

{...EXTRACTS...}

Selections from Primary Sources

"EXTRACTS" is an occasional section of New York Irish History. It presents material taken directly from primary sources in its original language. Each of these sections presents uninterpreted material which, we hope, is of interest to readers of this journal.

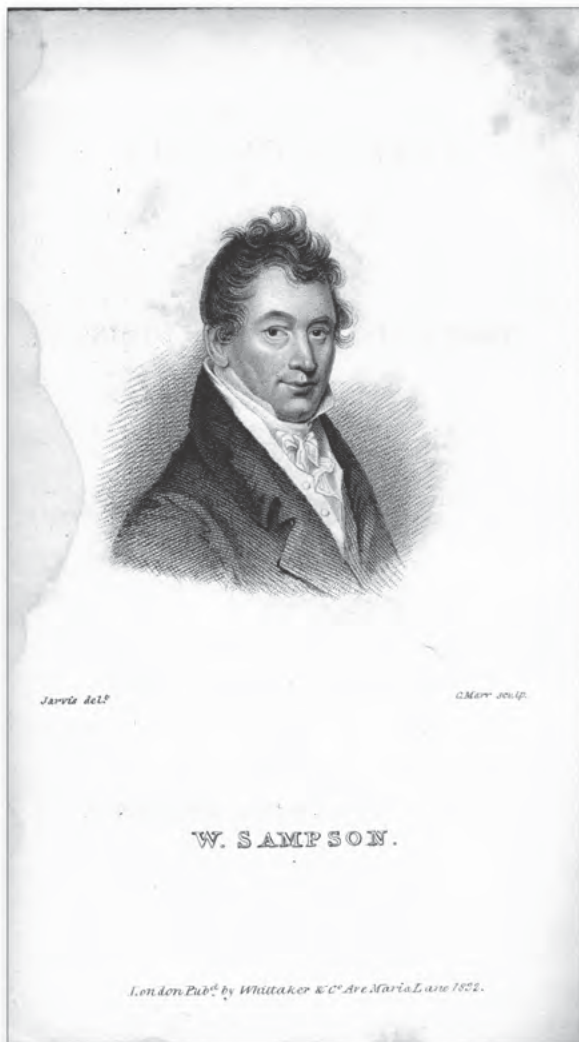


Illustration: frontispiece from Sampson's Memoirs (1832 edition).

Editor's Introduction

The following extracts are from *Memoirs of William Sampson*, a collection of letters and other writings composed by the famous Irish and American attorney, William Sampson. They are largely concerned with his participation in, and observation of, the United Irish uprising in 1798. These selections are from an 1832 edition published by Whittaker, Treacher, and Arnot in London. The extracts here focus on events immediately before and after Sampson's exile to America because of his activities in the uprising. The immediate cause of the exile was a decision rendered in 1806 by Lord George Spencer, the King's secretary of state for the Home Department and former first lord of the Admiralty. The first section describes Sampson's departure from Falmouth, England. The second section is a tongue-in-cheek letter, addressed to Spencer, that describes (with some license) life in New York and America in the first decade of the nineteenth century. —F.N.

Embarkation for New-York

My wife and I stood opposite each other; our two children, tears in their little eyes, filled the interval, and held a hand of each looking at one and the other in sorrowful anxiety. We bound each other by the tenderest engagements to cheerful resignation, and made it the mutual condition of our future love. But I saw in the eyes of this best of women, that she had little hopes of seeing me



again. And indeed, so infirm was my health, there was but little. Those who know the state in which I arrived at New-York, and the cruel sickness I have since endured, will readily believe me.

I was sent down [to leave for New-York from Falmouth] in a post-chaise with Mr. Sparrow; and in consideration of my health was allowed to repose every night. My expense was defrayed by the government, and I had certainly nothing to complain of in respect to the treatment I received. I dined and spent one evening in a genteel private family, of the acquaintance of my guide, and arrived on the fifth day at Falmouth.

