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The Effects of the Embargo of 1807 on the District of Maine

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TRINITY COLLEGE

Thesis

THE EFFECTS OF THE EMBARGO OF 1807
ON THE DISTRICT OF MAINE

Submitted by

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(A.B., Hamilton College, 1956)

In Partial Fulfillment of Requirements for
the Degree of Master of Arts

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INTRODUCTION

The Embargo of 1807 was passed by the United States Congress on December 22nd of that year. It marked the culmination of American attempts to deal effectively with the warring powers of Europe and to prevent their depredations on American ships and seamen.

Beginning in 1793 France and England had waged intermittent warfare with each other, but the United States was able to develop its commerce during these years without much interference from these powers in Europe. Because of this unhampered development of trade America was the leading neutral shipping country in the world as the Nineteenth Century dawned.

Following a temporary cessation of hostilities the war in Europe was renewed with increased intensity after 1803. Both powers now attempted to strike at the other on the sea and the inevitable involvement of American shipping resulted. In 1806 Britain declared that the coast of Europe from the Elbe to the Brest was to be blockaded. Napoleon responded to this by declaring his own blockade of the British Isles. On November 11, 1807, England declared that henceforth all American shipping was excluded from ports closed to the British. This was

countered, in turn, by the French Milan Decree which declared that all ships having dealings with the English were now liable to confiscation.

American resentment toward England had been aroused when on June 22, 1807, a British ship had chased down and fired on an American warship, the Chesapeake. As a result twenty American sailors were killed or wounded. The attack had come after the captain of the Chesapeake refused to turn over alleged deserters from the British navy on his ship. Impressment of suspected deserters by the British was not uncommon, but the brutality of this act against an American warship had aroused great hostility in the United States towards the English.

Thomas Jefferson, as President of the United States during this difficult period, tried to maintain the young country's policy of neutrality, but as interference with American shipping by belligerents increased it became clear that neutrality was impossible and some retaliatory action had to be taken.

Under these circumstances Congress met late in 1807 to take action. Jefferson, wishing to avoid a war at all costs, had decided that the only way short of war to force the warring nations to respect American rights was a policy of commercial non-intercourse. Therefore, a willing Congress passed, on December 22, 1807, the first of a

series of acts to become known as the Embargo of 1807, which prohibited American trade with the rest of the world.¹

* * * * *

In 1807 Maine was inhabited by approximately 228,000 people located in towns scattered along the rugged sea-coast and up the numerous rivers. Politically it was a part of Massachusetts, as it had been since 1652. Most commonly referred to as the District of Maine, it was composed of seven counties which stretched from the Piscataquis River in the west to Eastport, across Passamaquoddy Bay from Canada, on the east.

The natural harbors, fine rivers and vast tracts of virgin timber had made Maine a leading shipping and ship-building region from the beginning of its history. As in the rest of New England, shipping and its associated industries had prospered in the 1790's and the early years of the first decade of the Nineteenth Century.

Therefore, although the District was largely a rural area in 1807, a large percentage of the population had a direct stake in the prosperous West Indian, Oriental and

¹ The actual vote was 82 in favor, 44 opposed and 16 who abstained in voting. Recorded in C.O. Paullin, Atlas of the Historical Geography of the United States (New York: Carnegie Institute of Washington and American Geographical Society of New York, 1932), p. 108.

European trade when the first news of the embargo was heard in the District.

The purpose of this paper is to discuss and evaluate the various effects of this fourteen month embargo on the District of Maine.

CHAPTER I

MAINE REACTION TO THE EMBARGO

The purpose of this chapter is to examine the effects of the Embargo of 1807 on the people of the District of Maine and to discuss the various reactions that they had to it.

One of the most common reactions by Mainites to the embargo was the formal letter of protest written to the Massachusetts Legislature and the President of the United States. The great majority of these formal statements of grievances appear to have been drawn up in the latter part of 1808 and early 1809. Beginning in the late summer of 1808 references to various town protests appear in newspapers and local histories with considerable frequency.

The most common procedure was for members of the town assembly to meet and draw up the letter of protest which stated what they felt to be their particular problems as a result of the embargo. The degree of criticism depended upon the town's location in regard to shipping, in the size of the town and in the political sympathies of the influential people in town.

The following is an example of a protest drawn up in September, 1808, by the inhabitants of Camden:

The citizens of Camden have hitherto submitted to the distress and embarrassment of the Embargo without opposition, and still influenced by the purest motives, their greatest sense of the love of their country never shall be found wanting in promoting the public safety and welfare; but the evils we are now experiencing and the dismal prospect before us make it, in our opinion, a duty incumbent on us to be no longer silent. Being thus situated in a new, rough, and in a great measure an uncultivated part of the Country, and depending on the fish and lumber remaining on our hands in a perishable condition, having no market for the one nor the other; added to this the severe restrictions on coasting trade, the Embargo presses peculiarly on your Petitioners, depriving them of the means of discharging their debts with punctuality, and of supporting themselves and families with decency.¹

When no relief of these problems was forthcoming the same people addressed a much stronger protest to the Massachusetts Legislature in January, 1809:

The embargo is an act which, in our opinion, strikes home at the civil rights of the people, and threatens a total subversion of our liberties. We are convinced the existing Embargo Laws cannot be carried into effect in this part of the Country except by military force, and we dread the consequences that may ensue from fire arms being put into the hands of unprincipled men acting under the authority of the officers of Government against the united and deliberate sentiments of the most respectable part of our citizens.²

In some of the protests there were hints of secession

¹ Reuel Robinson, History of Camden and Rockport, Maine (Camden: Camden Pub. Co., 1907), p. 136.

