

THE PRISON ON THE MOOR: A STUDY OF THE
AMERICAN PRISONER-OF-WAR EXPERIENCE
WITHIN DARTMOOR PRISON
1813–1815

by

JUSTIN JONES

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ABSTRACT

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Justin Jones, M.A.

The University of Texas at Arlington, 2011

Supervising Professor: Elisabeth Cawthon

The War of 1812 is a conflict best characterized by two adjectives: ironic and forgotten. Conventional histories of the War of 1812 focus almost exclusively on the land engagements of the war, despite the occurrence of several crucial engagements at sea. In what is perhaps the greatest irony of all, one of the most infamous incidents of the war—the shooting of several United States prisoners-of-war at Dartmoor prison in 1815—has received virtually no scholarly attention. The general topic of prisoners-of-war during the War of 1812 has received almost no treatment.

Owing to the lack of substantial scholarly literature on Dartmoor Prison during its time as a place of incarceration for both French and American prisoners-of-war, this study's primary focus is on the autobiographical accounts of the men held there. For this study, the author has discovered ten narratives that each tell a slightly different story of what it was like within the prison on the moor. Without exception, all of these narratives are autobiographical in scope.

Building upon the prisoner-of-war autobiographies, the thesis concludes with a discussion of the two most important events in Dartmoor's history as a prisoner-of-war compound. The first, a riot over bread, bears a direct correlation to what would take place on April 6, 1815, the date of the Dartmoor Massacre. To what degree did the former influence the latter? What did actually take place during both events? Was the Dartmoor Massacre really a massacre? Or have time, sensationalism, and political rhetoric obscured the truth?

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

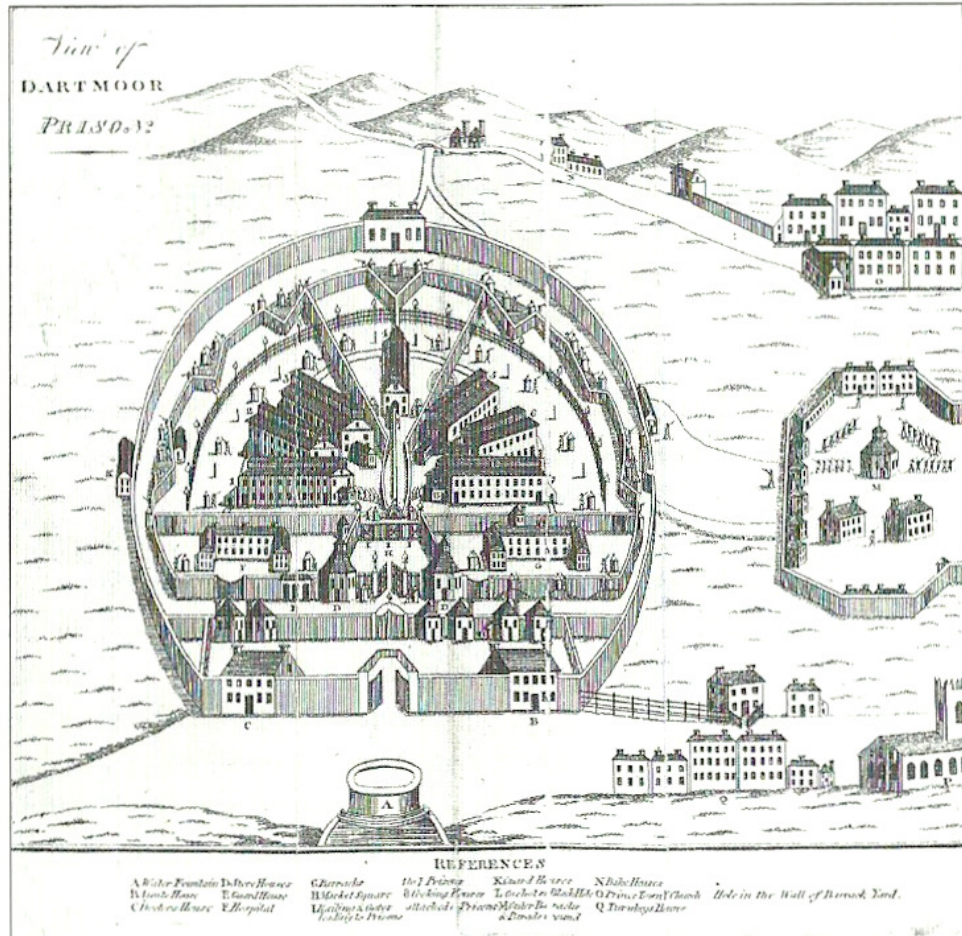


Figure 1 Dartmoor prison in 1815, showing the Barracks, Church, and the growing settlement of Princetown. By permission of the British Library, Map c. 18 e. 37.¹

¹ Elisabeth Stanbrook, *Dartmoor's War Prison & Church* (Brixham, Great Britain: Quay Publications, 2002) , 66.

On top of a mountain those prisons does stand
A place picked on purpose for tormenting man
Where Frenchmen and yankey's together must stay
Until the war's o'er or else run away

Our manner of Living depends very bad
Not grub half enough every Countenance sad
Nor clothing sufficient to cover our skin
And no more Indulgence we get from the King

Our manner of pastime it's hard to Explain
But Keeno and dice is our principal game
While some set at drinking together they sing
Bad luck to the prison short life to the King

Now place all together of what I relate
And had I not Reasons for to god dam'n my fate
But I bear it with patience and cheerfully sing
Long life to our President and a curse on the King

—Excerpted from *The Journal of Joseph Valpey*

The War of 1812 is a conflict best characterized by two adjectives: ironic and forgotten. Irony pervades the entirety of the conflict—from its very beginning up until after the ratification of the Treaty of Ghent. In his history of the conflict, titled simply *The War of 1812*, Harry Coles remarks: "In a war filled with irony, nothing was more ironical than the timing of the declaration [of war with England]. From April to June the British...moved toward conciliation, while the Americans...hastened toward war."² Throughout the conflict, the much smaller United States navy fought—and won—many engagements against a fleet many times the size of her own.³ Of course, the greatest irony of all was the Battle of New Orleans, fought on January 8, 1815, which was the United States' greatest victory, won mere weeks after the peace had been declared.⁴

Conventional histories of the War of 1812 focus almost exclusively on the land engagements of the war. While these engagements are examined to a degree, they are only

² Coles (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1965), 25.

³ Ibid., 73.

⁴ Ibid., 276.

passed over in favor of the conflict's most famous battles. This prevalence toward focusing on the land campaigns of the War of 1812 are themselves an irony, as the United States was more successful on the high seas. In another ironic twist, the most profitable type of naval warfare—at least from the perspective of interfering with an enemy's economy—that of privateering, is barely touched upon—even when naval warfare is discussed.

In what is perhaps the greatest irony of all, one of the most infamous incidents of the war—the Dartmoor Massacre—has received virtually no scholarly attention. However, this void is unsurprising as most histories of the War of 1812 comment on the treatment of prisoners-of-war very little or not at all. For instance, in his book, *The Age of Fighting Sail: The Story of The Naval War of 1812*, (1956), C. S. Forester's only remark concerning privateering is the following: "The chance that the owner might lose his ship and every penny invested; the chance that the seaman might lose his life—or at least spend a considerable part of it in the curiously uncomfortable British prisons—was likely to be forgotten by those imbued with the gambling spirit."⁵

It is little wonder then—considering the scant attention paid to the subject of privateering—that almost nothing has been said concerning the fate of those men captured at sea. Yet, although little has been said, this observation presupposes that there has been some scholarly attention paid to the subject. While the general topic of prisoners-of-war during the War of 1812 has received almost no treatment, happily, commentary does exist in the literature pertaining to Dartmoor Prison.

If the literature on privateering is scant, then the scholarship on Dartmoor Prison is nearly nonexistent by comparison. Most scholarship concerned with Dartmoor Prison is focused on the prison's second incarnation as a penal institution—where even up to the present time of writing, convicted felons are still being incarcerated. For instance, in his 2002 book *Dartmoor Prison: A Complete Illustrated History*, Ron Joy focuses on the prison's slow evolution from a

⁵ Forester (New York: Doubleday, 1956), 85.

prisoner-of-war compound to a penitentiary. Joy acknowledges the presence of American and French prisoners-of-war, but this is the extent of his commentary on Dartmoor Prison as a holding place for prisoners-of-war.

In his book *Dartmoor Prison: A Record of 126 Years of Prisoner-of-war and Convict Life, 1806–1832*, published in 1932, A. J. Rhodes provides a general overview of the prison up until the time of his book's publication. While Rhodes treats the American and French prisoners to only a chapter each, he does devote space to both groups. However, the author draws on a few prisoner narratives and does not devote any space to examining their origins. Therefore, it seems reasonable to conclude that these two chapters were meant to serve as a backdrop to Rhodes's real subject: Dartmoor Prison, the Penitentiary, and not Dartmoor Prison, the prisoner-of-war encampment.