The only thing that I can recollect worth notice on the road, was a drove of miserable looking people, whom we met walking bare-footed along, and limping with soreness and fatigue. There were men, women and children; both men and women had children on their backs, and were leading others by the hand. I thought that perhaps they were miners, as we were then, if I recollect, in Cornwall, but they proved to be of that race which the unfeeling call the lazy Irish, who were traveling in search of labor and drudgery, in hopes, at the end of their hard campaign, to be able to carry home wherewithal to pay their tythes, their taxes and their rent.

We met some sailors also, who had been with a whaler to London. It was a ship that had been three years on a South Sea voyage. The hands were all impressed in sight of their native land, where they had hoped, perhaps, to pour their hard-earned wages into the lap of a joy-

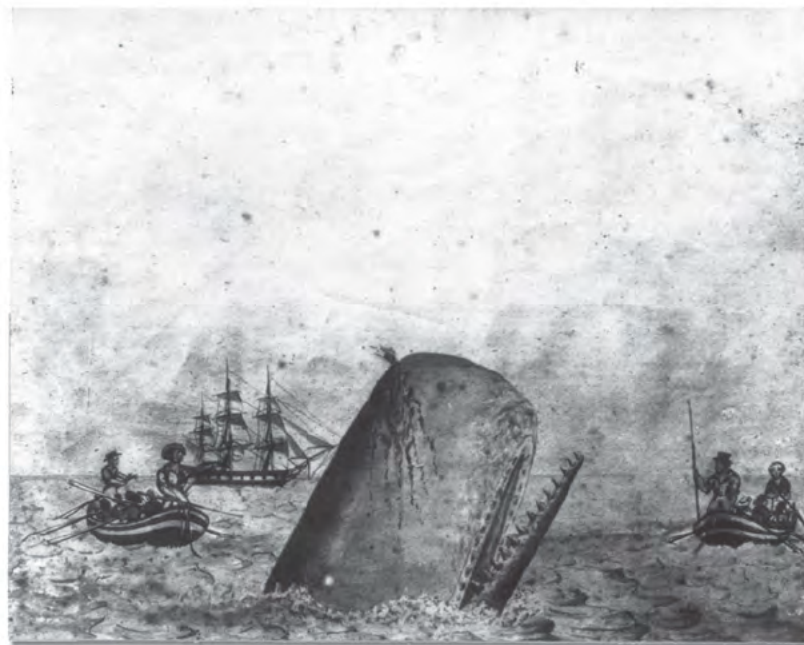


Illustration: Impressment or forced service onboard vessels was practiced by British whaling and naval ships during the 1800s. American sailors were "pressed" at times into British service, an action which may have contributed to the 1807 attack on the U.S.S. Chesapeake in 1807, mentioned later in Sampson's recollections. Illustrations courtesy of Library of Congress.

ful wife; might they not, like me, have children, whose innocent smiles were their delight! Had they not human feelings? And though their hands were hard with labor, their hearts might be more tender than those they were to serve. Where is human justice to be found? These unhappy men were not even suspected, and yet their punishment was worse than that of malefactors.

I lived, as I said, near a fortnight in Falmouth, waiting for the packet. Lord Spencer, the easier to get rid of me, had sent me at the government expense; and I had received a letter, informing me from him, that my conveyance to America was to be defrayed. I therefore had made no provision. But finding that neither the packet agent nor the collector, Mr. Pelew, to whom I was consigned, had any orders, I thought it necessary to write on that head. And as I had come into England with views of peace, so I was determined to leave it. I made up my mind to see every thing in the fairest light, and to avoid every sentiment of resentment that could at best serve to ruffle my own mind and injure my health and happiness. I persuaded myself that lord Spencer had not meant unkindly; and at all events I owed him the same gratitude that the crane owed to the fox, who had his head in his mouth and did not bite it off. I therefore mentioned to him, that although I could not conceive why the government should have thought it necessary to proceed so harshly, yet that I was sensible of the handsome manner in which I had been so far conveyed, and hoped it would continue to the end of my voyage. I shall presently state to you with candor, how far it did and how far it did not.