² Ibid.

if the disliked legislation was not removed. For example, the protest from Alfred, Maine:

We are the poor inhabitants of a small town . . . rendered poorer by the wayward, inconsistent policy of the general government; but life and liberty are as dear to us as to our opulent bretheren of the South, and we flatter ourselves that we have as much love of liberty and abhorrance of slavery as those who oppress us in the name of Republicanism. We love liberty in principle but better in practice. We cling to a union of the states as the rock of our salvation; and nothing but a fearful looking for of despotism would induce us to wish for a severance of the bond that unites us. But opposition did sever us from the British Empire; and what a long and continued repetition of similiar acts of the government of the United States would effect, God only knows.¹

The threat of nullification was also mentioned on at least one occasion. A protest from Hallowell stated that when those delegated to make laws exceed their powers granted by the Constitution the laws are null and void.²

The following is an example of a letter of protest written to President Jefferson by the people of a Maine town:

To the President of the United States.

The inhabitants of the town of Castine, in Town-meeting legally assembled, respectfully represent: That, habituated to commercial pursuits, and drawing their support and wealth from the ocean and from foreign countries, the laws laying an embargo

¹ printed in New England Palladium, Feb. 17, 1809.

² John B. McMaster, A History of the People of the United States (New York: D. Appleton & Co., 1892), III, 329.

are peculiarly distressing to them. Although they have doubted the expediency of those laws, and even their constitutionality--when imposed for a limited time,--yet they have hitherto waited with patience, in the hope that our differences with the great powers of Europe might be so adjusted, that it could be consistent with the policy of our government to remove the embargo. That this distressing measure has had any favorable influence on our foreign relations, does not at present appear; but that your petitioners have endured heavy losses, their idle ships and perishing commodities unfortunately bear positive testimony . . . They therefore pray your Excellency that the embargo may be in whole or in part suspended, according to the powers visited in you.¹

The tone of the town protests varied from pleading and polite supplication to threats of nullification or secession. It does not appear that the protestors got any satisfaction other than the knowledge that they had made themselves heard.

Four of the five newspapers printed in the District of Maine during the embargo period were Federalist in outlook.² The largest of the Federalist papers was the Portland Gazette which was rivaled by the only openly Republican journal, the Portland Eastern Argus. These two papers dominated the Maine field and were considered by many to represent the opinions of the two groups of the Maine electorate.³ Although outnumbered the Argus

¹ George A Wheeler, History of Castine (Cornwall, New York: privately printed, 1923), pp. 67-8.

² Frederick G. Fassett, "A History of Newspapers in the District of Maine", University of Maine Bulletin, XXXV (November, 1932), p. 196.

³ Ibid., p. 141.

was widely circulated and thus Maine citizens were exposed to both sides of the embargo question.

Early in 1809 a printed protest appeared in Portland. Entitled, "Read, Citizens of Maine, and Judge for Yourselves", it was a strongly worded piece of anti-embargo propaganda. It was prefaced:

Let the subject of this paper waken your attention, and trust not, solely, in the publication of the Chronicle and Argus. Look well to your Rights and Liberties and despise the doctrine of passive obedience, with which the friends of those who evade them, endeavor to inculcate.¹

Then under the heading, "The Constitution Gone", it went on to say:

The late act to enforce the Embargo, . . . has given the last blow to our Civil Liberties . . . its true title . . . should be, An Act to Suspend the Rights of the People, and to create an Absolute Dictator for an indefinite period.²

There then followed a list of the violations of the "unalienable rights" of citizens such as the right of "acquiring property", or of enjoying it and possessing it. Further this handbill went on to declare that the embargo subjected the citizens to unwarranted visits by spies, informers and military hirelings; that it subjected the people to the will of the executive, and that it subjected the coasting trade to "needless

¹ "Read Citizens of Maine, and Judge for Yourselves", (Portland: Published by Committee of Safety of Portland, 1809).

² Ibid.

vexations", thus reducing and impoverishing a hardy and deserving people.

The document then finished the introduction by stating that, "In short, it [the embargo] leaves but one dreadful, horrible alternative, Civil War, or Slavery." It was signed, "A Descendant of the Pilgrims." The rest of the handbill was given over to the reproduction of anti-embargo speeches in the United States Congress.

Although it used inflamed language and exaggerated the truth, this piece of anti-Jefferson, anti-embargo literature must have influenced many people's thinking.

It was in the larger cities of the District that the most vociferous complaints occurred. This was due to the fact that in the more metropolitan areas it was difficult for the unemployed to find any work. In the rural areas and small towns the people found it easier to sustain themselves from their own produce.

Augusta, Portland and Bath were leading cities in the District of Maine in 1807. The reason for this predominance was primarily geographical. Portland on Casco Bay, Augusta on the important Kennebec River and Bath farther down on the same river were all ideally situated for the thriving shipping and shipbuilding of the day.

Portland, in 1807, was the sixth largest shipbuilding center in the United States, and therefore a large

percent of the population was directly or indirectly dependent on the sea for a living.¹

It did not take long for the people of Portland to feel the effects of the embargo. Three weeks after the signing of the act the citizens of the city set aside a day of fasting and prayer because of the alarming outlook.² Five days later a special town meeting was held to try and deal with the problems at hand, such as the overcrowded condition of the poorhouse, increasing unemployment and the inability of many taxpayers to pay their debts.³

Several sources make mention of an event which took place in Portland which indicates the degree of anti-embargo feeling on the part of the citizenry. Late in 1808, on the day which marked the first year of the embargo, a strange parade made its way through Portland streets to the main wharf. A ship's longboat made up like a full rigged ship, but with very ragged sails and loose rigging, was carried on a wagon dragged by most of the truckmen of the town. On the stern of the boat were

¹ William H. Rowe, The Maritime History of Maine (New York: W.W. Norton Co., 1948), p. 84.