On the other hand, Elisabeth Stanbrook's 2002 work *Dartmoor's War Prison and Church*, is an in-depth examination of the prison, but strictly from an administrative point of view. She comments only: "The suffering of French and American prisoners-of-war, so far from home, was very real and desperately sad."⁶ Occasional bits of prisoners-of-war narrative creep into her book, but only as corroborative narrative and not as a discussion of the men held within the prison's walls. To that end, she makes use of three prisoners' accounts, those of Charles Andrews, Joseph Valpey, and Nathaniel Pierce, men who will be discussed in this thesis. Rather, Stanbrook's focus is on the extensive administrative records, contracts, and other similar documents relating to Dartmoor Prison.

Clive Lloyd's discussion of Dartmoor Prison, found within his book entitled *A History of Napoleonic and American Prisoners-of-war 1756–1816: Hulk, Depot and Parole*, is only a small part of a greater history. He treats the subject of Dartmoor Prison as only a facet of overall British prisoners-of-war policy. What is of great interest is that Lloyd not only discusses Dartmoor Prison, but also includes a description of the rather infamous prison hulks. Beyond

⁶ Stanbrook, *Dartmoor's War Prison*, 8.

this, he also devotes some space to discussing the other prisoner-of-war compounds within England. However, as might be expected, these discussions are necessarily brief as Lloyd's narrative encompasses all prisoner-of-war treatment during the Napoleonic era.

Finally, Robin Fabel's article "Self-Help in Dartmoor: Black and White Prisoners in the War of 1812," published in the *Journal of the Early Republic*, is an overview of life within Dartmoor's walls. The emphasis in this instance is on American prisoners-of-war, but Fabel also includes glimpses into the administrative side of the prison. As with all other scholarship relating to the prison, and that which focuses on prisoners-of-war, Fabel's article is brief. On the other hand, Fabel's focus is primarily on Americans, using memoirs from four different prisoners.

Among these prisoner narratives is *A Journal of a Young Man of Massachusetts*, which is discussed in the second chapter of this thesis. Given the quite modern publication of Fabel's article (in 1989), it is curious that the author assumes that it was Benjamin Waterhouse himself who was present at Dartmoor Prison. In any instance, and regardless of some of its very minor deficiencies, Fabel's article serves as a model for writing on the subject of the American experience within Dartmoor Prison.

Owing to the lack of substantial scholarly literature on Dartmoor Prison during its time as a place of incarceration for both French and American prisoners-of-war, my study's primary focus is on the autobiographical accounts of the men held there. For this thesis, the author has discovered ten narratives that each tell a slightly different story of what it was like within the prison on the moor. Without exception, all of these narratives are autobiographical in scope. Each of these narratives provides both a factually similar account—a plus on the side of historical accuracy—while each offers slightly differing insights into prison life such that each reads dissimilarly from the others.

The most famous of these autobiographical narratives is *A Journal of a Young Man of Massachusetts*, published in 1816. The first of these autobiographical narratives to be published, it was the most impressionable on American readers at the time. Other

autobiographies followed, but most came many years after *A Journal of a Young Man of Massachusetts*. The only exception was the memoirs of Charles Andrews, printed in 1815 under the title of *The Prisoner's Memories on Dartmoor*; this account, like many of the others of American prisoners-of-war, seems to have gone unnoticed.

Josiah Cobb was the next memoirist to publish his manuscript in 1841, under the title of *A Green Hand's First Cruise: Roughed Out From The Log Book of Twenty-Five Years Standing*. Most of this two-volume narrative is concerned with Cobb's time as a prisoner-of-war. Cobb's account provides nothing else before, or after, his time of incarceration. Following Cobb's narrative by three years was an anonymous account, titled "Reminiscences of a Dartmoor Prisoner," published in *Knickerbocker Magazine* in 1844. This latter account is even more mysterious as the author provides very little in the way of personal details, but focuses primarily on his experiences as a prisoner-of-war.

All of the other primary documentation consulted by this author was published from or after the end of the nineteenth century. One of the last narratives to have been published in the nineteenth century was that of Francis G. Selman. Included as part of a larger compilation—in the *Marblehead Manual*—it was published in 1883. Rather than being a deliberately styled autobiography, Selman's account takes the form of a ship's log. The final manuscript to have been published was Joseph Bates' autobiography. Unlike the vast majority of the Dartmoor memoirs, Bates' account of his time as a prisoner is only part of his life's story. Published as late as 1868, this narrative's focus is more on Bates the man—an elder of the Seven Day Adventist movement—rather than Bates the Dartmoor prisoner.

One of the first publications after the turn of the century was *The Yarn of a Yankee Privateer*, published in 1922. Next, *East By Sea and West By Rail: The Journal of David Augustus Neal of Salem, Massachusetts, 1793–1861* was published as recently as 1979. Other accounts were never published, but were held in various collections. For instance, Nathaniel Pierce's narrative, titled "Journal of Nathaniel Pierce of Newburyport, Kept at Dartmoor Prison,

1814–1815," is a part of the Essex Institute Historical Collections. Similarly, *The Journal of Joseph Valpey of Salem*, by Joseph Valpey, was published by the Michigan Society of Colonial Wars in 1922.

Finally, there are four other primary sources that need to be addressed. The first, while not having a direct bearing on the American experience within Dartmoor, is nevertheless important in that it provides additional corroboration for the American narratives. Published in 1847, *The historical story of the misfortunes and escapes of French prisoners in England under the Empire from 1809 to 1814*, written by Louis Catel, tells the story of a French prisoner-of-war held in captivity within Dartmoor. The final three sources of interest are three letters from Reuben G. Beasley. To this historian's knowledge, these letters—especially the one sent to James Madison in November of 1816—have never been examined, let alone set into the context of the American experience at Dartmoor Prison.

The discussion presented within this thesis is five-fold in nature. It is structured such that each chapter builds upon that of the preceding. For instance, the discussion of Waterhouse's manuscript is set aside from the other Dartmoor memoirists to serve as a point of contrast. It is the most famous—or perhaps one ought to say well known—of these memoirs and requires significant space for adequate examination. Discussing Waterhouse first, therefore, will give the reader an understanding of the prevailing views of Dartmoor Prison at the time that the manuscript was published. The other four chapters serve as the meat of the discussion, examining in minute detail the life and experiences of the Americans held within Dartmoor Prison.

This study's primary focus is on the American experience within Dartmoor Prison. This author acknowledges the fact that French captives were also present within Dartmoor Prison—and for much longer a duration than their American counterparts. This study deliberately avoided the English perspective, focusing instead on the American experience within the prison.

As stated above, the second chapter is a discussion of *A Journal of a Young Man of Massachusetts* and its commentary on both Dartmoor Prison and the massacre that took place there. The introduction to the manuscript alleges that the anonymously published narrative is “the fullest account of the experiences of American prisoners-of-war in England during the War of 1812.”⁷ In addition to examining this claim, the thesis explore the identities of the authors of the manuscript and their motives for publishing it in the first place.

A Journal of a Young Man of Massachusetts served as the opening salvo in a debate not only concerned with the treatment of American prisoners-of-war, but as part of a concerted offensive directed toward the then moribund Federalist Party. One of the manuscript’s authors, moreover, was a well-connected individual with links to Thomas Jefferson and, by extent, to the Democratic Party. Finally, and not least of all, this narrative was the first published, and owing to Benjamin Waterhouse’s skill with a pen, it created several myths concerning the treatment of Americans within Dartmoor’s walls. For all of these reasons, *A Journal of a Young Man of Massachusetts* requires separate attention.

The third chapter is an overview of the other Dartmoor memoirists. Many of these men wrote and subsequently published about their time within the prison, commenting to varying degrees on their treatment by the British as well as many of their other experiences. In addition, this chapter provides the reader with a brief look at the prison hulk, to serve as a point of contrast between these floating hells and the prison on the moor.

The final portion of this chapter is a brief examination of an autobiography of one of Dartmoor’s original prisoners. Dartmoor Prison was originally constructed to house French prisoners-of-war. This brief examination serves a two-fold purpose. First, it demonstrates to the reader that many of the prevailing circumstances present throughout American incarceration within the prison were pre-existing, i.e. many of the regulations and institutions that the

⁷ Benjamin Waterhouse and Amos G. Babcock, *Journal of a Young Man of Massachusetts*, (Boston: Row and Hooper, 1816), biographical note.

American prisoner encountered were in existence long before he set foot within Dartmoor's walls. Second, Catel's account serves as a point of both comparison and contrast with his American counterparts. As many similarities as there were between the French and American experiences within Dartmoor, there were stark differences. By examining this account, these comparisons and contrasts can be explored more fully.

Naturally enough, the British government had a system in place for managing prisoners long before the first Americans arrived in England. In addition to the formalized regulations set out by the Transport Office, e.g. who administered the various prisons, what were the daily rations, et cetera, the Americans were permitted to govern—mostly—their own affairs inside of Dartmoor. Chapter Four is an in-depth examination of both of these systems of administration. This chapter examines the true effectiveness of both the British administration of Dartmoor and the American prisoners' self-governance. For example, were the British able to adequately feed, clothe and house their reluctant charges? On the other hand, did the prisoner-appointed committees maintain order? If so, to what degree?

How did the Dartmoor prisoners keep themselves occupied throughout their incarceration? Chapter Five presents a discussion of the behavior of these men as they attempted to stave off boredom. Covered in this discussion are the topics of criminal behavior and the inevitable escape attempts from the prison. How pervasive was the former? And of equal importance, how successful were the vast majority of the latter?