I was so far indulged during my stay in Falmouth, as to be allowed to walk with my conductor through the fields, along the rocks, or wherever fancy led. And besides that, the inhabitants of this little town had a certain character of benevolence, that it is remarkable for the simple rustic beauty of its women, there was a circumstance which gave it still more interest in my imagination; for nearly twenty years ago, when full of the ardor of youth, I was proceeding on my first voyage to America, by invitation of my uncle, colonel Sampson, to inherit a pretty rich estate which he possessed in that county of North-Carolina, which still bears his name, and

was put, by adverse winds, into this very port. During several weeks that I was detained, my delight had been to explore the wild beauties of the country....

On the 12th of May, I was conducted on board the *Windsor Castle* packet, and set sail with a fair wind for the city of New-York.

The society of a fellow-passenger, captain Davy, of the 29th regiment, and the politeness of captain Sutton, of which I cannot say too much, rendered the former part of the voyage agreeable; but during the latter part the weather was bad, and my health began again to decline. During the few days we staid at Halifax, I was forbidden to go on shore, which mortified my curiosity more than my pride, and I suppose was intended as a mortification; for the most narrow suspicious or contemptible jealousy could scarcely imagine any mischief I could do, were I ever so inclined.

On the 4th of July, a day ever memorable in the annals of America, I arrived in the waters of the Hudson, but I did not reach the city until most of its inhabitants had retired to rest. And now that my travels are at an end, that I am at length arrived in a land of peace and liberty, let us for awhile repose....

Letter from New-York

To the Right Honourable Lord Spencer, his Britannic Majesty's Principal Secretary of State for the Home Department

My Lord, —According to your orders I was landed in this city on the 4th of July, 1806 by captain Sutton of the *Windsor Castle*. I was sorry his majesty's ministers had judged it unsafe that I should be seen at Halifax, as I had need to recruit my health and to reinforce my principles. ...I am now, thank God, in good health and spirits, and shall take every means of showing myself grateful for past favours.

The day I arrived they were commemorating their independence, carousing, singing republican songs, drinking revolutionary toasts, bonfires blazing, cannons firing, and huzzaing for liberty!

I was in expectation that the lord mayor would have brought the military and fired on them; but the mayor is not a lord, and I was informed he

was seen drinking with some of the soldiers. They were also making an outcry about a Yankee soldier, called Pearce, that was killed-off by captain Whitby. It is a pity we had not them in Ireland, we might have ten thousand of them shot in a day, and not a word about them.

I would have gone to the barracks myself to inform against them, but there was no barrack [in New York]. The soldiers live in their own houses, and sleep with their own wives. Nay, more, they have counting-houses, clerks, warehouses, ships, coaches, county seats; the like was never seen amongst common soldiers.

I asked if there was no clergyman that was a justice of peace to head the military? They showed me a bishop,

a mild, venerable-looking old gentleman, that would not know which end of a gun to put foremost, fitter to give a blessing than to lead a corporal's guard; no vigour, no energy. And they say the clergy do not act as justices in this country. Indeed, the clergy here do not act as clergy, as your lordship shall judge.

There is not a clergyman of any description in New-York, nor, as far as I can learn, in all America, that can lead a concert, or play upon the fiddle, or that dances or manages an assembly, or gets drunk, or rides in at the death of a fox or that wears a ruffled shirt, or sings a bawdy song, or keeps a mistress. All they do is to marry the young people, christen their children, visit the sick, comfort the afflicted, go to church, preach twice or thrice on a Sunday, teach the living how to live, and the dying how to die; they are pure in their lives, uncorruptible in their morals, and preach universal love and toleration, and what is more unaccountable, they

have no tithes, and they live in the very midst of their congregations. If I might be bold to suggest anything, and it would not be counted over zealous, I could wish there was a good book written against this disuse of tithes; and I think, my lord, that Anacreon Moore would be a very proper person;

it would be a good means of preventing emigration.