² Clarence A. Day, "A History of Maine Agriculture", University of Maine Bulletin, Vol. LVI (April, 1954), 96.

³ Ibid.

painted the letters O-G-R-A-B-M-E and following this carriage was a band playing funeral dirges. Behind the band trailed all of the town's unemployed. When the procession reached the wharf there were speeches against the embargo following which the boat was launched.¹

Under these circumstances it is not surprising to note that Portland voted more than two to one for the Federalist candidate for Congress in the November Congressional elections.²

Augusta, too, was having problems with its aroused citizens. Stagnation in Augusta's vital lumber trade caused a great deal of indebtedness. When the sheriffs attempted to collect debts they were met by bands of inhabitants disguised as Indians who prevented the collection of the debts by force.³ Rumors that these "Indians" planned to burn down the jail and court house to destroy the records contained therein caused the authorities to call out the militia.⁴

On August 20, 1808, a protest was forwarded to

¹ A good description of this event appears in William Goold, Portland in the Past (Portland: E. Thurston and Co., 1886), pp. 423-24.

² Portland Eastern Argus, November 10, 1808.

³ James W. North, The History of Augusta (Augusta, Clapp and North, 1870), pp. 353-54.

⁴ Ibid., p. 355.

President Jefferson by the people of Augusta.¹ Shortly thereafter at a town meeting the members present declared that "silence about the embargo would be a crime and resistance . . . a virtue".² The August 20th protest was answered by the President who tried to point out the reasons for the necessity of the Embargo Act.³

In a town meeting on January 16, 1809, the citizens drafted a list of resolutions to be a memorial to the Massachusetts Legislature. In summary they are as follows:

1. The restrictions on trade and commerce need immediate relief.
2. The government appears to be under French influence.
3. There is not sufficient cause to warrant a war with England.
4. Government threats of raising a standing army make it appear that the government is inclining towards monarchy.
5. No friend of liberty will join the army.
6. The most recent embargo law is unfair.
7. The people of Augusta have suffered needlessly because of the embargo.⁴

Like Portland, Augusta's voters favored the Federalist candidate in the April election for governor⁵

¹ Ibid., p. 361.

² Thorp L. Wolford, "Democratic-Republican Reaction in Massachusetts to the Embargo of 1807", New England Quarterly, XV (Dec., 1945), 53.

³ North, Op. Cit., p. 361.

⁴ Ibid., pp. 364-66.

⁵ Portland Eastern Argus, April 14, 1808.

as well as in the November election.¹ Augusta was still predominantly Federalist in 1810 despite the fact that the county and state were Democratic.²

In 1807 Bath was a leading shipbuilding community in the District and thus also felt the pinches of the embargo strongly. As in other shipping towns the merchants and captains felt they would rather put to sea and risk the dangers of capture by a belligerent power than sit idly at home.³

In a town meeting on December 27, 1808, a series of resolutions was drawn up which included mention of the possibility of secession.⁴ At least two incidents of smuggling involving Bath ships have been recorded, and the government built and manned a fort guarding Bath's harbor to prevent such actions.

Like Portland and Augusta, Bath voted Federalist in 1808.⁵

Of all the reactions to the embargo displayed by the people of Maine, the one which caused the government the

¹ Portland Gazette, November 14, 1808.

² North, Op. Cit., p. 393.

³ William A. Fairburn, Merchant Sail (Center Lovell, Maine: Fairburn Marine Educational Foundation, Inc., 1945), p. 3185.

⁴ Welford, Op. Cit., p. 53.

⁵ Portland Eastern Argus, November 14, 1808.

most concern was smuggling.¹ Maine was a leading offender in this regard during the fourteen month embargo period.²

The District of Maine was ideally suited to smuggling because of its proximity to Canada and its many fine natural harbors and islands. Contemporary accounts of the embargo period include many stories of ingenious methods used by shippers to avoid the embargo. When it was first issued it was possible to carry on coastal trade and some land trade, and thus smuggling was not very difficult. After the further embargo act of February, 1808, which prohibited any land trade with Canada, and tightened restrictions on coastal trade, smuggling became more difficult and a more serious offense.

One common way of avoiding the embargo was to load the ship at night and sail before dawn thus being out of the reach of government officials by dawn. At this Portland was a steady offender.³ As already mentioned offenses of this type caused the government to build and man a fort on a point commanding the harbor of Bath.

¹ see letters from Albert Gallatin to President Jefferson on May 23, Aug. 9, Sept. 14, 1808 in Henry Adams, ed., The Writings of Albert Gallatin (New York: Antiquarian Press, Ltd., 1960).

² Rowe, Op. Cit., p. 80.

³ Gould, Op. Cit., p. 423.

In spite of this the brig Sally was able to escape with a load of lumber for London with "but a shot hole in her sail."¹ In the same fashion the Bath ship Mary Jane escaped from the harbor in spite of the fort.²

The case of Samuel Haddock of Little Cranberry Island is an example of another type of evasion of the embargo. Instead of bringing home his catch from the Newfoundland Banks he dried his cod on the shores of Labrador and then sailed to Portugal where he made a good profit.³ The ship Ploughboy left Newport, Rhode Island, loaded with produce in November 1808, but according to the captain was blown off course and did not arrive in Castine, Maine, until February, 1809, having come via Antigua.⁴ In another instance a Camden sea captain returned with an empty hold and his profits hidden in the stanchions of his ship.⁵

Contemporary accounts indicate that most shippers obeyed the embargo, but the chance to make a tremendous profit in the West Indies or Canada was more than many a Maine captain or merchant could pass up.

