumers in Gold Rush California. What follows, then, is a tale about a little known and awkward chapter in American history: a story of American participation in the [opium](#) trade.

Early in the spring of 1844, George Basil Dixwell wrote from Canton, China, to his brother, John James Dixwell, in Boston, asking him to have two fast vessels built for use on the China coast. George had been in China since the fall of 1841, when, at age 27, he joined Augustine Heard & Co., a newly established partnership of American commission merchants. The Dixwell brothers and Augustine Heard already had extensive commercial experience in India and China. Now George Dixwell, the company's opium specialist, wanted fast ships to give his firm a competitive edge in the drug trade. If the company had its own fleet to transport opium from India to China and to distribution points along the China coast, the increased drug consignments from native dealers in India would yield large profits from both transport fees and commissions on sales.

While the opium trade was prohibited by the Chinese government, it did not contravene any United States law of that time. Indeed, medicinal preparations containing opiates were legal and routinely consumed in nineteenth-century America by much of the population. In any case, American shippers were accustomed to walking a fine line between legal and illegal ventures. They had, after all, already been active in the slave trade, blockade running, and privateering. Further, as we shall see, by the second quarter of the nineteenth century opium had become the primary commodity by which the Western world balanced its trade with China.

1. Eventually the owner of the *Frolic*, John James Dixwell of [Boston](#), an associate of the [China](#) trading firm of Augustine Heard & Co., would have her re-rigged as a standard brig, which is to say, square rigged on both her masts.

September: Captain [Edward H. Faucon](#) took a $\frac{1}{5}$ th share in the *Frolic*.



December 1, Sunday: The Master Carpenter’s Certificate for the brig *Frolic* was placed on file in the [Baltimore](#) office of registry.

December 7, Saturday: The brig *Frolic*, a fast “Baltimore clipper” built by William Gardner and his brother of Fells Point, [Maryland](#), was completed and in the water and being provisioned. The hull weighted in at 209 tons of displacement, which means that the builders received just over \$5,000 at so much per ton. The hull form that had been chosen, and had been designed in the ship models submitted, was that of the sharp pilot boat, a fast V-shaped rather than a generous U-shaped cross-section. It was 97 feet from bow to stern and 24 feet 1/2 inches in beam width at its widest point, which means that it had a length-to-beam ratio of four, and was 10 feet deep, measuring amidships from the keelson up to the underside of the deck planking. Its two masts were to be mounted at an extreme rake angle, approaching 20 degrees. It carried two main anchors and an auxiliary anchor, with three 90-fathom chains. Its deck had bulwarks, and initially there were two ships cannon on wheeled carriages, firing 9-pound balls through hinged gunports in these bulwarks. Fully rigged, the vessel had set its owners back more than \$16,000, and by the time they would have their new ship completely outfitted and provisioned for its 1st voyage to Bombay, their expenses would have run to more than \$20,000.

1845

March 28, Friday: The *Frolic* arrived in Bombay to begin its work in the [opium](#) trade. She would be found capable of making three round trips per year between [India](#) and [China](#). Under favorable conditions she would be able sail from [Hong Kong](#) to Bombay in but 35 days. However, at the moment, she was delinquent, she had arrived in Bombay after schedule, and the opium that had been reserved for her had already been released to another buyer.



April 30, Wednesday: The Bombay [Times](#) ran an advertisement soliciting a cargo of [opium](#) for the *Frolic*.

INDIA

May 8, Thursday: [Isaac Hecker](#) wrote to the Reverend [Orestes Augustus Brownson](#).

Captain [Edward H. Faucon](#) (sketched below by a Chinese artist during this year) sailed the [Frolic](#) out of Bombay Harbor and headed for [Macau](#) anchorage.



To demonstrate her worthiness, he arranged to race against the *Anodyne*, a 275-ton brig formerly of the Royal Yacht Squadron but at that point in the possession of the merchant empire of Jardine, Matheson & Co. of [Hong Kong](#).

merchant
princes:



The near-shipload of [opium](#) which had been rounded up for this new ship from various sources had cost the owners more than \$400,000, although it was not monopoly opium produced in Patna and exported through Calcutta by the British East India Company, but opium of considerably lower grade produced independently in the Malwa uplands and exported through Bombay by Parsee (Indian Zoroastrian) and Hindu merchant trading houses. It was necessary to keep very close tabs on the quality of such bootleg drug, as it frequently had been “extended” by the addition of inert ingredients such as cowshit, fruit juices, clay, etc., a process which could be repeated a number of times by a number of different middlemen.