The final chapter is a discussion of what this historian believes to be the two most important events in Dartmoor's history as a prisoner-of-war compound. The first, a riot over bread, bears a direct correlation to what would take place on April 6, 1815, the date of the Dartmoor Massacre. To what degree did the former influence the latter? What did actually take place during both events? Was the Dartmoor Massacre really a massacre? Or have time, sensationalism, and political rhetoric obscured the truth?

CHAPTER 2

A JOURNAL OF A YOUNG MAN OF MASSACHUSETTS

2.1 The Waterhouse/Babcock Account

On April 6, 1815, British militia guarding Dartmoor prison opened fire on a crowd of between fifty and one hundred American prisoners-of-war.¹ After the smoke had cleared and the uproar had died down, the final casualty figures were set at fifty-three Americans—forty-six wounded and seven killed.² As with the Battle of New Orleans, ironically enough, this massacre—or riot, depending on the point of view of the reader—took place after the signing of the Treaty of Ghent on December 24, 1814.³

That the massacre had taken place is beyond doubt; one only needs consult the numerous written accounts of the event. There are several well-known recollections of the massacre ranging from Benjamin Palmer's journal to that of Joseph Valpey that provide the reader with differing viewpoints of what happened on that day. One book published anonymously is of particular interest, *A journal, of a young man of Massachusetts, late a surgeon on board an American Privateer, who was captured at sea by the British, in May, eighteen hundred and thirteen, and was confined first, at Melville Island, Halifax, then at Chatham, in England, and last, at Dartmoor Prison. Interspersed with observations, anecdotes and remarks, tending to illustrate the moral and political characters of three nations. To which is added, a correct engraving of Dartmoor Prison, representing the massacre of American*

¹ Benjamin Waterhouse and Amos G. Babcock, *Journal of a Young Man of Massachusetts* (Boston: Row and Hooper, 1816), 224.

² Robin F. A. Fabel, "Self-Help in Dartmoor: Black and White Prisoners in the War of 1812," *Journal of the Early Republic*. 9, No. 2. (Summer, 1989), 186.

³ Henry R. Viets, "The Life and Scientific and Medical Career of Benjamin Waterhouse: With Some Account of the Introduction of Vaccination in America," In *Three Centuries of Science in America*, ed. Bernard Cohen (New York: Arno Press, 1980), 605.

prisoners. Written by Himself, in June of 1816,⁴ hereafter *A Journal of a Young Man of Massachusetts*.

In an essay entitled "The life and scientific and medical career of Benjamin Waterhouse," which appeared in the book *Three centuries of science in America* published in 1980, Henry Viets finally discovered who had written *A Journal of a Young Man of Massachusetts*. At first, the reader might be confused whilst reading through the article. Viets presents a discussion of Waterhouse's achievements regarding vaccination against smallpox, culminating with Thomas Jefferson's own inoculation against the disease on August 6, 1801.⁵ Yet Viets was trying to demonstrate, throughout this whole discussion, that no matter how much he might have achieved, Waterhouse was never accepted by his colleagues at Harvard.⁶ The point to the first part of the Viets article, therefore, was to prove why Waterhouse was able to collaborate with a rather obscure ship's surgeon named Amos G. Babcock in editing and publishing his journal.

It is also interesting that Viets was not merely content to stop at proving the Waterhouse/Babcock connection. Viets took great care to demonstrate, through the use of letters to Thomas Jefferson and General Jacob Brown, that Waterhouse had been the individual who edited the journal. He was also clear as to why Waterhouse might have published the book in the first place: because the physician was no longer connected with Harvard Medical School, and more importantly, Waterhouse had been interested in the health and well-being of his students during his tenure as a professor at Harvard.⁷ In other words, it was not much of a stretch for Waterhouse to be concerned with the health and welfare of American prisoners-of-war during the recent conflict. Viets' research did not stop there, as he turned his attention to Waterhouse's collaborator.

⁴ Philip Cash, *Dr. Benjamin Waterhouse: A Life in Medicine and Public Service* (Sagamore Beach, MA: Boston Medical Library & Science History Publications, 2006), 381.

⁵ Viets, "Life and Scientific and Medical Career," 613.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 123.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 614.

To establish the identity of Waterhouse's alter-ego, Viets used several different sources—examining newspapers, lists of crews serving aboard privateer vessels, and Admiralty records denoting who was captured when, and most importantly, where. The man's identity: Amos G. Babcock.⁸ Babcock had been a surgeon aboard a schooner called the *Enterprise* and had been captured along with the rest of his crew, on May 21, 1813, by a British frigate.⁹ Unfortunately, Viets was unable to provide any additional details concerning Babcock. Yet this points to another strength of the essay: Viets was not reluctant to tell the reader when he simply did not possess enough information on a given subject. He concluded his discussion of Babcock's background by saying: "Unfortunately, we know nothing about young Dr. Babcock."¹⁰

Viets's article on Waterhouse serves a two-fold purpose for this study. First, it explains in detail just who Benjamin Waterhouse was and what his contributions to early American medicine were. While not relating directly to the topic of this thesis, this information does furnish one with a bit of general background. For instance, the reader can get a good idea of just who Waterhouse was and why we are sure that he had edited and published the journal.

The other, and more important, contribution of Viets to the following discussion is that he is an example of how to approach the topic of this chapter. Though the author of this study cannot follow the method that Viets has used for his own article with exactitude, this angle can at least allow the author to approach the subject similarly. Rather than attempting to intermix comparisons and contrasts of Babcock's account of the Dartmoor Massacre with those of other witnesses, this chapter will briefly describe the massacre and Babcock's relationship to it.

Waterhouse is important because it is necessary to know how much he tampered with Babcock's original manuscript. Philip Cash, in his 2006 book, *Dr. Benjamin Waterhouse, A Life in Medicine and Public Service (1754–1846)*, notes: "It seems likely that Babcock wrote an unadorned and careful account of what he saw and experienced, while Waterhouse

⁸ Viets, "The Life and Scientific and Medical Career," 609.

⁹ Ibid., 608.

¹⁰ Ibid., 609.

embellished it with spread eagle nationalism, pious moralizing, and judgmental ethnic observations."¹¹ This is where Viets's article comes back into play even though he did not assess the accuracy of the journal. He claims: "The account given in the *A journal, of a young man of Massachusetts* [Italics supplied] appears to be accurate...".¹² This particular statement provides the very question that this chapter seeks to answer: How accurate is *A Journal of a Young Man of Massachusetts* with regard to the Dartmoor Massacre?

2.2 The Scholarship

It is generally known that the Dartmoor Massacre took place on April 6, 1815, and that many witnesses were present who recorded their observations in journals or diaries.¹³ In addition to all of the primary sources concerning the Dartmoor Massacre, there has been much in the way of scholarship published by historians concerning the prison from its earliest days to the middle of the twentieth century. Most of this work touches on the Dartmoor Massacre in some way, but very few of these sources seem to cite or even reference *A Journal of a Young Man of Massachusetts*.

In his biography of Benjamin Waterhouse, Philip Cash devotes a chapter to exploring the Waterhouse/Babcock account of the Dartmoor Massacre. While Cash takes the time to examine parts of the Waterhouse/Babcock journal, he does not explore its authenticity in relation to similar accounts. Perhaps Cash thought that an analysis of the Waterhouse/Babcock manuscript was not necessary because "As a result [of Babcock's absence at the beginning of the massacre], the Journal's account is given through a series of official documents."¹⁴ Perhaps Cash is confident in this belief—which is probably justified—because the Waterhouse/Babcock account of the massacre, for all of its flaws in regard to Waterhouse's tampering, does indicate throughout its pages when the author was not present for any given event.

¹¹ Cash, *Dr. Benjamin Waterhouse*, 383.

¹² Viets, "The Life and Scientific and Medical Career," 608.

¹³ Waterhouse and Babcock, *Journal of a Young Man of Massachusetts*, 220.

¹⁴ Cash, *Dr. Benjamin Waterhouse*, 390.

Intrigued by the seeming lack of scholarship on this matter, the author of this thesis conducted a brief database search. One hundred and eight results were found regarding the Dartmoor Massacre. Some of these entries were primary sources and others—the majority—were secondary in orientation. Most of the primary sources were lists of prisoners-of-war or other, more famous memoirs relating to Dartmoor. Unfortunately, the majority of scholarship relating to Dartmoor and the massacre was fleeting, as it was part of a larger history. Given the very nature of database queries, the author could not verify his conclusion as much as he would have liked. Worse, there was no way to access each book's bibliography to check for references to the Waterhouse/Babcock book.

Deciding not to attempt to rely on the little secondary scholarship in determining the accuracy of *A Journal of a Young Man of Massachusetts*, this author explores primary sources almost exclusively. The central concern in this portion of the study, therefore, was to gain a very general understanding of the War of 1812 and to briefly examine Dartmoor Prison through the use of secondary literature. The other key goal was to perform a check of bibliographical information to determine how much scholarship concerning the Dartmoor Massacre referenced *A Journal of a Young Man of Massachusetts*.

