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JOHN RIVERS AND THE VOYAGE OF THE THREE BROTHERS

THURMAN T. MORGAN *

Owing to a paucity of local records covering the first decades of Charles Town's existence, the story of the first voyage of settlement was not told in any detail until 1883.¹ Around 1870 the Shaftesbury Papers had been transferred to the British Public Records Office; before 1883 local historians had some of Noel Sainsbury's transcriptions; and they were finally published in 1896.²

The five ships employed in the first voyage were: (1) the *Carolina*, (2) the *Port Royal*, wrecked and replaced by (3) an unnamed "Bermuda Shallop," and (4) the *Albemarle*, which was replaced by (5) the *Three Brothers*, after the *Albemarle* was destroyed in a storm at Barbados on November 2, 1669.³ The *Three Brothers*, sometimes termed a "Barbadian Sloop," was named for its owners the three Colleton brothers (Sir Peter, Thomas, and James).⁴

Bound for Port Royal, its initially intended settlement site, the fleet left Barbados about November 28, 1669.⁵ It then consisted of the *Carolina*, the *Port Royal*, and the *Three Brothers*. The ships touched at Nevis about December 9th, and after leaving there became separated during a protracted storm.⁶ The *Carolina*, her stern badly damaged, was forced to put in at Bermuda, where she may have arrived as early as January 12, 1669/70.⁷ She was definitely there before February 4th.⁸

On January 12th the *Port Royal* was wrecked near Great Abaco.⁹ Many of her survivors soon rejoined the *Carolina* contingent at Bermuda

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¹ W. A. Courtenay et al., *Centennial of Incorporation, 1883* (Charleston, 1884), 34-74; *Charleston Yearbook, 1883*, 351-393.

² Langdon Cheves, (ed.), "The Shaftesbury Papers and Others Records Relating to Carolina and the First Settlement on Ashley River prior to the Year 1674," *Collections of the South Carolina Historical Society*, vol. 5 (Richmond, 1896.)

³ *Ibid.*, p. 156.

⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 242, 255.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 164. (Also see p. 156 for intended departure on November 23rd.)

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 159.

⁷ "Tricentennial Edition," *The News and Courier and The Charleston Evening Post* (Charleston, March 31, 1970), 6-A.

⁸ Cheves, "Shaftesbury Papers," p. 4 (of "Papers Omitted").

⁹ Cheves, "Shaftesbury Papers," p. 279.

where they were provided with a "Bermuda Shallop." They reached Bermuda by way of Eleuthera and New Providence, where some chose to remain.¹⁰ These two vessels departed Bermuda February 26, 1669/70 and, via Bull's Bay and Port Royal, finally made landfall at Albemarle Point in early 1670.¹¹

The account of the voyage given in 1883 misleadingly suggests that the *Three Brothers* departed Bermuda with the other two vessels and was thereafter separated from them.¹² Actually she parted company in late December or early January, and from the Shaftesbury Papers we learn of her arrival at Nansemond River (present Norfolk, Virginia) in late January 1669/70. This source also reports that her master was John Baulk; that she had about 30 passengers; and that she departed Virginia in early February.¹³

The next recorded date on her voyage is May 15, 1670, when, according to Maurice Mathews, she made landfall at Santa Catalina (St. Catherines Island, Georgia).¹⁴ The question has frequently been asked: "Where was the *Three Brothers* during the nearly three and a half months between her departure from Virginia and her appearance at St. Catherines?" From the evidence below she appears to have wandered off course and made the island of Montserrat.

The *Three Brothers* departed St. Catherines May 17, 1670, under fire from Spaniards and Indians, leaving behind several passengers, and perhaps all but one seaman, John Hanks.¹⁵ She joined the others at Albemarle Point on May 23rd. When, in June, Governor Sayle sent Joseph Bailey (or "Bayley") and John Collins to St. Catherines in the *Three Brothers* to recover the presumed captives, they too were detained and taken prisoners to St. Augustine. Bailey had carried two letters from Sayle (in Latin, and dated June 5, 1670) for the missionaries at St. Catherines and the governor at St. Augustine, respectively.

Some 15 months later, Don Manuel de Cendoya, then Governor of St. Augustine, assembled several depositions to forward to the Royal Council to support his recommended "dislodgement" of the English set-

¹⁰ Ibid., pp. 278-279.

