

Pirates & Privateers

by Robert Bachand

Part III - New York Privateers 1698-1748

In this issue, contributing writer Robert Bachand continues his five-part series titled "New York Privateers 1698 - 1748." Part IV deals with "Privateers and the American Revolution," and Part V relates to "Privateers and the War of 1812."

This series promises to be both educational and highly entertaining.

enemy merchant ships in the Caribbean was far more profitable than in the Maritime Provinces.

On September 30, 1697 the English and French signed a peace treaty ending King William's War, but they were soon engulfed in another conflict, Queen Anne's War. It lasted from 1702 to 1713. During this period, 18 privateers sailed out of New York, capturing or destroying 44 enemy vessels.

In 1705 successful Rhode Island privateer, Captain Tongrelou, backed by New York merchants, purchased a 200-ton galley, the *Cole and Bean*. It was armed with 18 guns and renamed *New York Galley*. A few privateers were built specifically as raiders, but like most, the *New York Galley* was a converted merchant ship. Holes were cut through the wooden, upper edges (gunnels) to accommodate the ship's cannon, and cargo spaces below were converted into less-than-adequate sleeping quarters. Food stores, grog, and other supplies were part of the investment cost; arms and ammunition were frequently provided by Assemblies.

The *New York Galley* sailed out to sea past Sandy Hook in December of 1705, joined by a privateer cutter under the command of Captain Peniston. Once off Barbados, they were joined by a Dutch privateer out of Curacao. As was customary, the three would share equally in the profits of their ventures.

The Dutch privateer was first to succeed in capturing an enemy ship, a French sloop loaded with cocoa. It was not unusual for a privateering sloop to carry 60 to 70 crewmen. A larger privateer could initially have a complement of 120 (depending on space) or more crewmen. This was to ensure that when a ship was captured, some of the crew would take over the prize and sail it to a friendly port. The French sloop was sailed to New York.

Peniston captured a Spanish privateer while Tongrelou, together with the Dutch privateer, seized a French merchant ship laden with sugar. A later capture by the *New York Galley* netted a small sloop that was renamed *Revenge*. It was added to the small raiding fleet. The *Revenge* proved to be a great asset. Under the command of Nathaniel Burchett, the sloop, which was armed with only six guns, took on a heavily-armed

Spanish ship off Cuba. Despite the odds, Burchett managed to vanquish the enemy ship and take on its cargo of wine and brandy.

On September 19, 1706 the *New York Galley* entered New York Harbor fresh from a highly successful undertaking. She and her fellow privateers had captured 11 enemy vessels - the investors, captains, and crewmen found themselves well compensated for the nine-month cruise.