As to the [national] government: at the head of it is an old country philosopher. I wish your lordship could get a sight of one of his shoes, with quarters up to his ankles, and tied with leather thongs. He has neither chamberlain nor vice-chamberlain, groom of the stole nor of the bed-chamber, master of the ceremonies, nor gentleman usher of the privy-chamber,

nor black rod, nor groom, nor page of the privy-chamber, nor page of the back-stairs, nor messenger to his robes, (he has no robes) nothing but red breeches, which are now a jest, and a threadbare one; no laundress for his body linen, nor starcher, nor necessary-woman. He will talk with anybody, like the good-natured vicar of Wakefield; if the stranger talks better than him he is willing to learn; if he talks better he is will the stranger should profit. His is a simple gentleman every way, and keeps his own conscience and his own accounts, pays his own debts and the nation's debts, and has hoarded up eight millions and a half of dollars in the treasury. Your lordship will smile at such an oddity.

We do all we can to shake him, we do all we can to vex him, we do all we can to remove him. He is like a wise old devise; he will not be shaken, he will not be vexed, he will not be moved; if he gets up, we say he is too tall; if he sits down, we

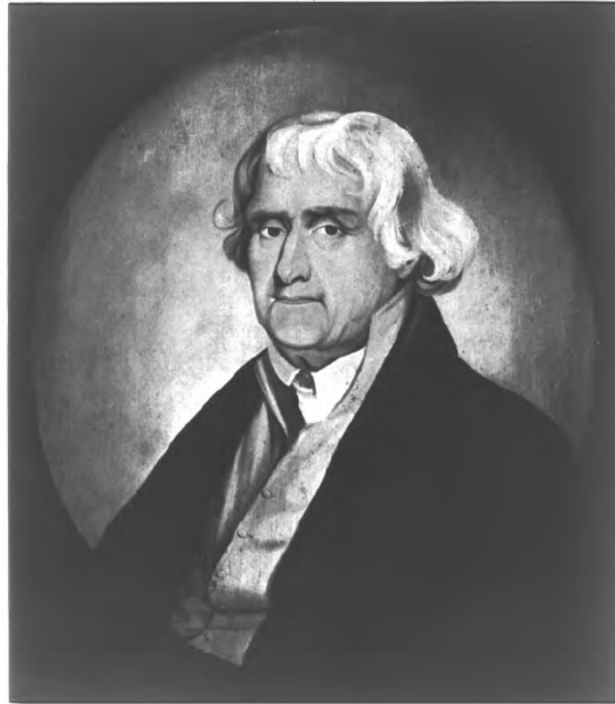


Illustration: President Thomas Jefferson, Sampson's "old country philosopher" in 1806. Courtesy of Library of Congress.

say he is too short; if we think he will go to war, we say his bloody; if we think he is for peace, we say he is a coward; if he makes a purchase, we say he ought to take it by force; if he will not persecute [sic], we say he has not energy; if he executes the law, we say he is a tyrant. I think, my lord, with great deference, that a good London quarto might be written and thrown at his head; he has not guards nor battle-axes, and dodges all along upon his old horse from the president's house to the capitol; there might be an engraving to show him hitching his bridle to a peg; the stranger in America might write the book, but he need not call himself the stranger, it appears clear enough from his works; if it could be possible to confine those works against emigration to home circulation, it would be better; they appear rather ridiculous in this country, for they know here, as well as your lordship, that people are the riches of a nation; I would humbly recommend a prohibition of their exportation; if Mr. Parkinson writes any more, would your lordship have the goodness to let him know that there has been no yellow fever since I came to America, but that in return the catadids have created great disturbance; a good work against the catadids might prevent emigration. Tell him, if your lordship pleases, that the butter is no better than it was when he was here, and the pigs remain reconciled to the peaches; the Timothy grass grows straight up, and so does the duck-greass—apropos, the ducks here go on the water like those of England, but they swim hardest against the stream. Twelve barrels of plaster in Massachusetts go as far as a dozen in any other state, and there is but one head upon a stock of wheat, and the grass grows rankest in the wet ground; a work of this nature may serve to prevent the lovers of good butter and pork from coming to America, and prevent emigration; they boil their cabbage in fresh water, and throw the water out.