In addition to Cash and Viets, the author discovered two additional sources that utilized the Waterhouse/Babcock book. In his book entitled *Dartmoor Prison: a Record of 126 Years of Prisoner-of-war and Convict Life, 1806–1932*, A. J. Rhodes made extensive use of the Waterhouse/Babcock account in the chapter devoted to discussing American prisoners-of-war.¹⁵ Given that this particular book was published in 1933, and that this was before Viets made his discovery as to who the author of *A Journal of a Young Man of Massachusetts* was, it is no surprise that Rhodes did not seem to know who had written *A Journal of a Young Man of Massachusetts*.¹⁶ Robin Fabel's more recent discussion of conditions in Dartmoor in the article

¹⁵ A. J. Rhodes, *Dartmoor Prison: A Record of 126 Years of Prisoner-of-war and Convict Life, 1806-1932* (London: John Lane, the Bodley Head Limited, 1932), 60.

¹⁶ Ibid.

entitled “Self-Help in Dartmoor: Black and White Prisoners in the War of 1812,” also made extensive use of the journal.¹⁷ For some inexplicable reason, Fabel seems not to have made the connection between Benjamin Waterhouse the author and Benjamin Waterhouse the physician.¹⁸ Throughout the article, Fabel assumes that Benjamin Waterhouse was actually present at Dartmoor when he would have been retired by that time from Harvard and not very likely to have enlisted as a sailor aboard a privateer.¹⁹ This finding is interesting because Fabel’s article was published long after Viets’s own discovery of the identity of the authors of *A Journal of a Young Man of Massachusetts*.

Recall that on June 16, 1815, Benjamin Waterhouse published the heavily revised manuscript of Amos Babcock’s time serving aboard an American privateer during the War of 1812. While the facts surrounding the publication of this manuscript into book form—and on which Babcock had certainly collaborated—are beyond question, there are a number of areas of interest that have not been so thoroughly explored through scholarship. For instance, there has been no attempt to explain the reasons why Waterhouse had agreed to edit and submit the manuscript, or for that matter, why Babcock had gone to Waterhouse in the first place.

It is a safe assumption to say that the particulars involved in the Waterhouse/Babcock collaboration will never be known. While that knowledge is probably useful for the examination of the published journal, it is not necessary for determining the Journal’s accuracy. Rather than attempting to explore in depth scholarship on Dartmoor and treatment of prisoners-of-war during the War of 1812, this particular chapter focuses mostly on primary sources. The rest of this discussion, therefore, will involve examining several other accounts—in brief, as all of these same narratives are examined in depth in subsequent chapters—of the Dartmoor Massacre so that the reader may gain a general understanding of what happened. The focus will then shift to examining the Waterhouse/Babcock journal and answering whether or not it is indeed accurate,

¹⁷ Fabel, “Self-Help in Dartmoor,” 176.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Ibid.

or if the book is merely anti-Federalist propaganda. Because of the rarity of the primary sources used for this project, the author has elected in many places to include extensive quotations from the documentary materials. Finally, it is important for the reader to understand just what Dartmoor Prison was actually like. The circumstances of everyday existence at Dartmoor, as Benjamin Brown's account of his experiences explains, coupled with the nature of the prison's administrator Captain Thomas George Shortland, Royal Navy, are key to understanding why the massacre took place.²⁰

2.3 Dartmoor Prison—The Reality

In 1809, the British government opened Dartmoor prison to house prisoners-of-war.²¹ The prison compound was an alternative to the hulks—prison ships which were as bad as their name suggested—that the British government had normally employed to house prisoners-of-war.²² The reasoning behind this decision was three-fold: prison hulks were breeding grounds for disease and were vulnerable to fire; most importantly, the British government believed that enemy prisoners were too close to naval arsenals.²³ A. J. Rhodes further argues that the British government had an unreasoning fear of the American prisoners rioting.²⁴ In any case, between the years 1813 and 1815, a total of 6,553 American prisoners-of-war were housed within Dartmoor's walls.²⁵

Not all of these men were prisoners-of-war; many of them were simply sailors who had been impressed into the Royal Navy. These men had ended up within Dartmoor's walls "because they would not fight against their own countrymen."²⁶ Benjamin Brown's account of

²⁰ Brown, *The Yarn of a Yankee Privateer*, ed. Nathaniel Hawthorne (New York: Funk and Wagnalls, 1922), 262. Brown's relationship and experiences are more fully explored in the next chapter of this thesis.

²¹ Ron Joy, *Dartmoor Prison: A Complete Illustrated History* (Bath, Great Britain: Bookcraft, 2002), 43.

²² Fabel, "Self-Help in Dartmoor," 166.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Rhodes, *Dartmoor Prison*, 49.

²⁵ Fabel, "Self-Help in Dartmoor," 165.

²⁶ Brown, *The Yarn of a Yankee Privateer*, 211.

his time within Dartmoor estimates the number of prisoners in this situation at 2,350.²⁷ Brown does go on to qualify his estimate a little later by explaining: "I do not believe that all these men were Americans; some I know were not..."²⁸

George Magrath, a physician who was in charge of the prison hospital while the Americans were held in captivity at Dartmoor, described the prison as "a great tomb of the living".²⁹ This is an apt description, given the grimness of the prison and its surroundings. In his journal, Joseph Valpey gives the following general description of the prison: "DARTMOOR DEPOT [prison] is situated in the county of Devonshire and lies about 15 miles N[orth] E[ast] of Plymouth and 26 miles W[est] N[orth] W[est] of Exeter [*sic*]... its appearance and Situation is most unpleasant and disagreeable imaginable [*sic*]..."³⁰ He describes the surrounding countryside as being "barren and dreary waste."³¹ Dartmoor Prison was not a single building, but rather a compound consisting of seven barracks and two yards for the prisoners.³²

The interior of each barracks was little better, as the Waterhouse/Babcock account notes: "It [the prison] had iron stanchions, like those in stables for horses, on which hammocks were hung. The windows had iron gratings, and the bars of the doors seemed calculated to resist the force of men and of time."³³ The prison was "dark" and the floors "were [made] of stone, damp and mouldy, and smelling like a transport."³⁴ In addition, Valpey comments that "the inside of the prison presents a melancholy and disagreeable aspect and one would imagine they [the prisons] were calculated for cattle rather than [*sic*] the human species..."³⁵

Valpey makes a reference to the fact that many prisoners were constantly sick due to

²⁷ Ibid., 212.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Rhodes, *Dartmoor Prison*, 1.

³⁰ Joseph Valpey, Jr., *The Journal of Joseph Valpey of Salem* (Detroit, MI: Michigan Society of Colonial Wars, 1922), 58.

³¹ Ibid. As with Brown, Valpey's experiences at Dartmoor will be explored more fully in subsequent chapters.

³² Waterhouse and Babcock, *Journal of a Young Man of Massachusetts*, 173.

³³ Ibid., 174.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Valpey, *Journal of Joseph Valpey*, 58.

the poor climate of the prison.³⁶ In spite of this statement, Rhodes puts the actual number of Americans who died from disease at 280—a relatively low figure given the total number incarcerated.³⁷ Rhodes notes additionally: "It was asserted that the mortality at Dartmoor in the worst year (1810) was less than in the prison hulks, where it was 30 per thousand, and less than the average of deaths in all the war prisons of the country."³⁸ He argues further that many of the diseases present within Dartmoor had been imported along with men who had been captured in tropical latitudes and were not so much the result of the prison's climate, miserable though it was.³⁹

If the conditions were bad at Dartmoor, the food was little better. The Transportation Office of the British government did try to feed and supply the prisoners, though what the prisoners actually got was something else entirely.⁴⁰ As far as clothing and other similar supplies, prisoners received "apart from a hammock, a pillow, a blanket, a coarse bedsack, and some rope yarn."⁴¹ Food was little better, according to Benjamin Brown:

There was great complaint among the prisoners of the insufficient quantity of provisions allowed us by the British for our subsistence. Our allowance was a half pound of beef per man, which... was diminished considerably in weight by cooking and the abstraction of the bone; some turnips, or onions, a little barley, and one-third of an ounce of salt.⁴²

In addition, the men received a pound and a half of bread, which the journal describes as being "of good quality."⁴³

According to the Waterhouse/Babcock journal, there were only two meals a day and they were separated by "a fourteen houre [*sic*] interval."⁴⁴ These meals were described by Babcock as being "vilely cooked," and the journal makes a point to note that cooks were subject

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Rhodes, *Dartmoor Prison*, 38.

³⁸ Ibid., 40.

³⁹ Ibid., 41.

⁴⁰ Fabel, "Self-Help in Dartmoor," 172.

⁴¹ Ibid., 166.

⁴² Brown, *Yarn of a Yankee Privateer*, 203.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Waterhouse and Babcock, *Journal of a Young Man of Massachusetts*, 202.

to extreme abuse by the other prisoners as the majority believed that these men were hoarding additional food for themselves.⁴⁵ The Waterhouse/Babcock book sums this up by informing the reader that "To be a cook is the most disagreeable and dangerous office at this depot."⁴⁶

Fortunately for the prisoners, there was some relief from the "filth and vermin in...our...captivity."⁴⁷ This relief came in two forms: first, the small allowance of money given to every American prisoner-of-war by the United States government.⁴⁸ More importantly, a market operated six days a week from 11:00 to 13:00 so that the prisoners could spend this money on extra food, small articles, and most surprisingly of all, various forms of alcoholic beverages.⁴⁹ In addition to the sale of food "...[there were] shops for the sale of articles of prison manufacture, such as mimic ships, neatly built of bone, straw hats, shoes made of list and canvass, toys of various kinds..."⁵⁰

This market was operated by two types of individuals. The first type was the prisoners themselves who were able to indulge in entrepreneurship by making use of their own skills in prison.⁵¹ The market also included a number of local civilians who were willing to sell food and sundries to the prisoners.⁵² Brown's account explains further: "The market was well supplied with every article needed for consumption in the prison, and was productive of no small profit to the country people."⁵³

Benjamin Brown calculated the total expenditure on all prisoners at Dartmoor, per month, by the United States government at 9,000 dollars.⁵⁴ This fact is even more impressive when one considers that during the year 1814, the American government was in the midst of a

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Ibid., 190.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 201–202.

