

A Brief History of the Sailing Brig Last Known as the Piratical Slaver *Guerrero*

By Corey Malcom
Mel Fisher Maritime Museum
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The Spanish piratical slaving brig Guerrero was wrecked December 19, 1827 on a reef near Key Largo, Florida. Its tragic and dramatic loss was quite newsworthy in its day and is a relatively well documented event. Because it was a pirate vessel, though, its origins and mode of operations are not as well understood. Through the survey of a wide range of newspapers and governmental documents, the brig's career before 1827 is less ambiguous. Its origins and many of its earlier incarnations are now evident. This knowledge will aid any future research concerning the vessel and its remains.

Introduction

This is the account of an early 19th century sailing brig, which, in its last incarnation after a many-year career, was known as the Spanish piratical slaver *Guerrero*. As such, it was wrecked while carrying a cargo of 561 African people for sale to the plantations of Cuba. *Guerrero* met its doom on December 19th, 1827 after the British Navy schooner HMS *Nimble* intercepted it while patrolling waters near the Bahamas for illegal slavers. A chase began near Orange Cay in the western Bahamas, and ended a few hours later when both ships struck the shallow, hard bottom at Carysfort Reef, near Key Largo, Florida. The impact sank *Guerrero* in the shallows, drowning 41 of the captive Africans. The *Nimble* was luckier; with much difficulty it was eventually floated free.

The story did not end there, though. After wreckers came to the aid of both ships, the *Guerrero*'s piratical crew took two of them their next victims. After these good Samaritans rescued the crew and nearly 400 of the Africans, they were hijacked and forced to Cuba. Those on the damaged *Nimble* could only watch. Ultimately, many of the pirates escaped, and most of their human cargo was sold. *Nimble* did eventually make its way to Key West with 121 of the rescued Africans. After a long period of living as virtual slaves, those that survived were taken to Liberia to begin life anew.¹

By the sheer nature of its illicit, outlaw enterprise, the history of the *Guerrero* (at least before its relatively well-documented loss) has been rather murky, and challenging to reconstruct. Because it operated on the fringes of society, basic facts such as its origins, how and where it was operated, and by whom, have all been difficult to uncover. Despite the challenges, enough is found about this vessel to begin to understand most of its history, and the times in which it sailed.

The sailing life of the brig last known as *Guerrero* ended on December 19th, 1827, when it smashed headlong into a reef near Key Largo. It is this last incarnation of the vessel - as a piratical slave ship - that is the best place to begin to unravel its much longer, and more complex story.

¹ Historian Gail Swanson has recently published a book, *The Slave Ship Guerrero*, (Infinity Press, 2006), which nicely summarizes the saga from the time of the ship's sinking, to what became of the African survivors' lives in Liberia.

The Piratical Voyages

On June 5th, 1826, a large Spanish brig left Havana harbor for the coast of Africa. The British mixed commission agents Henry T. Kilbee and William S. Macleay, whose mission was to monitor clandestine traffic to Africa, noted she was the "...Brig 'Pepe,' Don José Gomez Master, well armed, and with a Crew, as we have heard, of upwards of 80 men."² The *Pepe* was up to no good. It was one of at least 15 vessels that left Havana for Africa that year, and it was well understood that ships sailing for there were usually going for just one thing – captive Africans.³ Though Spain had completely outlawed the slave trade by 1820, and had an agreement with England to jointly police any illegal efforts, its colony Cuba was only demanding more slave labor. Plantations on the island were in the process of shifting from coffee to the more lucrative sugar; a product that required three times the number of workers to make.

Even worse, because the slave trade was illegal, it fell under the sway of pirates. It was well understood that the crew of the *Pepe*, like those on many such ships, were bound to no law and planned on robbing any vessel they encountered of whatever they wanted to take. Looking at the historical record, it appears it wasn't long before they got started.