¹ Henry W. Owen, History of Bath, Maine (Bath: The Times Co., 1936), p. 144.

² Walter W. Jennings, "The American Embargo, 1807-1809", U. of Iowa Studies, VIII (1929), 116.

³ Rowe, Op. Cit., p. 80.

⁴ Ibid., p. 82.

⁵ Ibid.

The most serious problem that the government had with smuggling in Maine was at Eastport which is only a few miles from Canada. In May, 1808, the ports of New Brunswick and Nova Scotia were opened to many kinds of American produce and as a result Eastport became "one of the busiest towns in the Union."¹ As much as 30,000 barrels of flour were smuggled into Canada in one week from secret hiding places along the Maine coast.² A barrel of flour worth five dollars in the United States brought twelve dollars in Canada a few miles away.³ Boats of all sizes and types were used in this lucrative business. One man earned forty-seven dollars hard money for twenty-four hours of labor.⁴ Many of the government agents took bribes⁵ which only facilitated this so-called "Flour War."

The flagrant nature of the Eastport smuggling caused the government to take action. First of all Fort Sullivan was built in Eastport and manned by a company of troops, and then the sloop of war Wasp was sent in May, 1808, to Passamaquoddy Bay. On the first day

¹ William H. Kilby, Eastport and Passamaquoddy (Eastport: Edward A. Shead and Co., 1888), p. 143.

² Ibid.

³ Ibid., p. 144.

⁴ Ibid., p. 145.

⁵ Ibid., p. 146.

of its arrival the Wasp caught fourteen boats smuggling flour.¹ However, the threat of an occasional skirmish with federal troops did not deter men who could make a large sum of money for a night's work.² Later in the year the famous frigate Chesapeake, which had been involved in the well-known incident the previous year, was sent to the area. Concentrated efforts by the government did undoubtedly reduce the smuggling problem at Eastport, but it was not until the Canadian ports of St. John and Halifax were closed to American goods in 1809 that the smuggling problem at Eastport was ended.³

The political reaction of the people of the District of Maine to the embargo is interesting. In spite of the fact that there was a great deal of protest to the Massachusetts Legislature and to Jefferson himself during the months of the embargo the voters of Maine continued to support the Jeffersonian candidates in the two elections of 1808 and 1809.

The first election after the embargo went into effect was the election for governor held in April, 1808.

¹ Portland Eastern Argus, June 2, 1808.

² Marion J. Smith, A History of Maine from Wilderness to Statehood (Portland: Falmouth Publishing House, 1949), p. 296.

³ Ibid.

As indicated in Table I, the Democratic candidate received sixty percent of the vote in 1807 and fifty-nine percent in 1808. The Democratic majority declined to fifty-two percent in 1809 and then increased again after the embargo.

The Federalists in Maine did make inroads, undoubtedly due to anti-embargo sentiment, but they did not gain a majority during the embargo years.

The District of Maine was entitled to four members in the United States House of Representatives. In 1806 all four were Democrats. In the congressional election of 1808 three retained their seats and only one, the candidate from Portland-dominated Cumberland County, lost to the Federalist candidate.¹

The strongholds of Federalism in the elections were in the cities in the District. Mention has already been made of the vote in Augusta, Portland and Bath.² In 1807, Portland voted for the Federalist candidate for governor 492 to 428 and then in 1808 favored the Federalist by 615 to 394.³ Bath and Augusta likewise cast a majority of votes for Federalist candidates.

However, in spite of the increase in the support

¹ New England Palladium, Dec. 29, 1808.

² see pages 12-14.

³ New England Palladium, April 8, 1808.

TABLE I

MAINE VOTE FOR GOVERNOR, 1805-1812^a

Year	Total Vote	Fed	Dem	Pct Fed	Pct Dem	Pct Dem Majority
1805	16579	7201	9378	45	55	10
1806	19181	7781	11400	41	59	18
1807	20334	8010	12324	40	60	20
1808	20791	8383	12408	41	59	18
1809	24825	11729	13096	48	52	4
1810	24120	10231	13889	42	57	15
1811	21281	8432	12849	40	60	20
1812	28181	10341	17841	37	63	26

^a from Frederick G. Fassett, "A History of Newspapers in the District of Maine, 1785-1820," University of Maine Bulletin, XXXV (November, 1932), p. 199.

of the Federalists in the cities, the people in the outlying regions, smaller towns and rural areas supported the Jeffersonian candidates and gave the District an overall Democratic majority.

At the same time that the District of Maine was supporting Jefferson at the polls, the rest of Massachusetts was relapsing to Federalism. Massachusetts elected a majority of Federalist members to the House of Representatives, and cast all nineteen of its electoral votes for the Federalist presidential candidate, Charles Pinckney.¹

On the surface it appears strange that the party of the administration would be favored by a majority in the District of Maine in light of the protest against the embargo. There are at least two reasons to explain this. First, Maine had been predominantly Democratic since 1805 because the Democrats had favored liberal land laws in the District.² This was a matter of great importance to the people of the District who wished to have more control over the settlement of the vast tracts of Maine land than the Massachusetts Legislature was willing to give them. The second reason is that the people of Maine in 1808 were, for the most part, self-

¹ Portland Eastern Argus, Dec. 29, 1808.

² Wolford, Op. Cit., p. 43.

supporting, rugged individuals who could overcome the upset of the embargo and make a living from their own produce. In other words, they were not, with the exception of those living in cities, cast out from jobs with no place to turn. Thus it appears that they felt discomfort from the embargo but not enough to see the need of a new administration.