⁴⁸ Brown, *Yarn of a Yankee Privateer*, 204.

⁴⁹ Valpey, *Journal of Joseph Valpey*, 95.

⁵⁰ Brown, *Yarn of a Yankee Privateer*, 213.

⁵¹ Ibid., 217.

⁵² Ibid., 246.

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Ibid., 210.

serious financial crisis.⁵⁵ In addition to the allowance from the United States government, many of the prisoners within Dartmoor had some money and could use their wealth to make their lives less difficult.⁵⁶ Yet there were also men who, for whatever reason, could not get the sorts of provisions they needed so they resorted to theft or smuggling.⁵⁷

It is important to note that the prisoners at Dartmoor were not isolated from the outside world. According to Brown: "We frequently, while in prison, heard of reverses to the American arms, and we now and then got a glimpse at their triumphs."⁵⁸ Interestingly, most of the news that the prisoners received was current, as the Waterhouse/Babcock journal demonstrates: "Whenever we see in the newspapers an article captioned 'News from Ghent' we devour it with our eyes..."⁵⁹ At the same time, the account goes on to say, "We now and then get sight of American papers, but they are almost all of them Federal [ist] papers, and contain matter more hostile to our government than the English papers."⁶⁰

Lastly, one needs to look at two individuals who were important at Dartmoor. The first was Captain Thomas George Shortland, Royal Navy, the governor of the prison. He was detested by many of the American prisoners-of-war. Valpey, for instance, had this to say about Shortland: "the prisoners... have received very injurious and harsh treatment from the Governor of the Depot, having always endeavored to curtail them of the smallest liberty or indulgence..."⁶¹ Valpey goes on to say: "[we] ought forever to stamp the name of Thomas George Shortland with cowardice, Barbarity Infamy & disgrace [*sic*], his name will never be mentioned by a single American Prisoner but with sentiments of detestation horror and Contempt [*sic*]..."⁶²

The accounts by Brown and Waterhouse/Babcock are less harshly disposed toward

⁵⁵ Donald R. Hickey, *The War of 1812: A Forgotten Conflict* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1990), 223.

⁵⁶ Brown, *Yarn of a Yankee Privateer*, 221.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 205.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 245.

⁵⁹ Waterhouse and Babcock, *Journal of a Young Man of Massachusetts*, 184.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 206.

⁶¹ Valpey, *Journal of Joseph Valpey*, 59–60.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 60.

Shortland. True, Brown states: "... I thought, if there was one villain on the earth, prominent over all others in malice and cruelty, that one was Thomas George Shortland."⁶³ And the Waterhouse/Babcock journal adds: "the prisoners here speak of Captain Shortland as the most detestable of men, and they bestow on him the vilest and most abusive epithets."⁶⁴ Yet, throughout both of these journals, the authors do mention instances of the humane treatment Shortland had demonstrated toward the prisoners as a whole.

Rhodes argues that there was a profound difference between the two governors of Dartmoor during the war with the United States. On the one hand, Captain Isaac Cotgrave, Shortland's predecessor, whom Rhodes describes as being a "strict disciplinarian." On the other hand, Cotgrave's successor, Captain Thomas George Shortland, also a strict enforcer of the Transport Office's regulations, but had a "human touch in his administration."⁶⁵ For instance, Shortland allowed the American prisoners a bit more in the way of freedoms such as the market so they could purchase additional goods that they were lacking.⁶⁶ Perhaps the most interesting aspect of Shortland's administration, however, was how he employed prisoners and simultaneously kept a check on these men from escaping:

Each workman received a wage of 6d. per day, paid every three months, and, if any prisoner escaped, the whole of all the workmen's pay was forfeited. Each prisoner was thus induced to be watchful of the movements of his fellow, and the guard so instituted was more effectual than if it had been armed!"⁶⁷

Obviously, as Fabel has pointed out, Shortland's reputation for being a petty tyrant is overrated.⁶⁸ So why did several of the memoirists display stark hatred for the man? Perhaps many of the prisoners felt resentment at being held in captivity and Shortland was the man to blame. Or perhaps others, as the Waterhouse/Babcock manuscript suggests, were equal in

⁶³ Brown, *Yarn of a Yankee Privateer*, 255.

⁶⁴ Waterhouse and Babcock, *Journal of a Young Man of Massachusetts*, 177.

⁶⁵ Rhodes, *Dartmoor Prison*, 54.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 56.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 57.

⁶⁸ Fabel, "Self-Help in Dartmoor," 173.

rank with Shortland and resented the fact.⁶⁹ In any case, there is little in the way of evidence to answer this question one way or another.

If Shortland was considered to be the most hated man among the British authorities at Dartmoor, then the prison's physician, George Magrath, was the most respected. In Valpey's words, "George Magrath the present super-intendant [of the hospital], is a gentleman of Eminance and skill in his profession, and will ever be remembered by the American Prisoners, with esteem and respect, the sick have uniformly received from him every attention that delicacy and humanity could dictate..."⁷⁰ Brown describes George Magrath as "a tall, one-eyed, but whole-souled Irish gentleman" with the needs of the prisoners under his care being utmost concern.⁷¹ The Waterhouse/Babcock manuscript adds the following:

Was M'Garth [*sic*] commander of this depot, there would be no difficulty with the prisoners. They would obey him through affection and respect; because he considers us rational beings, with minds cultivated like his own and susceptible of gratitude, and habituated to do and receive acts of kindness; whereas the great Capt. Shortland considers us all as a base set of men, degraded below the rank of Englishmen, towards whom nothing but rigor should be extended.⁷²

None of the accounts surveyed for this project specify the reasons why Magrath was held in such high esteem. Still, all of them were in complete agreement concerning the man's disposition.

2.4 The Dartmoor Massacre

Having described what Dartmoor Prison was like, as an in depth discussion is presented in much greater detail in subsequent chapters, one may now turn to the massacre itself. All of the primary sources surveyed for this chapter agree upon what happened on April 6, 1815. There are differences in opinion, however, as to what were the causes of the massacre. Joseph Valpey claimed that "it is a notorious fact that Capt. Shortland has long sought a

⁶⁹ Waterhouse and Babcock, *Journal of a Young Man of Massachusetts*, 182.

⁷⁰ Valpey, *Journal of Joseph Valpey*, 59.

⁷¹ Brown, *Yarn of a Yankee Privateer*, 233.

⁷² Waterhouse and Babcock, *Journal of a Young Man of Massachusetts*, 179.

plausible pretext to glut his revenge and hatred against men whose principles and manners are so incongruous with those of his countrymen in general..."⁷³

On the other hand, Brown had another theory: "It was a large number of these petty causes of irritation on both sides, which produced that highly excited state of angry feelings which led to the catastrophe of the 6th of April."⁷⁴ Further on in his journal, Brown offers an example of some of the "petty grievances":

The occurrences of the 4th of April have always appeared to me to have an intimate and important connexion [sic] with the massacre of the 6th. On the morning of the 4th, the committee to receive the provisions received biscuits [hard bread] instead of soft breads which was our usual allowance. The prisoners refused to take them, conceiving themselves entitled to soft bread, and they were sent back. At 5 P. M. the prisoners, grown desperate by hunger... broke open the gates and rushed into the market-square, and evinced a disposition to break open the storehouses where the provisions are usually kept. The bells rang, the drums beat to arms, and the soldiers paraded in front of the prisoners, and threatened to fire on them. The prisoners did not disperse, and many cried out, 'Fire away, fire away, we may as well die this way as with hunger.' The Major assured them that if they would retire they should have the bread; but they knowing that he had no authority over the provisions, would not retire. Upon Mr. Mitchell, the head clerk's (Captain Shortland being absent) assurance that they should not be locked up until soft bread was issued to them, they retired. The bread arrived about 9 o'clock, and was issued out..."⁷⁵

Interestingly, Brown stated in his journal that if the massacre had taken place on April 4, then the British government and Captain Shortland probably would have had more justification to fire on the prisoners.⁷⁶ In any case, it will probably remain unknown as to what causes were behind the events on April 6, 1815.

As has been previously stated, all of the journals surveyed for this particular chapter do agree on what happened on April 6. It is curious that most of the individuals who spent time in Dartmoor only caught fleeting glimpses of what happened and were not present for the entire massacre. This was probably fortunate for the witnesses, given the outcome of events.

⁷³ Valpey, *Journal of Joseph Valpey*, 60.

⁷⁴ Brown, *Yarn of a Yankee Privateer*, 262.

⁷⁵ Ibid., 265–266.

⁷⁶ Ibid., 267.