Just a few days after the *Pepe* left Havana, an attack occurred on the Schooner *Vesta*. The *Vesta* had left St. George's, Bermuda on the 1st of June, bound for Norfolk, Virginia. On the 8th of June, "a Spanish brig of war of 250 to 300 tons, then about four miles off" fired a gun at the schooner to bring her to. The brig sent a boat with an "officer (supposed to be the captain) the coxswain, and six men (one of whom appeared to be American) armed with muskets, pistols, cutlasses and knives." This hostile crew boarded the *Vesta* and proceeded to rob her "of nearly all her provisions, clothing, books, a barrel of lemons, a new hawser of about 90 fathoms, oars, and several other things." The pirates claimed they were 35 days from Cadiz, but wouldn't say to where they were bound.⁴

Just under seven weeks later, along the coast of Liberia, on the other side of the Atlantic, a remarkably similar vessel pulled off a pair of daring robberies. On the evening of July 26th a large brig with yellow sides, flying the French flag, and mounting at least 14 guns, came into the Cape Mesurado Roads. It anchored within a musket shot of the American brig *John* of Portland, Maine. Also anchored nearby was the American schooner *Bona* from Baltimore. Both were there to trade at the fledgling American colony.

The next morning two boats left the brig, with one making its way toward the *Bona*; the other toward the *John*. Close to twenty men boarded the *Bona*, led by an officer in a Colombian uniform. Though the officer spoke no English, some of the crew apparently did. Armed with a variety of weapons, they proceeded to rob the schooner and its crew. Over a period of six hours

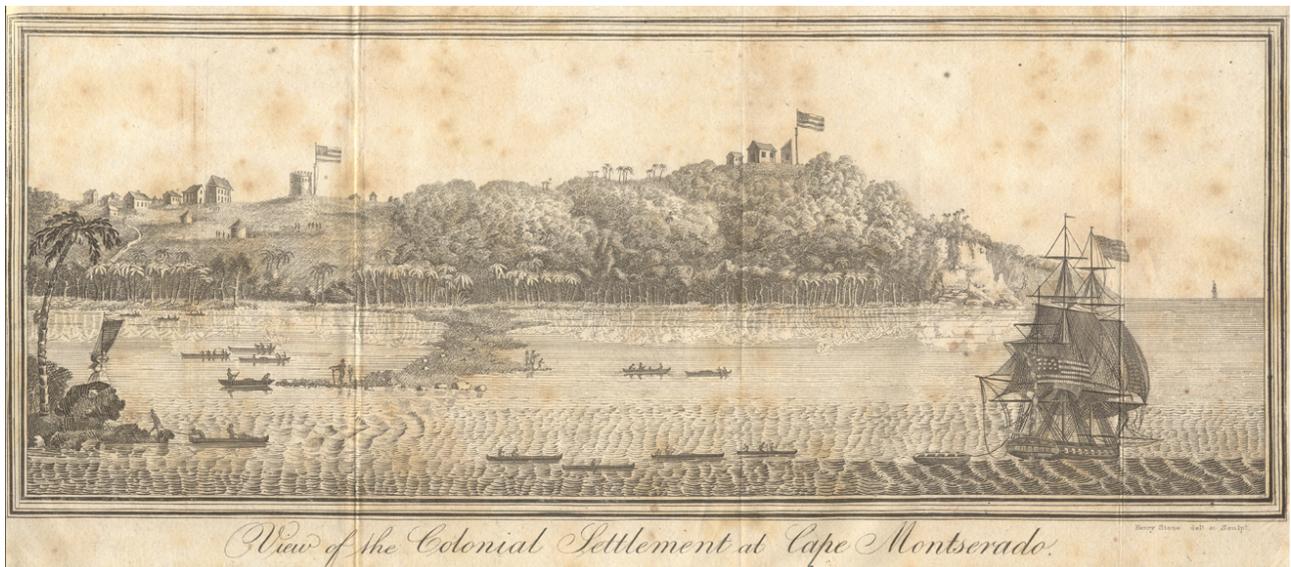
² H.T. Kilbee and W.S. Macleay to Secretary George Canning, from Havana, June 14, 1826. In *Class A Correspondence with Foreign Powers Relating to the Slave Trade, 1826-1827*. Presented to Both Houses of Parliament. R.G. Clarke, London, 1827.

³ *List of Arrivals and Departures for the Coast of Africa, during the year 1826*. 2nd Enclosure in H.T. Kilbee and W.S. Macleay to Secretary George Canning, from Havana, January 1, 1827. In *Class A Correspondence with Foreign Powers Relating to the Slave Trade, 1827*. Presented to Both Houses of Parliament. R.G. Clarke, London, 1828.