CHAPTER II

THE EFFECTS OF THE EMBARGO ON MAINE COMMERCE

Our ships all in motion once whitened the ocean,
They sailed and returned with a cargo;
Now doomed to decay, they have fallen prey
To Jefferson, worms and embargo.¹

Thus ran a popular anti-embargo saying of the day which indicates the frustration felt by many Maine citizens during the months of the embargo. The District of Maine's shipping and trade was prospering, and had been for two decades, when the restrictive laws were put into effect. Mainites had built up a thriving trade in exports such as lumber, fish, potash, beef, pork, corn, flour and a small amount of manufactured products, and in imports from the West Indies and Europe such as manufactured articles, salt, iron and hemp.

Therefore, the people of the District found it hard to accept the fact that their ships must remain idle in the harbors. Some, tempted by the large profits that could be made in the West Indies,² defied the embargo

¹ quoted from Portland Gazette in Marion J. Smith's A History of Maine from Wilderness to Statehood (Portland: Falmouth Publishing House, 1949), p. 295.

² As soon as news of the embargo reached the West Indies prices doubled and tripled on American produce. For example, flour jumped to twenty-five dollars a barrel and potatoes to \$7.50 a barrel.

and carried on smuggling activities, but it appears that the majority of the inhabitants of Maine obeyed the edict and then complained about it.

A visit to the District of Maine in 1808 would have shown the harbors full of ships at anchor battened down for the duration. In Bath, for example, according to one description, "There were tied up at the wharves, or idly swinging at anchor, 16 ships and 27 brigs amounting to 9,000 tons of cargo space, besides a large number of schooners and sloops."¹ This scene was repeated in harbors throughout the District.

This cessation was hard on all the people of the District who were involved in commerce. At least sixty percent of the people in seaport towns found themselves unemployed as a result of the embargo.² "Every man who had anything to do directly or indirectly with the building or lading of ships - carpenters, blacksmiths, lumbermen, sailors, clerks, merchants, teamsters, farmers - was suddenly deprived of a livelihood."³

Portland, the leading market center in the District

¹ William A. Fairburn, Merchant Sail (Center Lovell, Maine: Fairburn Marine Educational Foundation, 1947), p. 3185.

² William H. Rowe, The Maritime History of Maine (New York: W.W. Norton Co., 1948), p. 84.

³ Ibid.

in 1807,¹ was severely affected by the embargo because the majority of the people of the town were involved in commerce or its connecting industries.² Portland's shipping tonnage decreased by about 10,000 tons between 1807 and 1809.³

A contemporary account by a man visiting the city in 1808 gives a picture of the economic effects of the embargo on Portland:

Commerce and commercial men, and consequently with very minute exceptions, the whole population of Portland, was at this time in very distressful circumstances, consequent on the political state of the country. Solidity of capital is at all times out of the question in Portland; its whole trade is dependent either upon borrowed funds, and funds borrowed, at an interest often, of 18 and even 20 per centum.⁴

Further on in his account he states:

Under such circumstances, a stagnation in trade is ruin; and this stagnation having occurred, the prospects of Portland were now of the most gloomy kind. A large number of failures had already taken place and others were expected to follow.⁵

¹ Clarence A. Day, "A History of Maine Agriculture, 1604-1860," U. of Maine Bulletin, Vol. LVI (April, 1954), 96.

² William Goold, Portland in the Past (Portland: B. Thurston and Co., 1886), p. 423.

³ Rowe, Op. Cit., p. 85.

⁴ Edward A. Kendall, Travels through the Northern Parts of the United States in the Years 1807 and 1808 (New York: I. Riley, 1809), III, 155.

⁵ Ibid., p. 156.

Thirty Portland firms failed the first year of the embargo,¹ and in the words of a Portland historian, "grass literally grew on the wharves."² A town committee report of January 18, 1808, indicated that money on hand in Portland was inadequate for relief. Provision was made for setting up the "old market place" as a soup kitchen. This was done and soup charity was continued until the end of the embargo.³

Portland was not alone in its embargo problems. Cities up and down the coast experienced failures of businesses and general distress due to the cessation of trade. Wiscasset, for example, issued sea letters to sixty-seven outbound ships in 1807 and to only two in 1808.⁴ Note has already been made in Chapter One of the problems in Augusta caused by the breakdown in Augusta's lumber trade.⁵

In Bath the commercial men felt the embargo was a

¹ Charles E. Hill, "James Madison," American Secretaries of State and their Diplomacy, ed. Samuel F. Bemis (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1927), III, 135.

² Edward H. Elwell, Portland and Vicinity (Portland: Short and Harmon and W.S. Jones, 1876), p. 15.

³ Day, Op. Cit., p. 96 .

⁴ Rowe, Op. Cit., p. 84 .

⁵ see pp. 12-13 .

"stab in the back"¹ and even went so far as to discuss the possibility of secession.² A historian of Wells and Kennebunkport reports that in these towns the embargo was a "death blow to business."³

Farther eastward along the Maine coast conditions in the smaller towns were also bad. In a letter from a Buckstown (now Bucksport) man the following was indicated: "The situation in our part of the country is truly alarming."⁴ He went on to say that merchants dared trust no one for goods because nobody was getting paid, and therefore they could not even provide the necessities of life. Storekeepers did not want to keep corn and flour on hand for fear of being robbed, and "backsettlers" threatened force to get food. The sheriff of Frankfort, a town across the Penobscot from Bucksport, was assaulted and writs taken from him by force by men disguised as Indians, and surveyors were afraid to go about their work in the woods for fear of being shot.⁵

¹ Fairburn, Op. Cit., p. 3185.

² see page 14.

³ Edward E. Bourne, History of Wells and Kennebunk (Portland: B. Thurston and Co., 1875), p. 590.