According to Joseph Valpey, on the evening of April 6, several prisoners were playing a game in one of the prison's courtyards and their ball flew over the outer wall of the compound.⁷⁷ The prisoners, Valpey's account goes on to say, asked the guards to retrieve their ball, but the request was refused.⁷⁸ The prisoners then threatened to break through the wall and retrieve the ball themselves, and upon further refusal by the guards, did precisely that.⁷⁹ Predictably, the sentries raised the alarm, and according to the account, the men immediately ceased what they were doing.⁸⁰

At this point, the situation appears to have gotten out of hand, as Valpey explains:

The prisoners [were] surprised at the alarm [and had] run into the Passage opposite the market, when appeared Captain Shortland at the head of about 500 of the Malitia [*sic*], the front rank of whom were ordered to fire, and soon after the rear [had] done the same, with considerable execution and persued [*sic*] the Prisoners to the yards, the Scenes of barbarity and horror which were witness'd [*sic*] on this Day are indiscribable [*sic*]...⁸¹

Valpey goes on to say that "a man by [the] name [of] John Washington being wounded and overtaken by the military [*sic*] begged for his life but those Ruffians... deliberately pointed their muskets within six inches of his head and blew his brains out..."⁸²

Benjamin Brown was one of the American prisoners who did not witness much of the massacre.⁸³ Brown did see prisoners trying to retrieve their ball, but quickly returned to his barracks as soon as the alarm was raised; while inside, he did claim to hear muskets firing from the direction of where the market was located.⁸⁴ It is interesting that Brown had noted that "... it [his account of the massacre] was written under such strong feelings of excited indignation, that I dare not trust to it now as a correct representation."⁸⁵

⁷⁷ Valpey, *Journal of Joseph Valpey*, 60.

⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁸¹ Ibid.

⁸² Ibid.

⁸³ Brown, *Yarn of a Yankee Privateer*, 271.

⁸⁴ Ibid., 274.

⁸⁵ Ibid., 273.

Out of all the accounts examined for this thesis, Brown's appears to have been the most dispassionate. He not only admits that there was a great deal of anger felt by himself, and presumably by the other prisoners, but he offers some explanations as to what might have caused the massacre. Brown's journal speculates that if there had been some deliberate action by the militia and Captain Shortland, and not the confusion that had arisen before the massacre, then it might not have happened.⁸⁶ He adds, "He [Shortland] may have been actuated by resentment, or he may, while regretting the supposed necessity, have done nothing more than what he conceived to be his duty under the circumstances."⁸⁷

As for Amos Babcock, where was he during the massacre? What did he see and hear? The answer, as it turns out, is very little. The Waterhouse/Babcock journal states, "I did not see the beginning of this affray. I was, with most of the other prisoners, eating my evening's meal in the building, when I heard the alarm bell, and soon after a volley of musketry."⁸⁸ While it is unfortunate for historians—but very fortunate for Babcock—that he was not present in the prison yard to witness the attack, he can at least confirm that he heard the alarm being raised and shots fired, adding further corroboration to the already numerous accounts as to what happened.

Rather than trying to record the events of the massacre on April 6, 1815, the Waterhouse/Babcock journal reproduces a report from the prisoners who were present.⁸⁹ To that end, Waterhouse—presumably—enclosed several depositions taken after the massacre as an appendix to the journal itself.⁹⁰ This then prompts the question, and the final subject of this discussion: how accurate was the Waterhouse/Babcock journal?

⁸⁶ Ibid., 272

⁸⁷ Ibid., 271.

⁸⁸ Waterhouse and Babcock, *Journal of a Young Man of Massachusetts*, 219.

⁸⁹ Ibid., 220.

⁹⁰ Ibid., 221.

2.5 Fact or Fiction?

According to Donald R. Hickey in his book, *The War of 1812: A Forgotten Conflict*, the War of 1812 had a "political character."⁹¹ This is an important piece of information when one begins to examine the journals of American prisoners-of-war held at Dartmoor. Reading the Waterhouse/Babcock book for the first time, one notices that there were many instances of political and moral commentary scattered throughout its pages. The following passage is an adequate demonstration:

The sea-ports of England and the streets of her capital, and indeed of all her large cities, are filled with handsome women who offer themselves as "wives" to men they never saw before, for a few shillings; and yet this is the country of which our reverend doctors from the pulpit assure us, contains more religion and morality than any other of the same number of inhabitants; nay, more, our governor [Strong of Massachusetts] has proclaimed it to the world over, as being the very bulwark of the religion we profess. If cruelty to prisoners, cruelty to their own soldiers, if kidnapping their mechanics by press gangs, if shocking barbarity be exercised towards prisoners, and if open, shameless lewdness, mark and disgrace their sea-ports, their capital and all their large cities, are the modest and correct people inhabiting the towns and villages of the United States, to be affronted by being told publicly that they have less religion, less morality than the people of England? How long shall we continue to be abused by folly and presumption? We Americans are yet a modest, clean, and moral people, as much so as the Swiss in Europe, and we feel ourselves offended and disgusted when our blind guides tell us to follow the example of the English in their manners and sexual conduct.⁹²

The Waterhouse/Babcock journal was not the only account that included commentaries on politics. For instance, Brown writes "The term federalists was one of great opprobrium..."⁹³ What can be inferred is that the Waterhouse/Babcock manuscript cannot be dismissed based on its political commentaries—as numerous as they are. The question, therefore, is how accurate is the Waterhouse/Babcock manuscript when compared to other similar documents?

The answer is not quite as straightforward as one might first assume. While it is true that *A Journal of a Young Man of Massachusetts* is generally accurate, it does not furnish any additional insight into the massacre. The reasoning behind this assertion is simple: as has already been discussed, Babcock was not present for the massacre and only heard what was

⁹¹ Hickey, *War of 1812*, 100.

⁹² Waterhouse and Babcock, *Journal of a Young Man of Massachusetts*, 169.

⁹³ Brown, *Yarn of a Yankee Privateer*, 227.

taking place through others who were present.⁹⁴ It seems most likely that the Waterhouse/Babcock journal bases its opinions and perspectives on what others had seen and done, and subsequently, recorded in their respective accounts.

In point of fact, Babcock spent little time at Dartmoor. He experienced most of his incarceration for a year's time aboard prison hulks near Portsmouth.⁹⁵ It is interesting that the manuscript remarks: "This was the first time we touched the soil of England with our feet [in October of 1814], after lying under its shores nearly a year."⁹⁶ It is likely that Babcock was not present for the worst of the ordeals that the other American prisoners had experienced. Fortunately, as with the massacre itself, Waterhouse/Babcock informs the reader when this is the case, for example, there was an instance, during an incident in which a French prisoner-of-war had been shot for not obeying a sentry's command quickly enough.⁹⁷

The last point that needs to be explored is how to discern the difference between Babcock and Waterhouse's narrative in the account. Viets described Babcock as being "a good observer and describes in great detail, presumably with historical accuracy, the conditions he saw."⁹⁸ He adds "Interspersed with it [Babcock's narrative] are paragraphs of a political and moral nature, probably added later by the other author [Waterhouse]."⁹⁹

Reading through *A Journal of a Young Man of Massachusetts*, this difference in narrative becomes obvious. Even the full title of the book suggests a work characterized by two objectives: to recount Amos Babcock's time as a sailor aboard a privateer, and simultaneously, to provide the reader with moral instruction. While the account is accurate in a general sense, the editor's assertion that the manuscript is the most accurate representation of the American experience in Dartmoor is a bit of a stretch.¹⁰⁰

⁹⁴ Waterhouse and Babcock, *Journal of a Young Man of Massachusetts*, 219.

⁹⁵ Viets, "Life and Scientific and Medical Career," 607.

⁹⁶ Waterhouse and Babcock, *Journal of a Young Man of Massachusetts*, 170.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 183.

⁹⁸ Viets, "Life and Scientific and Medical Career," 608.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁰ Waterhouse and Babcock, *Journal of a Young Man of Massachusetts*, biographical note.

2.6 Conclusions

By examining two other journals kept by prisoners at Dartmoor, one learns that the Waterhouse/Babcock manuscript is indeed accurate. This accuracy is in rather general terms, though, when discussing the Dartmoor Massacre. As has already been established, Amos Babcock was not present for the massacre in the truest sense of the word as he only “heard” what happened.¹⁰¹ While Babcock was not a witness to the massacre, his journal does still provide insight into what life at Dartmoor was actually like—given that Babcock was there for six months.

Benjamin Waterhouse’s extensive tampering is easy to detect throughout the book. Most of what his meddling amounts to are inserted remarks of a political or moral nature. He does not, in any instance, attempt to alter or omit any of Babcock’s original writing. In order to give the reader a clearer perspective on the Dartmoor Massacre, Waterhouse presumably included several documents describing the massacre at the end of the journal.

While this consideration of the Waterhouse/Babcock account may have answered one question—the accuracy of that recollection of Dartmoor and the Massacre—several additional queries have arisen to take its place. There has been very little scholarly discussion of the Dartmoor Massacre. There has been no attempt, seemingly, to analyze all of the journals kept by American prisoners-of-war incarcerated within Dartmoor Prison. In addition, there has not been any attempt to explore what reality for these prisoners was like, save for Robin Fabel’s article on Dartmoor and a few chapters in A. J. Rhodes’s history of Dartmoor.