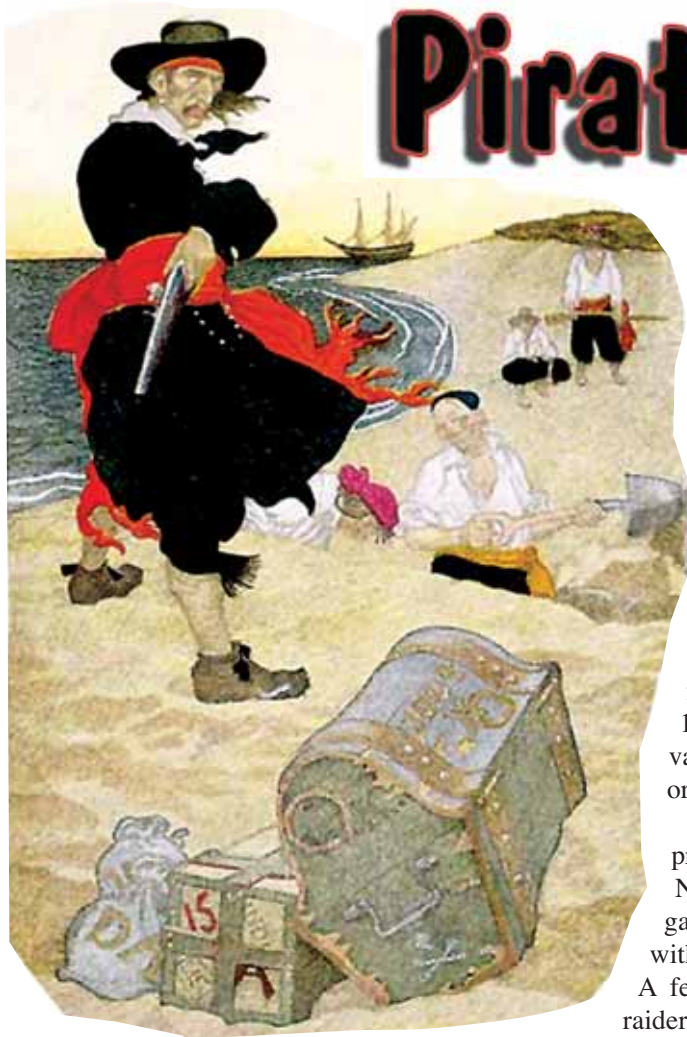
Queen Anne's War ended on April 1, 1713 with the Peace of Utrecht, but with scarcely time for a hiccup, the English and French were at it again in 1744. This time it was King George's War and New York's investors were only too happy to back the profit-making privateers. On July 1, 1744, just four months after the onset of the conflict, four locally funded privateers sailed out of the harbor.

Within weeks the four New York privateers had intercepted a French convoy, capturing six vessels. On August 8, 1744 they returned triumphant to New York Harbor with their prize ships. When the vessels and their cargo had been sold off, they brought in a profit of some £24,000. As a result of the quick success, more investors jumped onboard and by the following year, 13 privateer vessels had been equipped and commissioned through the Port of New York.

Historian James Lydon estimated that fully one-sixth of New York's population at that time was in some way engaged directly or indirectly in privateering. For crewmen aboard a privateer, the rewards could be enormous. Provided that they survived, they often collected 100 or more pounds after just a few months' cruise. In the event of the death of a crewman, the profits went to the widow.

By the end of King George's War in 1748, approximately 245 enemy ships were seized or destroyed by New York privateers. They continued to serve the English Crown during the French and Indian War, and in a few more years, their experience would serve them well in the nation's War of Independence from the English.

Pirates & Privateers, Part IV will look at the early efforts of private-men-of-war in aiding America's War of Independence.



During the early 1670s, while Captain Kidd was ashore on the island of Nevis, his crewmen took possession of his ship, the *Blessed William*. The vessel had been commissioned as a privateer by the English governor of Nevis; this allowed Kidd, a pirate, to legally raid any French merchant whose path he crossed. Booty recovered from capture of such a ship was then divided among the captain and crew with a portion going to the English government. But of recent days, *Blessed William* had seen more action in protecting British naval ships - something that provided tremendous risk, but no prizes (see *Pirates & Privateers*, Part I). The crew thus took over the ship to return to the more lucrative business of pirating.

In 1690 *Blessed William* sailed into the Port of New York where it found a ready market for its booty. At the time the English and French were still at war, but very few of the colonial merchant ships were participating in the conflict as privateers. For William Mason, captain of *Blessed William*, privateering was an opportunity to legitimize his ship's activities.

Jacob Leisler (the self-appointed head of New York Colony), expecting big profits from the venture, was quick to commission Captain Kidd's former ship and crewmen along with two other New York merchant ships as privateers. The New York privateers, under the leadership of Mason, sailed up the eastern coast to the French colony of Port Royal (Nova Scotia), where they went ashore and raided the fur trading and fishing settlement. Ketches were loaded with furs and liquor, but before they were able to reach New York, they were intercepted and the goods were re-taken by French privateers.

The New Yorkers also raided colonial French fishing villages, carrying off cured fish and capturing several fishing vessels, but when the prizes were divided among investors, captains, crewmen, and taxes, the booty barely paid for expenses. It was obvious to everyone that raiding