INDIA

May 11, Sunday: The *Anodyne* started for the anchorage at [Macau](#) on the 3rd day after the [Frolic](#) had departed from Bombay Harbor. (Fair’s fair: this three-day head start would be added in, of course, in determining the outcome of the sailing contest.)

INDIA

FROLIC

FROLIC

June 13, Friday: Captain [Edward H. Faucon](#) brought the *Frolic* to anchorage near [Macau](#) after a 4,470-mile passage from Bombay by way of Singapore. Her sailing time had been 34 days. If the *Anodyne* arrived anytime during the following two days, it would mean defeat.

INDIA



On the last leaves of a book of ITALIAN EXERCISES, the [Concord](#) schoolteacher Miss [Martha Emmeline Hunt](#) was keeping a journal of sorts prior to her suicide in the [Concord River](#). On this day her jottings included the following:

O, my God, art thou indeed my Father, who doth thus desert me!
O! What have I done? I must indeed be worse, than the worst of living beings, for thine infinite perfection hath condescended to the lowest sinners – but I am so lost! The earth is a thousand pointed dagger, without a friend who careth for me –myself against myself– everything arrayed in the bitterest reproach against me – and for what? Not for what I have done, but for what I have not done.

June 16, Monday: It was becoming clear that Captain [Edward H. Faucon](#)'s *Frolic* had won over the *Anodyne*.

INDIA
CHINA

June 25, Wednesday: The *Frolic* departed [Macau](#) for Bombay, in her hold some 8½ tons of silver ingots and coins worth more than \$270,000. That was nowhere near a full load and Captain [Edward H. Faucon](#) was able to transit the China Sea, against the southwest monsoon winds, in only 51 days, dropping anchor at Bombay on August 17th.

INDIA

August 17, Sunday: The *Frolic* arrived in Bombay Harbor with her some 8¹/₂ ton cargo of silver ingots and coins worth more than \$270,000. Captain [Edward H. Faucon](#)'s transit time was a mere 51 days, in radical contrast with a competitive vessel named the *Sultana* which had been heading in the same direction at the same time, which would be at sea not for these 51 days but for an embarrassing 108. There was no question about it, this skipper was a ruthless, relentless, driving skipper, one who would risk running his ship into a submerged rock or directly, under heavy canvas, into waves that might at any moment drive down its bow and swamp it. He would be able to make three full roundtrips per year between India and China, carrying relief for all the world's aches and pains.

CHINA
INDIA

1847

The arrival of steam transport made the speed of the drug-running Baltimore clipper *Frolic* suddenly as irrelevant as her rakish beauty. There were those, however, who were enamored of such loveliness, and their hearts at this point seem to have been ruling their heads. Rather than cutting costs and indulging in minimum maintenance, Captain [Edward H. Faucon](#) was rearming his vessel by getting rid of the two heavy ships cannon which fired 9-pound balls intended to open holes in the hulls of attacking ships, and replacing these cannon with two lighter antipersonnel cannon that could fire 6-pound sacks of shrapnel. He was also obtaining one dozen cap percussion blunderbusses on swivel mounts that could be set up at various points along the bulwarks each of which could discharge six musket balls per load, a dozen ship's muskets, and four braces of pistols, plus a dozen tomahawks and six cutlasses for close-in deck frolicking. No coastal pirates were to be allowed aboard! Also, he purchased six pairs of handcuffs so that his native crewmembers would not be tempted to rebel against his authority.²



2. It was apparently a rather ordinary practice to use iron handcuffs to subdue an unruly person of color. According to the journal of [Friend Thomas B. Hazard](#) or Hafsard or Hasard of [Kingston, Rhode Island](#), also known as "Nailer Tom," at one point he was asked to fashion a pair of handcuffs with which to confine a crazy negress named Patience.

January 26, Tuesday: The steamer *Sir Charles Forbes* left Bombay for the coast of China with 400 chests of Malwa [opium](#) balls. It would soon be obvious to all that the lower [insurance](#) rates on such fast new steamboat traffic would soon drive the clippers, such as the *Frolic*, entirely out of the drug transport business:

1847 Cost of Shipping a \$500 Chest of [Opium](#) Balls from [India](#) to [China](#)

	Clipper	Steamer
Freight rate	\$6. ⁰⁰	\$12. ²²
Insurance	\$12. ⁵⁰	\$5. ⁰⁰
TOTAL	\$18. ⁵⁰	\$17. ²²



In all likelihood the Wesleyan missionary [Robert Spence Hardy](#) was not aboard this particular vessel. However, we do know that it was during this year that he returned from [Ceylon](#) to England.