It is illuminating, for instance, to explore who Captain T. G. Shortland was. Was he really the tyrant that the prisoners said he was? Or, more likely, “Despite the infamy that thereafter [was] attached to Shortland as the Nero of Dartmoor, he had not presided over a hell camp, and the quality of life there contrasted favorably with the hulks...”¹⁰² Fabel’s observation prompts another question: what were the prison hulks like as compared to installations such as

¹⁰¹ Ibid., 219.

¹⁰² Fabel, “Self-Help in Dartmoor,” 183.

Dartmoor? Chapter Three explores the reality of life on the hulks. Chapter Four discusses regulations that affected the prisoners and pays special attention to the policies of the governors of the prison including Shortland and the previous commander, Captain Isaac Cotgrave. Chapter Five examines the conditions at Dartmoor in greater detail.

Last, but certainly not least of all, what really did happen during the Dartmoor Massacre? Did Captain Shortland deliberately order the cold-blooded execution of American prisoners? Or more likely, was it a case of confusion and conflicting orders? Chapter Six provides a preliminary sketch of the Dartmoor Massacre.

The present study begins our inquiry into Dartmoor and the Massacre, by comparing and elucidating the extant U.S. prisoners' memoirs. It leaves aside for the moment the question of British perspectives on the prison and the April 6, 1815 riot, as well as American political and popular reaction to the incarcerations and the bloodshed at Dartmoor. This thesis instead concentrates on the view from the ground: a consideration of several U.S. prisoners' recollections of Dartmoor during the War of 1812. Specifically, this study examines the autobiographical writings of the American prisoners who left accounts that have survived into the present day.

As the Brown and Waterhouse/Babcock accounts have noted, there were many French prisoners-of-war detained within the prison.¹⁰³ Were the French and Americans treated differently at Dartmoor? In Chapter Three, this study describes one French recollection of Dartmoor in order to highlight certain ways in which the experiences of French prisoners-of-war paralleled the Americans' time there.

If the Waterhouse/Babcock account is something of an outlier, then, as a description of the Dartmoor prisoners' experiences, what were the more typical reminiscences of American memoirists? The following chapter, Chapter Three, concerns the backgrounds of the remaining writers employed in this research. It also takes into consideration two related situations relevant

¹⁰³ Brown, *Yarn of a Yankee Privateer*, 239– 240.

to a description of Dartmoor: life for prisoners on the prison hulks, and the experiences of French prisoners prior to the arrival of the American prisoners en masse.

CHAPTER 3

THE DARTMOOR PRISONERS

3.1 Who Were the Dartmoor Memoirists?—Prisoner Biographies

At the very outset of his autobiography, David Augustus Neal remarks: "Autobiography is seldom interesting except in cases where the incidents of the writer's life have been associated with great events or his own acts have been of such a character as to minister to the honest pride of his posterity..."¹ While there is some degree of truth in this observation, it is fortunate that such memoirs exist. It is through the narratives of men like Neal that there is any information on Dartmoor at all. But who are these men? Where did the Dartmoor memoirists come from? And to what degree did their experiences at the prison affect the rest of their lives?

Some of the authors, such as Charles Andrews or Benjamin Brown, only provide commentary on their time within the prison, constructing their narratives around this central theme. Others, such as Neal or Joseph Bates, treat their time in the prison as only one portion of their lifetime experiences. It is therefore worth a significant amount of space to comment on each of these men and their origins.

For all their differences, these authors have several characteristics in common. Without exception, each of these men was from the New England region; most of them place their origins within Massachusetts. In addition, the Dartmoor memoirists were sailors of varying experience. Neal had served on board vessels bound for Calcutta, while Cobb's first seaborne adventure was the very privateering expedition that would land him inside a British prison.² Many of these men were also latecomers to Dartmoor Prison—perhaps explaining some of the

¹ Neal, *East By Sea and West By Rail: The Journal of David Augustus Neal of Salem, Massachusetts, 1793–1861* (Toronto: Elbridge Printing, 1979), 7.

² Neal, *East By Sea and West By Rail*, 43; Josiah Cobb, *A Green Hand's First Cruise: Roughed Out From The Log Book of Twenty-Five Years Standing*, 2 vols. (Boston: Otis, Broaders, 1841), 1: 26.

bitterness that colored their accounts. A final similarity shared amongst these men was their support, to varying degrees, of the war against England.

Benjamin Brown's account, entitled *The Yarn of a Yankee Privateer*, was in the keeping of the Hawthorne family for several years. In fact, Brown's account saw much editing by Nathaniel Hawthorne himself, but was never published. According to the introduction, the narrative had been a part of a manuscript for publication in the *Democratic Review*, but for whatever reason, it never reached the publishers of the magazine.³

There is a degree of mystery surrounding the origins of Brown's memoir. While Hawthorne certainly did not pen the account himself—the handwriting was not his, and he had been eight years old during the War of 1812—there is little evidence to suggest where it had originated. The introductory note to the manuscript offers the theory that Hawthorne might have had a hand in recording an account of a veteran of the war, owing to the fact that he came from a family of sailors.⁴ Regardless of who actually penned the manuscript, the introduction insists that there is no doubt as to its authenticity, owing to the fact that the narrative often refers to real people and incidents throughout its pages.⁵

Benjamin Brown's narrative begins with an explanation of his reasons for enlisting on board a privateer. He did not possess the physical constitution required for service on board a United States naval vessel. Fortunately for himself, Brown was offered a position as assistant to the ship's surgeon, though he observes: "... although my only qualification for this office was a slight knowledge of the composition of medicine; but, as the event proved, this was sufficient; for the surgeon had no opportunity of displaying his skill...during the cruise." Other than a general date—September of 1812—of when he departed the United States, Brown does not

³ Clifford Smyth, introduction to *The Yarn of a Yankee Privateer*, by Benjamin Brown, ed. Nathaniel Hawthorne (New York: Funk and Wagnalls, 1922), xiv.

⁴ *Ibid.*, xvi.

⁵ *Ibid.*, xvii.

provide any additional details about which port he sailed from, let alone the name of the privateer on which he served.⁶

His privateering career had been somewhat successful, capturing two prizes, but it came to an end on January 25, 1814, when his vessel was taken by the *H.M.S. Heron*.⁷ From this vessel, Brown was transferred to a prison on Barbados, where he was held with 500 Frenchmen for a six-month period.⁸ On September 29, 1814, Brown would reach Plymouth and subsequently be transferred to Dartmoor Prison.⁹

Throughout his memoirs, Brown maintains a coherent and rather objective writing style—doubtless enhanced through Nathaniel Hawthorne's skill as a writer. However, this memoir does fall short in that Brown was not present at Dartmoor for very long as compared to some of the other authors surveyed for this study. Where he does offer commentary, it is clear and concise and bears little of the inflammatory nature of many of the other Dartmoor memoirists. This concise and objective writing might be the direct result of Hawthorne's editing of the original manuscript. However, there is not a copy of the unaltered memoir, so this historian's opinion is purely speculative.

Unlike Benjamin Brown's account, there is no ambiguity surrounding that of David Augustus Neal. Neal was born in Salem Massachusetts on June 7, 1793.¹⁰ Unlike the majority of the Dartmoor memoirists, Neal's account of his time in prison serves as one part of his lifetime experiences. Living to 1861—the very eve of the Civil War—Neal's narrative reveals that he was witness to several advances in both the arts and sciences.¹¹

In direct contrast to many of the other accounts, Neal's first sea voyage was not as a direct result of the outbreak of war with England in 1812. His first time sailing was on board the

⁶ Brown, *The Yarn of a Yankee Privateer*, ed. Nathaniel Hawthorne (New York: Funk and Wagnalls, 1922), 4.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 64–68.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 80.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 152.

¹⁰ Neal, *East By Sea and West By Rail*, 11.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 17.

Union, a merchant ship bound for Calcutta.¹² When war did break out with England, Neal was hardly enthusiastic about the prospect as his memoir comments: "Never probably was a measure of so much importance adopted with so little deliberation and at so impolitic a moment."¹³

Nevertheless, Neal set aside his objections and enlisted on board a privateer, the *Diomedé*, assuming the position of ship's clerk.¹⁴ As to why he did not simply enlist the United States Navy, he comments: "In privateering there was something attractive in its adventurousness, its liberty of place and action, and its comparative freedom from the rigid discipline of national ships."¹⁵ The *Diomedé* would leave New York on February 4, 1814, and enjoy some degree of success before finally being captured by the British on May 21, 1814.¹⁶

Neal was one of the few officers who managed to survive the *Diomedé*'s capture to be taken as prisoners-of-war. His account pauses to assert that the reason for the capture in the first place was due, in no small part, to the cowardly conduct of some of the *Diomedé*'s officers.¹⁷ Regardless of the circumstances surrounding the *Diomedé*'s capture, the crew was treated well by their captors. On May 31, 1814, the *Diomedé*'s crew was transported to Halifax, Nova Scotia, where for a month and a half they would remain confined.¹⁸

In July, Neal was informed that he, along with the rest of the crew, was to be transported from Canada to England. On July 19, while en route to Plymouth, the prisoners attempted to seize the vessel, but the effort was suppressed, owing to confusion amongst the conspirators.¹⁹ Interestingly, the British assumed that Neal was the ringleader of this conspiracy and so was treated poorly until he was put on board another vessel, the HMS *Goliath*, and

¹² Ibid., 43.

¹³ Ibid., 75.