All the other departments are as ridiculous as the executive; and one of his majesty's cream-coloured Hanoverian horses has more servants than their secretary of state. They have no lords nor beggars; we must try to have beggars; a little work upon that might put things in a strong light.

Their judges are without wigs, and their lawyers without gowns; this might be called bald jus-

tice and stinted eloquence.

There is no energy in the execution of the law; one constable with a staff will march twenty prisoners; your lordship knows a country where every man has a soldier to watch him with a musket.

The government here makes no sensation; it is round about you like the air, and you cannot even feel it; a good work might be written upon that to prevent emigration, by showing that the arts of government are not known.

There are very few showmen or mountebanks, a proof of a dull plodding people, all being about their own affairs; this might be stated to prevent idlers from coming; but as there is little temptation for that class, it is not worth a book.

They have no decayed nor potwolopping boroughs, which render their parliament a stiff machine; their candidates are not chaired, and through no sixpences among the mob; this might be used to prevent the emigration of the mob.

I do not like their little one-gun ships of the line; if they are so wicked when they are little, what will they be when they grow big?

I believe Decatur to be a dangerous man, I had it from the ex-bashaw of Tripoli; and Preble, I fear, is bad, though the bashaw did not tell me so; however, if we do not come near them they can do us no harm; I hope your lordship will not count me overzealous in my remarks, and that they may not be considered altogether unworthy of your lordship's wisdom; your lordship, having been first lord of the admiralty, is the best judge of gun-boats.

The inventions of this people are becoming everyday more alarming; the sold their card-making machine to the English for twenty thousand pounds sterling, and now they say they can make one for fifty guineas. Might not some addresses be advisable from the Manchester fustian-weavers?

They have made a steam-boat to go against wind and tide seven miles in the hour, an alarming circumstance to the coach-making trade; a work might be written against the emigration of coach-makers, and entitled "No Steam-Boat."

The burning of Patterson Mills was very fortunate, but the Eastern and Southern manufacturers would require to be burned.

It is time the country was taken out of their hands; they are committing daily waste upon the



Illustrations: Changing views of cigar smoking. An illustration from the 1850s and a cigar-box cover from the 1860s depict cigar-smoking men-only clubs; by the late 1880s cigar boxes could depict couples and finally women alone as cigar smokers. Courtesy of Library of Congress.

woods, and disfiguring the face of nature with villages, turnpikes and canals; they are about stopping up two miles and a half of sea, which they call the Narrows, though I endeavour to persuade them of the advantage of free passage for his majesty's ships of war up to the city, and put before their eyes the example of Copenhagen.

That *Chesapeake* business has burst the bubble, and shows that many of those we counted upon here are Americans in their hearts, and will not do any serious mischief to their own country. Their wranglings, I fear, are like those of our own whig and tory, and will profit us nothing.

But there is a means left; and if your lordship will send me a hundred thousand pounds by the *Windsor Castle*, I shall lose not an instant to set about it; it will, I hope, be no objection to my project that it is a new one, the more so, as the old ones have not succeeded very well. I should glory, my lord, to be the author of a species of civil war and discord yet unattempted, and thereby recommend myself to the honourable consideration of his majesty's ministers.

There exists, my lord, in this nation a latent spark which requires only to be fanned; if this be done with address, we shall have a civil war lighted up in this country, which will not be eas-

ily extinguished, for the contest will be between the sexes; if we once can get them into separate camps, and keep the war afoot for sixty years, there is an end to the American people.

The matter is briefly this; the men smoke tobacco, the ladies will not be smoked; they say they do not marry nor come into the world to be smoked with tobacco; the men say they did not marry nor come into the world to be scolded, and they will be masters in their own houses; they are both in the right, they are both in the wrong; neither is right, nor neither is wrong, according as the balance of power can be managed by a cunning hand; and under the cover of this smoke much excellent mischief may be done for the service of his majesty, and the war, which will be memorable in future history, may be called the cigar war. We have at once in our hands three principal ingredients of civil war, fire, smoke, and hard words.