1849

July: Since the *Frolic* had become obsolete as an [opium](#) runner and Captain [Edward H. Faucon](#) had gone negative about having personal funds tied up in an obsolescent vessel, at this point the Boston company for which he worked sought to guarantee his further cooperation by buying out the skipper's 1/5th of the vessel.



August 14, Tuesday: Caught in a typhoon, Captain [Edward H. Faucon](#) had to chop off the masts of the *Frolic* in order to save it from being driven ashore by the winds. The rigging would need to all be replaced after towing the vessel to [Hong Kong](#). During the repairs it would be found that her bottom also needed to be re-coppered, and a rotten portion of her keelson would be replaced.

CHINA

[Henry Root Colman](#) had sailed again for England for his health, but died on this day in Islington, England soon after going ashore.

December 5, Wednesday: On its front page, [Elizur Wright, Jr.](#)'s Boston Daily Chronotype made a final mention of [Henry Thoreau](#) while remarking the “irrepressible good humor and wit” to be found in James Russell Lowell’s review in the Massachusetts Quarterly Review of a “pleasant book on the Concord and Merrimack.”

The *Frolic* sailed one last time from the port of [Hong Kong](#) on the coast of [China](#) to the port of Bombay on the coast of [India](#) to pick up a cargo of [opium](#). The plan was that after this last trip she would be loaded with luxury items, taken to California, and, if the proper opportunity arose, sold there as no longer large enough or fast enough for the opium trade.³



FROLIC

FROLIC

1850

May 21, Tuesday: The *Frolic* arrived in Canton from Bombay with a full load of Malwa [opium](#).

INDIA
CHINA

May 30, Thursday: The *Frolic* was moved from Canton to [Hong Kong](#) anchorage.

CHINA

June 7, Friday: The *Frolic*, under Captain [Edward H. Faucon](#), in the service of Samuel Russell & Co. of [Shanghai](#) and [Boston](#), left [Hong Kong](#) destined for San Francisco. This opium-running is a period in [Richard Henry Dana, Jr.](#)'s favorite captain's life upon which Dana has not considered it important to report in any great detail, choosing instead to report extensively on the putative disappearance of a "French John" character he had put in his "boys' book" who definitely did not appear on any of the ship's crew lists and who may very well have never existed outside the realm of the literary imagination.

TWO YEARS BEFORE THE MAST: Captain Faucon, who took out the *Alert*, and brought home the *Pilgrim*, spent many years in command of vessels in the Indian and Chinese seas, and was in our volunteer navy during the late war, commanding several large vessels in succession, on the blockade of the Carolinas, with the rank of lieutenant. He has now given up the sea, but still keeps it under his eye, from the piazza of his house on the most beautiful hill in the environs of Boston. I have the pleasure of meeting him often. Once, in speaking of the *Alert's* crew, in a company of gentlemen, I heard him say that that crew was exceptional: that he had passed all his life at sea, but whether before the mast or abaft, whether officer or master, he had never met such a crew, and never should expect to; and that the two officers of the *Alert*, long ago shipmasters, agreed with him that, for intelligence, knowledge of duty and willingness to perform it, pride in the ship, her appearance and sailing, and in absolute reliableness, they never had seen their equal. Especially he spoke of his favorite seaman, French John. John, after a few more years at sea, became a boatman, and kept his neat boat at the end of Granite Wharf, and was ready to take all, but delighted to take any of us of the old *Alert's* crew, to sail down the harbor. One day Captain Faucon went to the end of the wharf to board a vessel in the stream, and hailed for John. There was no response, and his boat was not there. He inquired of a boatman near, where John was. The time had come that comes to all! There was no loyal voice to respond to the familiar call, the hatches had closed over him, his boat was sold to another, and he had left not a trace behind. We could not find out even where he was buried.

3. The plan to grant Captain [Edward H. Faucon](#) power of attorney to sell the *Frolic* once it had reached San Francisco and been unloaded did not take account, of course, of a fact not known either to the firm members in Asia or to the firm members in Boston, that the Golden Gate was clogged at this point with vessels which had been abandoned by their crews so the crews could participate in the frenzy of gold digging. (It seems clear that the coming wreck of the vessel was not a staged thing, not intended merely for collection of [insurance](#) money.)