⁴ Portland Gazette, May 16, 1808.

⁵ Ibid.

Without doubt, then, the embargo restrictions on commerce caused considerable upset in the District of Maine. Just how much of the turmoil was actual hardship and how much was propaganda stirred up by anti-Jefferson or anti-embargo people is hard to determine. There are statistics, however, which indicate the effects of the embargo on Maine shipping. Table II indicates the amount of shipping owned in Maine in the years before, during and after the embargo. From 1807 to 1808 (1808 being the only full year of the embargo) there was a sharp drop-off in shipping registered with the government and a further decline is indicated in 1809 followed by recovery in 1810.

Another effect indicated by shipping statistics is the increase in coastal shipping during the embargo. In 1807, 89,892 tons of Maine shipping was engaged in the coastal trade, but in 1808 the figure reported is 127,893 tons¹ which is a considerable increase. This is explained by the fact that many shippers resorted to the coastal trade, which was not prohibited, to take up the slack caused by the restriction on foreign trade. The early embargo laws were lenient in regard to coastal trade, but as more and more abuses of it occurred this trade was in-

¹ American State Papers, Class IV, Commerce and Navigation, II (1808), 897.

TABLE 2
SHIPPING TONNAGE OWNED IN CUSTOMS DISTRICTS OF MAINE
1807-1810^a

<u>DISTRICT</u>	<u>1807</u>	<u>1808</u>	<u>1809</u>	<u>1810</u>
York	3155	3444	3475	3723
Kennebunk	8296	8652	8314	8808
Biddeford	5854	5496	6249	7719
Portland	41241	33596	32007	32599
Bath	21758	19431	23033	20344
Wiscasset	16349	15732	17672	17911
Waldoborough	18269	17802	17449	19041
Penobscot	15386	16081	15787	18019
Frenchman's Bay	5110	4376	4355	4828
Machias	2720	2732	2296	2259
Passamaquoddy	<u>6929</u>	<u>6929</u>	<u>1992</u>	<u>5801</u>
TOTAL	145066	134271	132629	141052

^a American State Papers, Commerce and Navigation, II (1808), p. 733.

creasingly restricted. By the end of 1808 a shipper had to pay a bond at least equal to the value of his cargo to guarantee that he would not sell his produce outside the United States. Finally, in desperation, the government passed the so-called Force Act in early January, 1809, which was very drastic and required coastal shippers to pay extremely high bonds, often two to three times the value of their cargo to guarantee that they would not stray from the coast. Thus even this trade was greatly diminished by the end of the embargo.

During the years that the District was developing its thriving commerce many large personal fortunes were being made as a result of it. As can be expected the embargo was a serious setback to most of these wealthy shippers. For example, Johnathan Davis of Bath of whom a Maine historian has said, "it was the . . . Embargo Act of December 22, 1807, that wrecked the Davis fortune as it did that of a large number of other Bath men and families interested in the building and operation of ships."¹

The most outstanding figure in Maine commerce and politics for many years was William King of Bath. He had built his fortune in Maine shipping in the years

¹ Fairburn, Op. Cit., p. 3182.

before the embargo. Once the embargo went into effect he ostensibly kept his ships tied up in the harbor of Bath as he was bound to do unless he wished to enter the coastal trade. However, in 1824, while King was serving as Maine's first governor¹ a pamphlet was published containing sworn affidavits describing the evasions of the embargo law by his captains during the embargo period. Governor King responded with a printed pamphlet of his own in which he denied all charges and branded his accusers as being political enemies out to blacken his name. In the printed refutation King stated that he had kept five ships and four brigs amounting to 2475 tons of shipping in the harbor throughout the embargo even though it caused him a loss of 5558 dollars per month.² Whether he did or did not engage in evasions of the embargo law, as many others did, is hard to determine. However, like many others in his position, he became increasingly disillusioned with the embargo laws as he saw their disastrous effects upon his income.

¹ Maine became the twenty-third state in March, 1820.

² William King and Mark Hill, Remarks upon a Pamphlet Published at Bath, Maine (Bath: printed by Thomas Eaton, 1825), p. 7.

³ Smith, Op. Cit., p. 297.

CHAPTER III

THE EFFECTS OF THE EMBARGO ON MAINE INDUSTRY

In this chapter Maine industry will be divided into five categories: fishing, shipbuilding, agriculture, lumbering and manufacturing, and the effects on each one will be examined individually.

The fishing industry provided a livelihood for many of the inhabitants of the District of Maine at the time that the embargo went into effect. In 1807, Maine's fishing fleet was composed of 9623 tons of ships¹ and this was double the tonnage of ten years earlier,² which indicates the rapid expansion of the fishing industry.

Fishing itself was never prohibited by the original embargo act or any of the subsequent additions to it, but the transportation of the fish to the customary foreign markets was ended thus sharply curtailing the industry. To prevent illegal export of fish the government required fisherman who engaged in fishing for home consumption to make frequent trips to the center of their customs district to swear they had not sold a catch il-

¹ William H. Rowe, The Maritime History of Maine (New York: W.W. Norton Co., 1948), p. 268.

² Ibid.

legally. For many fishermen this meant a trip of fifty to one hundred miles so that even fishing for the home market was difficult. Undoubtedly, there was illegal activity carried on in the fishing trade, such as the case described in Chapter One,¹ but for the most part fishermen had to accept the loss of their business and make the best of it. The result was that the fishing industry in New England, and Maine accordingly, declined by sixty-five percent during the embargo period.²

Many fishermen turned to the coastal trade, but when the government created very high bonds to prevent illegal sale of fish even this trade declined.