⁴ All information about this particular robbery comes from the *Baltimore Patriot* of June 16, 1826. There is nothing to tie the event directly to the *Pepe*, but the circumstantial evidence is intriguing. The place where this occurred is about where a fast sailing brig out three days from Havana to Africa would be, the size of the vessel is similar, and the method of operation is strikingly similar to later robberies committed by the *Pepe*.

the pirates stole ivory, wax, two boxes of soap, barrels of flour, 1000 lbs of tobacco, 90 pieces of bafta cloth, between 1500 and 1800 dollars in silver, 15 ½ ounces of gold, eight doubloons, clothes, a watch, a spy glass, a thermometer, and “every article that appeared of any value.”⁵

A similar number of men armed with cutlasses, muskets, knives, and other weapons, and again led by an officer “wearing the Colombian button,” boarded the *John*. They first demanded the ship’s papers, to which they paid little attention. Other, similarly armed pirates from the boat that had gone to the *Bona* joined the group. The crew of the *John* was ordered below, where each man was held by a pirate under the threat of a drawn cutlass. Then, for the better part of the day, the ship was plundered. The bandits eventually made off with an untold quantity of ivory, \$3000 cash, six hogsheads of tobacco, a quantity of cloth, and other miscellaneous goods of value. They also took all the clothes from the officers and crew, except for what they were wearing. The cabins of both vessels were stripped of their furniture. Finally, satisfied with their plunder, the pirates returned to their vessel, and left the bay.⁶



“View of the Colonial Settlement at Cape Montserado.”
From *African Repository and Colonial Journal*, March, 1827.
MFMHS Schimmel Archives.

The people at Mesurado, thinking the outlaw brig was a French man-of-war, let it into the harbor. Later that evening the brig exited and again approached the bay’s anchorage, which caused quite a stir. Fearing a repeat attack, the mate of the *Bona* – to make a quick escape and to prevent the capture of the ship – cut the anchor cables. The crew of the *John* began firing volleys

⁵ *Baltimore Patriot*, October 31, 1826.

⁶ *Ibid.* The crews of the *Bona* and *John* were lucky to have escaped physical injury. It was reported in the *Salem Gazette* of October 5, 1827 that Gomez was part of a group that bragged to a cellmate in a Cuban jail in 1825 that they had murdered 20 people, and coldly pronounced, “Americans and Englishmen were all cowards, because before they were killed, they would shed tears, and say they had wives and children that would be left destitute.”

of musket shot at the pirate brig, and people from shore headed out to offer their assistance. Having had enough, the outlaws sailed into the open sea and disappeared.⁷

On August 23, *Bona* sailed to Freetown, in the nearby British colony of Sierra Leone, to procure new anchors and cables. There, they also reported their assault. Eager to put a stop to such predations, the Royal Navy vessels *Lively* and *African* left Freetown on the 28th to pursue the “Colombian Pirate.” On September 6, they found the brig some 150 miles to the southward, near the Gallinas River, and began to make their approach. Unfortunately, the pirates took advantage of a blinding tropical downpour that sprang up as night fell and made a successful getaway.⁸

As word of the brazen robberies spread farther along the African Coast, the identity of the mysterious yellow brig began to come into focus. The head of the colony at Liberia, Jehudi Ashmun, wrote “The brig is discovered to be a slaver – and is a sample of nearly all the slavers at present to be found on the coast.”⁹ This was later confirmed by the American consul at Port Praya in the Cape Verde Islands, who wrote in a letter, “the Spanish brig, which robbed the American vessels *Bona* and *John* at Mesurado, answered the description of the *Pepe*, (late *San Josef*), captain *Joze Gomez*, which touched here, August 14, refitted and sailed again 26th on a pretended slave voyage.”¹⁰ A portion of his information is reiterated – along with a surprising revelation regarding the vessel’s pre-piratical career – in a dispatch from the British Consulate at St. Jago, who wrote, “a Spanish Brig, named the “*General Pepe*,” commanded by Captain *Joze Gomez* mounting 14 guns, with a complement of 80 Men, arrived at this anchorage on the 14th instant, to refit, previously to her departure for the Gallinas for a cargo of slaves for the Havannah. This vessel was a successful Privateer in the late American War, then named the “*Munro*,” and a very fast sailer.”¹¹ And from the Cape Verde Islands, the *Pepe/San Jose* did indeed sail to the Gallinas, where it took onboard 600 Africans.¹²