We might coalesce with our magnanimous allies, the Squaws, on the western frontiers, and a diversion on the *Chesapeake* would complete the whole. And I should not despair of marching a column of ladies, by the next summer, into Virginia, and laying the tobacco plantations with fire and tow.

One great advantage of my project, your lordship will please to observe, is this, that, whether it succeed or fail, take it at the very worst, supposing it to end as it begun, in smoke, it would have a result to the full as favourable as other projects which have cost Old England fifty times the sum I ask for. They very smoking of these ladies would be a great point gained, for they have arrived at an insolent pitch of beauty; and it will be in vain that we should deter the connoisseurs and virtuosi of our dominions from coming over here, by holding out that there are no statues nor pictures, if we suffer them to preserve such models of flesh and blood, from which goddesses, nymphs, and graces may be imitated. A few refined souls will prefer cheeks of brass and eye-balls of stone to the dimple of nature and sparkling glances of the laughter-loving eye; but the mass of mankind will be ever vulgar, for them canvass will be too flat, and marble too hard, and flesh and blood will carry off the prize.

It is true, my lord, that certain arts are not yet so advanced in this country as in those further gone in luxury. Yet it is mortifying to see the progress the young and fair ones are daily making in those delicate acquirements which give luster to virtue and embellish good sense. Those arts which have now the charm of novelty and the grace of infancy, cannot fail to improve in a soil where living beauty triumphs, where the great scenes of majestic nature invite, and where history points the eye of the poet, the painter, and the sculptor, to the virtues of Washington, and the plains of Saratoga, and York Town. But one who passes for having good sense, avowed to me, some time ago, that he would rather see a well-clad and active population, than the finest antique groups of naked fauns and satyrs, with a lazzaroni populace; and a thing that has raised great wonder in me is this, that some of these fair-haired dryads of the woods have manners as polished as the shining beauties of your splendid court; where they got it or how they came by it I know not, but on the chaste stem of native purity they have engrafted the richest fruits of foreign cultivation; and as they ladies in all civilized nations will, covertly or openly, have the sway. I think these dangerous persons ought to be well watched, and I am not indisposed, my lord, to keep an eye upon them, provided I may be encouraged by your lordship's approbation. I

shall not then regret the situation in which it has pleased the wisdom of his majesty's councils to have placed me, and I shall labour to the end of my life to make a suitable return.

In this view I think it right to mention that they young ladies have imbibed French principles; some of them can express any sentiment, grave or gay, by a motion of the head, speak any language with their eyes, and tell an affecting story with the points of their toes; those cotillions, by lord, are dangerous innovations.

It is, for the reasons I have mentioned, extremely important that Mr. Weld and the Anacreontic poet should write down the American ladies. The kind and frank hospitality they received from those unsuspecting fair ones, has afforded them an opportunity of taking a noble revenge, worthy of their masters. And if the finest genius, like the fairest beauty, is to be selected for prostitution, Moore is the man.

But if this system of detraction be followed up, you will do well, my lord, to keep your Englishmen at home. They will be very liable, coming over with such notions, to be surprised, perhaps put in chairs; it has already happened to more than one of my acquaintance, and may befall many more. There need come no more with toys from Birmingham. There is one Langstaff here that has done them mischief. He gives himself out for gouty, and sits writing in an elbow-chair; when the fit leaves him, he announces it in the newspapers, and appoints an hour for his visits; all doors are thrown open, and scouts sent out to watch for him; he runs about in a yellow coatee, and in the course of the morning will have kissed the hand of every pretty lady in town. It provokes me to see a little fellow lie in a lady's workbasket, and make laughing sport of grave men; and it makes me feel more mortified at my own growing corpulence, lest my bulk should be no recommendation in the eyes of the fair, whose favour is the chief object of my wishes; I shall, therefore, before the evil grows worse, go immediately to press, be corseted in the genteel form, and then pay my respects to the ladies, and to your lordship. Meantime, I have the honour to be, with all due gratitude for past favours, my lord, your lordship's much obliged and very devoted humble servant,

—William Sampson