June 16, Sunday: The *Frolic* was out of Chinese waters and heading east into the Pacific. This was its first entirely legit cargo in a number of years of steady activity. The items included, in addition to luxuries such as bulk silk cloth, a great number of stoneware bowls and saucers of a quality suitable for the use of California's gold miners. The only drug being transported was ordinary alcohol: 84 cases of Edinburgh ale in long-necked green bottles. The cargo had been adequately insured by the West India [Insurance](#) Company and the Imperial Marine [Insurance](#) Company in accordance with its value at destination, and the vessel itself was at this point in its life cycle insured, by the Suffolk [Insurance](#) Company of Boston, for considerably more than its remaining real value.⁴

CHINA

4. Memo to insurers: never insure anything for more than it is worth to its owner. The owners would eventually estimate that their [insurance](#) receipts actually had brought them a 30% return on their investment from the trip, despite the vessel and its cargo being a total loss to the rockbound coast and then the waves of salvagers!

July 25, Friday: In the dark of the night, on the northern coast of California, Captain [Edward H. Faucon](#)'s [Frolic](#) was wrecked.⁵



Catherine Faucon had wanted her father remembered for his public life, as the dashing young captain portrayed by Richard Henry Dana, Jr., in *TWO YEARS BEFORE THE MAST* and as a volunteer shipmaster in the Union navy during the Civil War. To accomplish this, she had destroyed her father's records of his career in [China](#). She would have been horrified to learn that 23 years after her death Jim Kennon, a weekend scuba diver hoping to spear a lingcod, had discovered the wreck of the [Frolic](#), her father's Baltimore-built [opium](#) clipper.

August 5, Tuesday: The [Daily Alta California](#) reported the wreck of the brig [Frolic](#).



Illustration of Frolic by S. F. Manning.

5. The skipper would be able to demonstrate that he had been sadly misled by his chart, a Chinese copy of Norie's "North Pacific" based upon the survey of the coastline which had been undertaken in 1792-1793 by George Vancouver, for the point at which the ship struck the rock was according to that chart all of 35 miles out in the deep and unblemished sea, and as the ship's log showed that they had been approaching the coastline at night in the fog with the expectable excess of caution, traveling obliquely and slowly and keeping a lookout and attempting to sound a bottom with a line and weight. The owners would have no reason to get spiffy with this skipper who had been their long-term and faithful employee, as they actually suffered no financial loss whatever: they would eventually estimate that their [insurance](#) receipts had brought them a 30% return on investment, despite the vessel and its cargo being a total loss to the rockbound coast and then to the waves of salvagers. Had the wreck not occurred, **then** there would have been financial loss, as there would have been no market whatever at this point in time along the California coastline, for such a vessel!



FROLIC

FROLIC



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"It's all now you see. Yesterday won't be over until tomorrow and tomorrow began ten thousand years ago."

- Remark by character "Garin Stevens"
in William Faulkner's INTRUDER IN THE DUST



Prepared: November 25, 2013

ARRGH AUTOMATED RESEARCH REPORT
GENERATION HOTLINE



This stuff presumably looks to you as if it were generated by a human. Such is not the case. Instead, upon someone's request we have pulled it out of the hat of a pirate that has grown out of the shoulder of our pet parrot "Laura" (depicted above). What these chronological lists are: they are research reports compiled by ARRGH algorithms out of a database of data modules which we term the Kouroo Contexture. This is data mining. To respond to such a request for information, we merely push a button.



FROLIC

FROLIC

Commonly, the first output of the program has obvious deficiencies and so we need to go back into the data modules stored in the contexture and do a minor amount of tweaking, and then we need to punch that button again and do a recompile of the chronology – but there is nothing here that remotely resembles the ordinary “writerly” process which you know and love. As the contents of this originating contexture improve, and as the programming improves, and as funding becomes available (to date no funding whatever has been needed in the creation of this facility, the entire operation being run out of pocket change) we expect a diminished need to do such tweaking and recompiling, and we fully expect to achieve a simulation of a generous and untiring robotic research librarian. Onward and upward in this brave new world.

First come first serve. There is no charge.
Place your requests with <Kouroo@kouroo.info>.
Arrgh.