Late that fall, the brig made its way back to Cuba, where its arrival did not go unnoticed. Commissioner Macleay noted in a dispatch to London, “On the 16th instant, the Spanish brig ‘*San Jozé*,’ *Don Joze Gomez*, master, arrived here in ballast, as from the Cape de Verde Islands...” and later adding, “The brig ‘*San Jozé*’ sailed for the coast of Africa on the 5th of June last, under the name of ‘*Pepe*.’”¹³ Macleay also reported what he was hearing of the true mission of the *San Jose*; that she had landed at Puerto Escondido “no less than 570 negroes.”¹⁴ As both a pirate and a slaver, the *Pepe/San Jose*’s 1826 voyage was a complete – and wholly criminal – success.

⁷ *National Intelligencer*, November 2, 1826.

⁸ *The Times* (London). November 16, 1826.

⁹ *The Life of Jehudi Ashmun, Late Colonial Agent in Liberia* by Ralph R. Gurley, James C. Dunn Washington, DC, 1835.

¹⁰ *Baltimore Patriot*, November 21, 1826.

¹¹ J.P. Clarke to John Bidwell, August 16, 1826. In *Class B Correspondence with Foreign Powers Relating to the Slave Trade, 1826-1827*. Presented to Both Houses of Parliament. R.G. Clarke, London, 1827.

¹² Gurley, *op. cit.*

¹³ W.S. Macleay to Secretary George Canning, from Havana, November 18, 1826. In *Class A Correspondence with Foreign Powers Relating to the Slave Trade, 1827*. Presented to Both Houses of Parliament. R.G. Clarke, London, 1828. Of 111 vessels openly sailing for the African Coast in the five years previous, none returned with merchandise – they were all “in ballast.”

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

How Gomez and his brig were occupied for the first part of 1827 isn't documented, but clearly plans were being made, and by the end of July they were ready for more action. Again, Kilbee and Macleay watched as it, and other slavers streamed out of Havana towards Africa. They reported,

"The illicit slave trade from this port which has been for some time on the decline, appears to be about to resume its former activity, no less than four Spanish vessels having during the present month sailed for the coast of Africa, and others we understand being in a state of preparation. The vessels which have sailed are the brigs "Guerrero" and "Gallo," and the schooners "Lambery," and "Indagadora," of which Joze Gomez, Ramon Gonzalez, Pedro Antonio Salduono, and Santiago Manzana, are respectively the masters.

The "Guerrero" is an old slave-trader, and was formerly called the "San Joze." She is well armed, and has a crew of ninety men; and there can be little doubt that her purpose is to plunder of their cargoes of slaves any weaker vessels that she may fall in with on the coast of Africa. This, we have heard, is a very general practice of the Spanish slave vessels fitted out at this port..."¹⁵

Clearly, nothing about the brig had changed, except for its name.¹⁶

The details of *Guerrero's* predations along the African coast during its 2nd voyage are not known, but when the brig fell in with the HMS *Nimble*, and wrecked on the Florida Reef in December of 1827, it was clear that, up to that point at least, things had gone as planned. With 561 Africans onboard, it was obvious that Gomez and his crew had done what they set out to do. Kilbee and Macleay wrote once again to London about the *Guerrero*; "We understand that she carried her intention fully into effect, and that she not only plundered slave vessels, but some other Merchant-ships; and accordingly at the time of her capture and loss she had a valuable Cargo of European merchandize on board."¹⁷

Even after being chased onto the reef, with *Guerrero* sunk and on its side, Gomez didn't give up. In his darkest hour, he turned desperation to advantage.¹⁸ He and most of his crew, along with the majority of the Africans, had been placed aboard American wrecking vessels that had come to their aid. In the night, they hijacked two of these rescue vessels, and forced them to sail to Cuba. There they landed at the port of Santa Cruz, midway between Havana and Matanzas, and sold 400 of the captive Africans into slavery.¹⁹

¹⁵ Henry T. Kilbee and W.S. Macleay to George Canning, July 31, 1827. *In Class A Correspondence with the British Commissioners at Sierra Leone, The Havannah, Rio de Janeiro, and Surinam, Relating to the Slave Trade, 1827.* Presented to Parliament, 1828. R.G. Clarke, London.