By 1807 the District of Maine had developed a thriving shipbuilding industry out of its vast timber reserves and fine natural harbors. This business suffered with the decline of commerce as a result of the embargo. There was little need for new ships when very few of the existing ones were being used. In Maine, as in the United States during the embargo, practically no deep sea merchant ships were built.³ Table Three,

¹ see page 16.

² Louis M. Sears, Jefferson and the Embargo (Durham: Duke U. Press, 1927), p. 176.

³ William A. Fairburn, Merchant Sail (Center Lovell, Maine: Fairburn Marine Educational Foundation, 1945), p. 3470.

which is a list of the shipbuilding figures for three Maine towns, includes the statistics for the town of Bath, which was the leading shipbuilding center in Maine prior to the embargo.¹ The figures give an indication of the decline in the shipbuilding industry during the embargo period.

This cessation of an important industry left a large number of men with no means of livelihood. Carpenters, blacksmiths and other skilled workers involved in the trade were without work unless they could find other means of subsistence. Bath, which was especially dependent on shipbuilding, was one of the most distressed towns in the District and one of the most violent in its opposition to the embargo.

Maine agriculture was also affected by the embargo. Many farmers found themselves with large surpluses on hand when the embargo went into effect because the high profits of recent years had stimulated overproduction.² Many were waiting for the areas near cities to use up their supplies and thus increase the demand and price, or they were waiting for snow to make transportation

¹ Ibid., p. 3383.

² Clarence a Day, "A History of Maine Agriculture 1604-1860," U. of Maine Bulletin, Vol. LVI (April, 1954), p. 97.

TABLE 3
SHIPBUILDING STATISTICS FOR THREE MAINE TOWNS
1803-1809^a

<u>Town</u>	<u>Year</u>	<u>No. of Ships Built</u>
Bath	1804	37
	1805	32
	1806	34
	1807	29
	1808	8
	1809	29
Belfast	1805	3
	1806	3
	1807	4
	1808	0
	1809	0
Saco	1803	3
	1804	2
	1806	1
	1807	5
	1808	0
	1809	2

^a William A. Fairburn, Merchant Sail (Center Lovell, Maine: Fairburn Marine Educational Foundation, 1945). pp. 3156, 3183, 3468.

easier.¹ With large supplies on hand and no way to transport them to the customary markets, the farmers found themselves with a serious problem. To add to the problem farm prices fell as the embargo caused unstable economic conditions.

As a result there was a rapid increase in the smuggling of farm produce, especially flour. The lure of high prices in Canada prompted farmers to smuggle flour and other produce themselves, or to sell it to men who engaged in smuggling. As has been noted in the first chapter, Eastport became a center for the illegal trade in flour. As Henry Adams has noted, produce became the object of speculation and citizens were turned into enemies of the laws.²

The pro-Democratic Portland Eastern Argus printed advice to farmers in the spring of 1808. It suggested that farmers let cattle and lumber grow heavier, and that farm women learn to spin, card, weave, dye and manufacture flax, hemp, cotton and wool since there may be no open markets for years and Maine will need to

¹ John B. McMaster, History of the People of the United States, Vol. III (New York: Appleton and Co., 1892), p. 304.

² Henry Adams, History of the U.S. during the Second Administration of Thomas Jefferson, Vol. II (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1890), p. 276.

create its own manufactures.¹ This was probably small comfort to the farm population as other papers indicated the falling prices and tightening restrictions. The following conundrum, printed in a Portland paper, reflects what must have been the attitude of many farmers:

A farmer driving toward Boston
Of good fat pork a cargo;
By chance another farmer crossed on,
Who warned him of the embargo.
"What's that? a yellow fever like?"
Quoth Ned, who wanted gumption.
"A yellow fever! no!" cries Dick,
"Tis a damn'd slow consumption."²

Maine's vast tracts of virgin timber made it a leading lumber producer in the United States at the time of the embargo. Because of the great quantity of lumber produced and the small amount consumed within the District Maine was the principal lumber shipper in the United States,³ and Bangor, Maine, was the largest saw-mill center in the country, having two hundred mills in its vicinity.⁴

Lumber, like other country goods, was sledged to the coast for shipment to the West Indies and Europe.

¹ Portland Eastern Argus, May 5, 1808.

² Portland Gazette, Feb. 1, 1808.

³ Victor S. Clark, History of Manufactures in the United States, 1607-1860 (Washington: Carnegie Institute of Washington, 1916), p. 467.

⁴ Ibid.

After December 22, 1807, when the embargo went into effect, lumbermen found themselves with no markets for their produce. The result was economic distress in towns dependent on the lumber industry. Outbreaks caused by the loss of markets were especially severe in Augusta and surrounding towns.

A Portland paper noted that boards which had sold for fourteen dollars per thousand in late 1807 had fallen to five and a half dollars per thousand by early 1808.¹

For several months after the embargo first went into effect lumbermen were able to sell their lumber in the coastal trade, but the temptation of tremendous profits in the West Indies caused violations. The Force Act, which has been mentioned earlier, was designed to prevent violations of the coastal trade and created bonds which were prohibitively high. Thus many lumber producers and traders had to suspend activities until the embargo was over.

It is difficult to evaluate the effects of the embargo on manufacturing in the District of Maine because of the lack of information. Evidence indicates, however, that Maine was not an important manufacturing region in the years before and immediately after the Embargo of

¹ Portland Gazette, Jan. 11, 1808.

1807. For example, one source states that Maine never had more than one active iron furnace in the late Eighteenth and early Nineteenth centuries and therefore contributed little to the nation's output in this product.¹

The economic dislocation caused by the embargo in Maine and elsewhere did cause many people to look to other pursuits in order to make a living. It is safe to say that the embargo in Maine did undoubtedly usher in some increase in manufacturing interests, but just how much is hard to determine.