¹¹ Ibid., p. 165.

¹² Courtenay, *Centennial*, p. 51.

¹³ Cheves, "Shaftesbury Papers," p. 163.

¹⁴ Ibid., p. 169.

¹⁵ Ibid., p. 170. The complement of such a vessel was about 6, including officers. Five were left ashore, and Mathews himself had to man the helm on departure while Hanks returned the fire.

tlement at San Jorge.¹⁶ Among these was the deposition below given by John Rivers, a *Three Brothers* voyager detained at St. Catherines in May 1670, and said to be a kinsman of Anthony Ashley Cooper, the first Earl of Shaftesbury.¹⁷ Bailey and Collins, and one William Carr (who first embarked at Barbados) also gave depositions at this time. These, along with a Spanish translation of Sayle's letter to the Governor of St. Augustine, are among the Cunningham transcripts in the Library of Congress.¹⁸ Rivers' statement was interpreted by Charles Robson, an English surgeon residing at St. Augustine. The translation below retains the shifts from first to third persons that occur when an interpreter uses first his words and then those of the respondent. The deposition is dated October 2, 1671, which would have been September 22 on the English (Julian) calendar.

* * * * *

ANOTHER DECLARANT: On the said day, month, and year (Oct. 2, 1671) there appeared before his excellency, the governor, one so-called John Rivers, an Englishman, who gave an oath before God on his Anglican Bible and swore to tell the truth, so help him God, in the interrogation for this proceeding in behalf of his excellency. Having had all this clearly explained to him by Charles Robson, the appointed interpreter, he indicated that he heard and understood it.

SAITH that on the second of August, according to the English reckoning, in the prior year of 1669, three ships left the port of London. These ships were dispatched by the Duke of Albemarle, Commander-in-Chief of the Army of England; the Earl of Craven; the Lord Berkeley; the Lord Ashley, and others. The declarant embarked in one of these, and in all there were about 130 persons. They went to Ireland to take on more people, but there some of those coming from England fled, while others boarded; so that they again departed with about 130. Leaving the Kingdom of England, they went to make a new settlement on this coast. They were under orders of the said Duke and others to go first to Barbados, consigned to Sir John Yeamans, and carried dispatches empowering him to go as governor to the settlement they intended to make.

¹⁶ Library of Congress, Manuscript Division Microfilm: General Archives of the Indies, Seville, Spain (hereafter AGI), Audencia de Santo Domingo: Estange 58, Cajon 1, Legalo 26 (esp., Cendoya to Crown, October 31, 1671).

¹⁷ Cheves, "Shaftesbury Papers," p. 205.

¹⁸ A letter written by Bailey in St. Augustine on December 12, 1672, is given by W. E. Dunn, "Letter from Joseph Baily," this *Magazine*, XVIII (January, 1917), 54; Library of Congress, Manuscript Division, *loc. cit.*

All three of the ships arrived at port at Barbados, but there they lost one ship and purchased another small ship in its place. In the latter ship the declarant departed to pursue the voyage in the company of the others, along with some [additional] men and women who embarked at Barbados. Making to sea the ships encountered an unexpected storm. With each having to run before the wind, his ship was able to make land at Antigua and Montserrat, where they got news that the capital ship [*Carolina*] bearing Sir John Yeamans had made land at Bermuda in good time; but there was no news of the other ship [*Port Royal*].

The declarant then departed in said ship from the island of Montserrat, which is an English settlement, in search of the spot on this coast where they were to make the said settlement, San Jorge. They lost their way and at the end of a month and a half, more or less, with great need for provisions and water, they arrived at the port of Santa Catalina on this coast. We saw smoke on shore and lowered our launch. Then some Indians came with tokens of peace, and indicated a point within the port at which we decided to land to bargain for some food; such as, chickens, corn, pork, beans, and other things. For the Indians who had come aboard assured us of humane and hospitable treatment.