¹⁶ It was not uncommon for vessels in these illegal enterprises to frequently change names. It was simply a way of trying to stay a step ahead of the law.

¹⁷ Henry T. Kilbee and W.S. Macleay to the Earl of Dudley, January 3, 1828. *In Class A Correspondence with the British Commissioners at Sierra Leone, The Havannah, Rio de Janeiro, and Surinam, Relating to the Slave Trade, 1828.* Presented to Parliament, 1829. R.G. Clarke, London.

¹⁸ Though situations like this were a hazard of the trade, this must have been particularly devastating for Gomez. His was generally regarded as an exceptionally fine ship. "The "Guerrero" or "San Jose" was by far the largest and finest Vessel, and considered to be the best sailer employed in the Slave-trade from this port," wrote Kilbee and Macleay to the Earl of Dudley.

¹⁹ *Deposition of William Wright, in the Case of the "Guerrero."* 2nd Enclosure in Henry T. Kilbee and W.S. Macleay to The Earl of Dudley, January 3, 1828.

What could be salvaged from *Guerrero*'s remains was sold at auction in Key West. "Among the goods found in the wreck of this vessel were German platillas, French cambrics, thread laces, gold dust and ivory; and there is little doubt that she obtained these goods by *piracy*," wrote an anonymous Havana correspondent about the salvaged goods on February 10.²⁰ And with this, the *Guerrero* came to an end. But Jose Gomez was undaunted. Despite whatever hardships he had faced, he could not resist the lure of fortune that was possible through the combination of piracy and the illicit slave trade. The same Havana writer noted, "Her [*Guerrero*'s] captain, the same who plundered the schooner Bona, of Baltimore, at Messurado, has already gone again to Africa in a sharp brig of ten or twelve guns, to repeat his predatory enterprise."²¹

The American Privateer Brig *James Monroe*

When the British consul at St. Jago alluded to an earlier incarnation of the *Guerrero*, and wrote, "This vessel was a successful Privateer in the late American War, then named the "Munro," he revealed an unexpected and startling dimension to an already remarkable story. Because of their extra-legal status, the specific histories of pirate ships are not always well documented, and there had been little reason to think otherwise about this one. Finding out, though, where and when the ship came into being, and what it did in its earlier days appeared to be lost to time. Fortunately, this small, offhand comment buried in governmental correspondence provides the telltale bit of evidence that allows this vessel's previously murky past to be opened to exploration.

Considering it was an Englishman making this reference to "the late American War," the British Consul was certainly talking about the War of 1812, the last war between those two nations, which had ended 11 years earlier in 1815. Searching lists of British, Canadian, and American privateers, only one possible match to the name "Munro" turns up, and that is the American privateer *James Monroe*.²² Significantly, what can be ascertained about the *Monroe* matches well with what is known about the *Guerrero*. All evidence suggests it is the same ship. It is interesting to note, and this perhaps speaks only to the nature of the times, the *James Monroe* shared nearly as violent a career as the *Guerrero*.

The *James Monroe* (also spelled *Munroe*, or *Munro*) was built by New London, Connecticut shipbuilder Amasa Miller. It was 323 and 38/95 tons, with a length of 110 feet 2 inches, a beam of 27 feet 5 inches, and a draft of 11 feet and 11 ½ inches. It had one deck, and a square stern. It mounted an appropriately terrifying dragon as a figurehead. The *James Monroe* was owned by Daniel Sullivan, Rennselaer Havens, and Frederick Jenkins, and its home port was New York City. It was captained by Joseph Skinner.²³

The *James Monroe* made its first documented voyage when it left New London on July 26, 1813 for New York. "A new brig, belonging to Capt. Skinner, came out of New London in co.

²⁰ *Baltimore Patriot*. February 26, 1828. Cambrics and platillas are types of cloth.

²¹ *Ibid*. It would appear that Gomez was aboard the *Vengador*, which, according to Kilbee and Macleay in a dispatch to the Earl of Dudley dated February 1, was the only brig to leave Havana for Africa in late January of 1828. It was said to be under the command of Joze Garay.