The only specific reference to the establishment of an industry in the District of Maine as a result of the embargo is made by an historian of Augusta who reported that a forge was erected on the Kennebec River in Clinton by a man named J.B. Cobb where "bar iron, mill cranks, plough and crowbar moulds" were made.²

Moses Greenleaf in his book, A Statistical View of the District of Maine, written in 1816, included an interesting chapter on manufacturing in Maine up to that time. He included a table of Maine manufactures as recorded in the census of 1810 and this is reproduced in Table Four. The author stated that to his knowledge

¹ Clark, Op. Cit., p. 497.

² James W. North, The History of Augusta (Augusta: Clapp and North, 1870), p. 364.

TABLE 4

STATEMENT OF MANUFACTURES IN 1810^a

<u>Manufactures</u>		<u>Maine</u>	<u>Mass.</u>	<u>U.S.</u>
Cotton cloth	yds.	811,912		16,581,299
Blended & unnamed do.	yds.	1,020,047		22,131,533
Woolen do.	yds.	453,410		4,004,280
Total	yds.	2,285,369	4,055,069	42,717,112
Average to each person	yds.	11 $\frac{1}{2}$	8 $\frac{1}{2}$	6 $\frac{1}{2}$
Looms	No.	16,057	22,564	325,392
Carding machines	No.	75	180	1,776
Wool carded	lbs.	450,255	797,236	7,417,261
Average carded by each	lbs.	6,003	4,429	4,232
Fulling mills	No.	59	221	1,682
Cloth dressed	yds.	357,386	730,948	5,452,960
Average by each mill	yds.	6,057	3,307	3,241
Spindles	No.	780	19,448	122,647
Hats	No.	60,123	142,645	457,666
Furnaces and forges	No.	2	37	153
Trip hammers	No.	14		316
Naileries	No.	6	36	410
Nails	lbs.	1,265,594	15,240,320	25,727,914
Average by each	lbs.	210,932	423,342	62,751
Augers	value	\$2,000		\$10,400
Soap	value	\$31,650	\$239,697	\$409,508
Shoes and boots	value	\$135,281	\$2,201,671	\$4,686,624
Saddlery	value	\$24,678	\$188,726	\$834,787
Tanneries	No.	200	299	4,316
Hides & skins dressed	No.	55,153	507,620	1,242,235
Leather	value	\$231,174	\$1,352,639	\$8,388,250
Flax-seed oil	value	\$3,000	\$46,982	\$848,809
Spirits distilled	gallons	160,300	2,852,210	22,977,167
Carriages made	value	\$9,000	\$122,674	\$1,449,489
Paper	value	\$16,500	\$257,451	\$1,689,718
Rope-walks	No.	11	29	173
Cordage	value	\$234,600	\$1,030,661	\$4,243,368

^a Moses Greenleaf, A Statistical View of the District of Maine (Boston: Cummings and Hilliard, 1816), p. 62.

there was no such listing as this prior to this time with which to compare his figures.¹ Therefore it is not possible to use them here to indicate an increase, if any, in manufacturing caused by the embargo. The figures do, however, indicate the extent of manufacturing in the District shortly after the embargo period, and compare it to the output in Massachusetts proper and the whole United States. The chart indicates a relatively large output in the textile industry in Maine by 1810, but not a very great amount of hard goods produced.

Maine's industries during the years of the embargo were primarily those concerned with the exploitation of her vast natural resources of land, lumber and fish. Development of other industries have been slow in coming.

¹ Moses Greenleaf, A Statistical View of the District of Maine (Boston: Cummings and Hilliard, 1816), p. 55.

CONCLUSION

The evidence presented in this paper indicates that the people of the District of Maine were affected in various ways by the fourteen month Embargo of 1807. At one time or another during the embargo most of the towns in Maine sent formal, written protests to the Massachusetts Legislature or the United States government. There were rumblings of secession or nullification and outbreaks of violence against authority trying to enforce the laws. Along the Canadian border smuggling was carried on in open defiance of the law, and several ships, at least, sailed out of Maine harbors openly, or during the night, loaded for foreign ports.

With all foreign trade cut off, and coastal trade increasingly difficult much of Maine's economic life was at a standstill for the duration of the embargo. The restrictive laws had come at a time when the District was engaged in a profitable and growing trade with ports all over the world. Lumbermen, fishermen and farmers found themselves with no means of transporting their goods to market. Shippers faced ruin with their ships wasting away at anchor. Shipbuilders, sailors and others with a stake in commerce lost their means of livelihood.

Yet, in spite of these unsettled conditions, Maine was able to survive the embargo with more ease than other sections of the country. One important reason for this was the fact that the products that Maine could not sell because of the restrictions on trade would not spoil. The fish were safe in the ocean, and the timber would last as long as necessary. These products remained available for future use.

A second advantage that Maine had over other parts of the nation was its ideal location for smuggling. The proximity to Canada allowed a thriving illicit trade to take place and Maineites capitalized on this outlet for their goods.

A third factor was that the District of Maine was predominantly a rural region made up of small, independent farms with few large cities. When commerce and its related industries ceased as a result of the embargo many of Maine's inhabitants could return to the farm or find a means of livelihood from the land. The people of the South, on the other hand, found it very difficult to make adjustments in their plantation economy, which was committed to the raising and selling of two or three major crops, and therefore suffered a great deal more at the loss of trade than did their neighbors of New England.

The people of Maine, like all New Englanders, were

traditionally a frugal, economizing people who, when the pinches of the embargo were felt, could readily adjust and make do with what they had. Because they could apply legendary Yankee ingenuity to their problems they were able to survive.

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