Having tried to depart to sea, but being prevented from doing so by the weather, they dropped anchor once more, and this declarant with nine others—men, a woman, and a girl—went ashore to wash clothes and bargain anew for provisions. Two Indians arrived and told the declarant and the others, in Spanish, that if they would take the launch further within the river they might find good water and other necessities; and this we decided to do. The declarant in the company of five others, being in the launch, then left the others [2 men] in the company of the women who were ashore washing clothes. They arrived at a corn-field and the dwellings of Indians who gave them hospitality and food and showed them the watering place. These Indians told them that they would go with them to the village of Santa Catalina where they might barter. They urged us to do this, and we decided to go. They arrived at an obstacle through which the Indians said they would carry them. Having absolute faith in those beneath them, four companions of this declarant were murdered by said Indians; but they did not kill him and the other, although they intended to do so. They then took them to the village of Santa Catalina. Some Indians went to where the other men and women had been left and killed the men and brought the women to the village.

Those who had stayed in the ship, noting that the launch and those who had gone ashore had not returned, sent a boy, who is now in this garrison, to swim ashore with two letters: One in Latin for the clerics of Santa Catalina; the other for the captain of the ship, who was one of those murdered. The declarant saw this second letter in the hands of the clerics. It asked those ashore to advise those in the ship whether they were prisoners and what they should do. As they did not respond the boat departed, and the declarant and the two other men and the women were brought to this garrison.

The declarant says he knows only what was stated in the dispatches from the Duke of Albemarle and the others, who were given the privileges by the King: that the settlers in the settlement he came to make were to be free to take the fruits the land produces for 20 years, and that for the settlement's security they brought, in said ships, about 16 or 17 iron cannon and about 200 muskets and some munitions; that all the settlers came for the purpose of colonization; that finding himself in this condition at this settlement as soon as he arrived, he never reached the English settlement and has no information about it. This is what he knows and answers . . . his signature . . . says he is 24 years old . . . and the said Carlos Robson: his signature, at the same time with his excellency: Don Manuel de Cendoya . . . John Rios . . . Juan Moreno y Segovia, Public Secretary of this government.

Rivers states he left London August 2, 1669. This is probably about right, as one vessel was at Gravesend August 3rd, and all were "riding in the Downs" by August 17th.¹⁹

One notes that Rivers failed to mention the *Three Brothers'* landing in Virginia. Perhaps he thought it impolitic to remind his captors of the equally unwelcome English intruders in Virginia, thereby inviting further questions about them.

Assuming the *Three Brothers* left Virginia about February, she could have arrived at Montserrat as early as March 15th. She had to leave there about April 1st to consume the 6 weeks voyage time to St. Catharines cited by Rivers. News of the arrival of the *Carolina* at Bermuda could have reached Montserrat by late February; that is, as Rivers implies, before the arrival of the *Three Brothers*. It should be noted that Yeamans, having left the settlers in Bermuda, had returned to Barbados by March 23rd, and might have stopped at Montserrat with this news.²⁰

¹⁹ Cheves, "Shaftesbury Papers," p. 141.

²⁰ Cheves, "Shaftesbury Papers," p. 162.

Rivers said his companions (excepting William Carr) were murdered while being carried on the backs (or shoulders) of Indians and while crossing a tidal creek or marsh. Indians frequently offered this form of conveyance to the early settlers.²¹

I am indebted to a close student of this period, Dr. St. Julien Ravenel Childs, for calling my attention to the Lowery Transcripts which contain the death certificate of John Rivers, dated March 8, 1675, signed by Perez de la Cerda, curate of the Parish Church, and noting that Rivers died in St. Augustine in the residence of Charles Robson.²² This makes untrue Cheves' editorial comment to the effect that he was freed by the intercession of the ambassador to Spain and returned to England.²³ Joseph Bailey was sent first to Havana, and then (in 1678) to Vera Cruz. The last report on him seems to have been given by Sir Henry Goodricke, England's ambassador to Spain, on May 13, 1683: "I have delivered several memorials upon Mr. Bayly's representations, sent me through a Spaniard in 1680. The answer which I at length received was that Bayly was detained as a spy."²⁴

²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 65.

²² Audencia de Santo Domingo (AGI 54-5-11), Certification sobre defunction D. Juan de Rivera, San Augustin, March 8, 1675.

²³ Cheves, "Shaftesbury Papers," p. 130.

²⁴ *Calendar of State Papers, America and West Indies, 1681-1685* (London, 1898), p. 429.