²² *Canadian Privateer vessels in the War of 1812* at www.chebucto.ns.ca/~jacktar/shiplist.html#1812, *Index of Royal Navy Vessels, 1800-1900* at <http://www.pbenyon.plus.com/18-1900/Index.html>, and *History of the American privateers, and letters-of-marque, during our war with England in the years 1812, '13 and '14*, by George Coggeshall, NY, 1856.

²³ Connecticut Ship Database, 1789-1939, *James Monroe* (Brig).
at <http://www.mysticseaport.org/Library/initiative/CuVessel.cfm?VesselId=105698>

with the Cutter [*Active*], and has arrived at Hell Gate,” announced the *Mercantile Advertiser*.²⁴ Once in New York, its arrival was met with some note, “The James Monroe is about 300 tons, and pronounced one of the best vessels that ever entered this port,” wrote *The Columbian* newspaper.²⁵

By late September, the *James Monroe* was advertising for an upcoming voyage to Holland. The advertisements that ran were soliciting space for cargo, and gave a fairly detailed description of the vessel, including that it was a new, pilot boat built hermaphrodite brig of 330 tons, armed with six 9 pound cannon, one 24 pound “long tom,” was “coppered to the bends,” and was to have a crew of 40.²⁶

It is not clear, though, if the trip to Holland ever happened. On October 18, the owners of the *James Monroe* submitted a petition to Secretary of State James Monroe for permission “for said Brig to cruize against the shipping and property of the enemies of the United States during the present War.”²⁷ Again, this document gives additional, specific details about the vessel. Its tonnage is listed quite precisely again as 323 and 38/95ths, the five guns supplemented by small arms, and the crew increased to fifty men. The request to operate as a privateer was granted, as is evidenced by a note in the Charleston, South Carolina shipping reports referring to the vessel as “the letter-of-marque hermaphrodite brig James Monroe” from New York.²⁸ The *Monroe* saw its first engagement as a privateer when it was chased by a British schooner near Charleston, but made an escape. It made its way down to Savannah, and left on a voyage for France in early January of 1814.²⁹

After time in France, the *Monroe* began its return on April 7th from L’Orient, a city on the Brittany Coast.³⁰ After a crossing of 44 days, the *Monroe* arrived at Savannah on May 23rd with twenty French passengers, a cargo of wine and brandy, governmental dispatches, and the latest political news. During the crossing the *James Monroe* took two unnamed English prizes, and, after taking what little cargo they had, burned them. The *Monroe* was also repeatedly pursued by Royal Navy vessels but always managed to escape.³¹

On December 6th the *James Monroe* sailed again from Savannah for France with a cargo of cotton. After unloading their cargo, the brig cruised through the Irish and English Channels for prizes. During the next month, the *James Monroe* saw its most successful cruise as a privateer, and managed to take four English prizes.³² The war ended during this voyage, with the Treaty of Ghent being ratified on February 17, 1815, but the word obviously did not reach the crew of the

²⁴ July 28, 1813.

²⁵ July 29, 1813.

²⁶ *New York Gazette and General Advertiser*, September 18, 1813. Similarly, *Guerrero* was “coppered to the bonds,” as noted in the *Savannah Georgian* of January 21, 1828 (transcribed by Gail Swanson; copy on file at the Mel Fisher Maritime Heritage Society). This means the lower hull was sheathed in copper up to the turn of the bilge, as a means of keeping shipworms at bay.

²⁷ This petition is transcribed in *The Department of State of the United States, Its History and Functions*, by Gaillard Hunt, New Haven, Yale University Press, 1914.

²⁸ *New York Commercial Advertiser*, November 18, 1813. A “letter of marque and reprisal” is what was issued by a government to a private agent, permitting them to act against enemy interests. When the agent was a ship, it was more commonly known as a “privateer.”

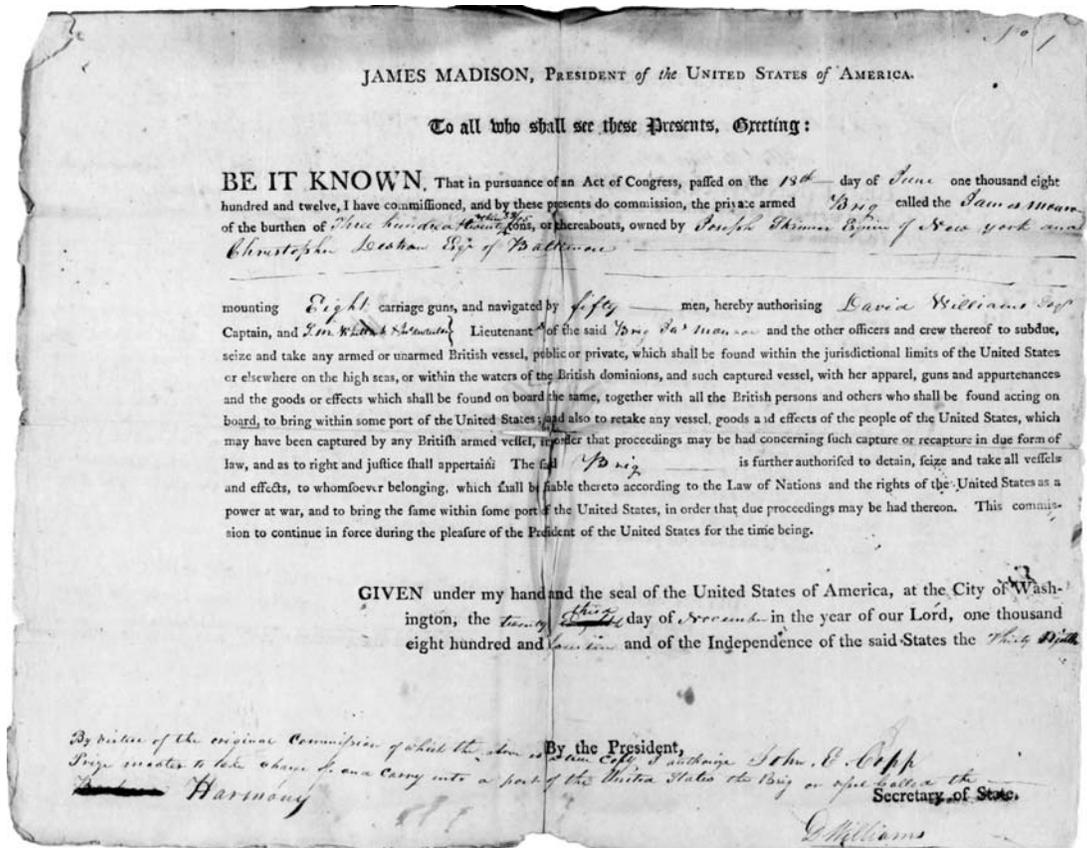
²⁹ *New England Palladium*, January 11, 1814.

³⁰ *Baltimore Patriot*, May 23, 1814.

³¹ *Daily National Intelligencer*, June 1, 1814.

³² *James Monroe (Armed Brig)*, *Journal Feb. 17 – March 18, 1815*. Mystic Seaports Manuscripts Division, Log 379.

James Monroe, because many of their prizes were captured after that date.³³ The first victim, named *Ann* (and one of two with that name) was a galliot loaded with a variety of goods. It was taken on February 15th, and brought into L'Orient on February 25, 1815. On March 2, the *Harmony*, sailing from Oporto, Portugal to London with a cargo of wine, was taken off Cape Finisterre. Two American and five French crewmen from the *Monroe* went aboard to man the prize. The English mate of the *Harmony* eventually convinced the Frenchmen to help him take the vessel back. On March 24th, near 43° 06' N and 27° 23' W, in the Atlantic between Spain and the Canary Islands, they did so and threw the American prize master overboard. *Harmony* made its way to Falmouth on April 7th to tell its tale. Remarkably, Capt. Skinner was able to later reclaim the vessel and its cargo from the British through a ruling of the Admiralty Court.³⁴ The second *Ann* and another vessel, the *Ashburton*, both sailing from Lisbon, were taken on March 5th. They were plundered and set free. Both arrived safely at Dartmouth on March 14.³⁵



Copy of 1814 Letter of Marque for Brig James Monroe authorizing prize master John E. Copp to carry the British Brig Harmony into a port of the United States.
US National Archives and Records Administration.

³³ The second article of the Treaty of Ghent did allow a grace period for vessels at sea. It was understood that those already under sail would not know the treaty had been signed, and any prizes they took during this period were allowed to stand.

³⁴ *Baltimore Patriot*, November 14, 1815.

³⁵ *Boston Gazette*, May 1, 1815.

The *Monroe* left Bordeaux on May 2, and arrived in New York on June 8th. The prize *Ann* also sailed to New York, where it arrived on June 15th with 40 tons of powder, 40 barrels of nails, and 40 barrels of herring.³⁶ Much as in 1814, the *James Monroe* brought important political news from Europe via newspapers and the word of Capt. Skinner. The *Ann* and its cargo were condemned on July 6, 1815. In August of 1815, goods from the *James Monroe* were being sold in Boston.³⁷

The *James Monroe* sailed again for France, but exactly when is not known. It arrived in the Chesapeake from Bordeaux on April 29, 1816 with a large variety of goods, but only after a very rough crossing.³⁸ A few weeks later, a Washington, DC merchantwoman named J. Doyne advertised as “direct from France” an exceptionally fancy group of items from the *Monroe* for sale at her store.³⁹

It appears the *James Monroe* made at least one more voyage to France. Again, when it left is not clear, but in early January, 1817, after a 45 day journey from Bordeaux via the Cordovan, the brig arrived at Washington under the command of a Capt. Little. It had an assorted cargo on board, and a passenger, J. Kennedy, who carried governmental dispatches from Paris for Washington.⁴⁰

From this point, it is not clear what became of the *James Monroe*. After the war, many more vessels were given this same name in honor of the man who was US Secretary of State and soon to be President. Confusingly, many of them were also brigs. One of these other *James Monroe*'s made history as the first regularly scheduled transatlantic packet liner, sailing for the Black Ball Company of New York.⁴¹ It made regular runs between New York and Liverpool from 1817 to 1821. By the early 1820's, a number of other vessels named *James Monroe* were sailing to Cuba. Which one of these, if any, would eventually become the *Guerrero* is not clear; obscuring any understanding as to how and why the brig was diverted into piracy.

Conclusion

Looking at what is known, the sailing vessel that started as the privateer *James Monroe* and ended as a piratical slaver *Guerrero* clearly made an impact on this world. Over its 14 years sailing throughout the Atlantic basin in a variety of incarnations, it brought together a wide range of people, ideas, and things - it carried cargo across the oceans; it helped steer the course of a war; it served as a platform for crime; and, most significantly, it altered the lives of hundreds, if not thousands, of people by carrying them into slavery. From Connecticut, to New York, Georgia, France, England, Cuba, Florida and Liberia, the people that traveled aboard this ship left their mark wherever they went.

Ultimately, the brig was wrecked, carrying dozens to their deaths. To this day it sits somewhere on the seafloor, broken and quietly waiting. When it is found, the collection of planks, nails, rigging, and other objects once known as *James Monroe*, *Pepe*, *San Jose* and

³⁶ *Poulson's American Daily Advertiser*, June 17, 1815.

³⁷ *Boston Gazette*, August 31, 1815.

³⁸ *Daily National Intelligencer*, May 2, 1816.

³⁹ *Daily National Intelligencer*, June 13, 1816.

⁴⁰ *The American Beacon and Commercial Diary*, January 10, 1817.

⁴¹ Robert G. Albion (1967) Planning the Black Ball Line, 1817. *The Business History Review*, Vol. 41, No. 1, pp. 104-107.

Guerrero will transform from narrative to physical reality. The long lost ship and all of its journeys will then take on new meanings that cannot yet be known. Certainly, though, it will bring an even-deeper understanding to an already fascinating history.

Note: Since 2003, the Mel Fisher Maritime Museum, in alliance with the RPM Nautical Foundation and the Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary Submerged Resources Inventory Team, has been conducting archaeological surveys in the areas near Carysfort Reef off North Key Largo where the Guerrero is believed to be lost. This paper was written to better understand what might be expected at the site. Special thanks go to Mr. J.J. Kennedy, who tracked down the log of the James Monroe and information relating to its construction. Those who are interested in the last days of the Guerrero and what happened to its people are encouraged to read Gail Swanson's Slave Ship Guerrero (Infinity Press, 2006).