¹⁴ Ibid., 85.

¹⁵ Ibid., 79.

¹⁶ Ibid., 87.

¹⁷ Ibid., 93.

¹⁸ Ibid., 97.

¹⁹ Ibid., 103.

transferred eventually to a hospital ship.²⁰ From hospital, Neal was eventually transferred to Dartmoor Prison. "I have never since regretted the short time I was compelled to reside in Dartmoor prison. It gave me a knowledge of men better than I could have acquired in any other school in a much longer time. As to treatment by the officials there was nothing to complain of, but the conduct of the prisoners, although towards me personally unobjectionable was in many instances outrageous."²¹

Neal would eventually return to the United States in May 1815. He would immediately pick up his life as a sailor, making a trip to Calcutta in August of that same year.²² This return to normalcy only reinforces his outlook on his time held within Dartmoor Prison. In point of fact, and very similar to Benjamin Brown, Neal's reminiscences of his time within Dartmoor Prison are both objective and a touch dispassionate. The one significant difference from Brown's account is that Neal does not hesitate to point out the faults of his fellow countrymen.

Francis G. Selman of Marblehead, Massachusetts was a serving officer, holding the position of first lieutenant on board the privateer *Growler*. Selman's memoirs of his time within Dartmoor—contained within *The Marblehead Manual*, published in 1883—are in the form of a journal. Owing to this form of Selman's narrative style, there is little in the way of details of his origins and previous experiences presented within the manuscript. The narrative takes the form of a ship's log, containing information on both the weather and the day-to-day activities of the vessel on which he served. The *Growler* was a privateer that enjoyed little success during the War of 1812.²³

In addition to having little luck in finding prizes, the *Growler* had many close calls with British patrols as the following entry demonstrates:

²⁰ Ibid., 105.

²¹ Ibid., 119.

²² Ibid., 121.

²³ Samuel Roads, *The Marblehead Manual* (Marblehead, MA: Statesman Publishing, 1883), 29.

Wednesday, June 29, At 8 A. M., saw a sail off the weather bow, and hauled to and made sail in chase for him. At 9, made him out to be a square-rigged vessel standing by the wind to the northward. At 10, saw the land, but the weather being so thick could not discover what it was. At 11.30, the chase tackt [*sic*] and stood off, when we immediately tackt [*sic*] and found her to be a 74-gun ship. Made all sail to get clear."²⁴

Not only does this entry demonstrate how poor the *Growler's* luck was in hunting her British prey, but also provides the reader with an example of Selman's writing style. Even in this particular instance, when the *Growler's* crew discovered that they had been chasing a British ship of the line, Selman's journal entries remain concise and to the point.

The *Growler's* luck would eventually run out when she was captured on July 7, 1813 by the HMS *Electra*. The seizure of the *Growler* was achieved by the *Electra* only after an hour and a half of exchanged cannon fire.²⁵ Following their imprisonment on board the *Electra*, Selman's log notes, day after day, the mistreatment of the *Growler's* crew, usually by excessive flogging. Unfortunately, Selman's memoir provides no reasoning behind the harsh treatment—other than speculation.²⁶

The situation continued to grow worse, with only one day (July 20) on which no floggings were administered. In August, the prisoners were willing to attempt a seizure of the *Electra*. However, revolt was thwarted—Selman's narrative speculating that it was intentionally given away—and with no further incidents, the *Growler's* crew was eventually placed on board a ship, HMS *Talbot*, that was bound for England.²⁷

As they had done on board the *Electra*, the *Growler's* crew would make one attempt to seize the *Talbot*. Selman's narrative states that their motives for doing so were based on their circumstances on board ship: they were birthed amongst the water casks, a claustrophobic space in which the prisoners had little room to move, let alone make themselves comfortable. Selman's involvement in the attempt to seize the *Electra* is unclear, but there is no doubt that he

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Ibid., 30.

²⁶ Ibid., 31.

²⁷ Ibid., 33.

played a significant role. Unfortunately, this attempt to seize the vessel would also fail, and as with the previous incident, was apparently given away by an informer.²⁸

On November 15, 1813, the *Growler's* crew was transferred from the *Talbot* onto one of the many prison ships in Portsmouth harbor. Rather than the antipathy that many of the other memoirists expressed toward the prospect of captivity on board one of the hulks, Selman's log entry for that day was one of relief, at least initially.²⁹ Selman would be confined on board prison hulks for nearly a year, transferred to Spithead, then to Chatham, until finally, on October 8, 1814, to Dartmoor Prison.³⁰

Even after their capture by the *Electra*, Selman maintains his recollections in the form of a ship's log. The way in which it was written almost implies dispassion on Selman's part as the following excerpt from his time on board the HMS *Electra* suggests:

Tuesday, July 12, Got under weigh [*sic*] and proceeded on a cruise in the sloop-of-war.
This day 3 men flogged belonging to the ship with 3 dozen each.
Wednesday, July 13, Saw St. Peters Island bearing N. W. 4 boys flogged with 2 and half dozen each.
Thursday, July 14, 1 man and 4 boys flogged, the man with 3 dozen and the boys with 2 dozen each.
Friday, July 15, Caught a number of codfish. This day 3 men flogged with 2 dozen each. The goat had one dozen.
Saturday, July 16, Caught a number of codfish. This day 2 men flogged, 1 and half dozen each. Boarded an Englishman.
Sunday, July 18, Capt. Gregory beastly drunk. All the boys and all the dogs and the goat flogged with two dozen each.³¹

Notably, as his captivity lengthened, Selman's writing style noticeably changes. The calm, cool professionalism of a ship's officer is slowly replaced with bitterness and anger toward his captors. Overall, the style of composition remains well-paced and concise.

Green Hand's First Cruise, written by Josiah Cobb, was originally converted from a logbook that spans twenty-five years at sea.³² Born in Boston, Massachusetts, Cobb's interest in sailing dated from his childhood, when he heard stories from an elder brother concerning his

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Ibid., 34.

³⁰ Ibid., 40.

³¹ Ibid., 29.

³² Cobb, *A Green Hand's First Cruise*, 1:1

adventures at sea.³³ His first experiences with sea voyages came during the War of 1812. He signed onto a privateer on December 13, 1814, at the very end of the conflict.³⁴ He was assigned—or perhaps entrusted might be a better word—the position of having charge of the ship's contingent of marines, men who were as new to the trade as he himself was.³⁵

On December 28, 1814, Cobb's vessel was surrounded and captured by three British frigates, ironically after the Treaty of Ghent had been signed.³⁶ The privateer's crew was held on board the HMS *Leander*, where they would spend two weeks awaiting transport to England.³⁷ From that point of time, he was transferred to the HMS *Pheasant*, from which point he was immediately taken to England.³⁸ On January 31, 1815, Cobb arrived in Plymouth and was promptly ordered to Dartmoor Prison.³⁹ As with many other instances within Cobb's account, this was an ironic twist. That he would have to spend time in Dartmoor at all was odd, owing to the fact that the war was legally over, and the only portion of the peace process remaining was Congress's ratification of the Treaty of Ghent.

Cobb would spend five months within Dartmoor Prison, finally leaving in early July, around the time that the last Americans were being discharged.⁴⁰ This leads to a brief point of interest: his narrative is not very clear on the exact length of time he was imprisoned. For instance, in the second volume, on page 237, Cobb mentions that he would remain imprisoned for four months, pushing his date of discharge to the end of May or early June, rather than late June/early July. In any instance, Cobb would eventually reach Boston on August 13, 1815; at this point his narrative ends, as does his entire biography.⁴¹

³³ Ibid., 1:13, 17.

³⁴ Ibid., 1:26.

³⁵ Ibid., 1:73.

³⁶ Ibid., 1:95.

³⁷ Ibid., 1:154.

³⁸ Ibid., 1:219.

³⁹ Ibid., 1:243.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 2:265.

⁴¹ Ibid., 2:306.

For such a brief time spent within Dartmoor's walls, Cobb's account is one of the more inflammatory, yet informative, narratives. Present throughout the thread of his memoir, Cobb indulges in occasional moralizing. In any instance, and regardless of the quality of writing, Cobb's memoirs provide a glimpse of everyday life within Dartmoor's walls. For instance, Cobb provides the reader with detailed descriptions of interactions between messmates or the process by which the daily rations were distributed throughout Dartmoor prison.

Turning to Joseph Bates, it is very clear from the outset of his own autobiography that his Dartmoor experiences were only one part of his life. Although Bates is best known for his conversion to Seventh-Day Adventism, he had been a career sailor before the War of 1812 and that aspect of his life is richly detailed in his memoir. In fact, his entry into this profession dates from 1807, and he would eventually reach the position of captain of his own vessel by the age of thirty-six.⁴²

Born on July 8, 1792 in Massachusetts, Bates's interest in sailing went as far back as his early childhood. His parents—his father fought during the American Revolution—did not approve of this interest in sailing. In order to cure him of the urge, Bates was permitted to take a short trip with his uncle, who was sailing to Boston. Rather than curing him of the interest, this trip merely encouraged him further.⁴³ Eventually, Bates would make his first real voyage by sea, a journey from New York City to London, as a cabin boy.⁴⁴

By 1810, Bates had been a sailor for three years, but his luck was about to run out. On April 27, 1810, his vessel was intercepted by the British and, quite literally, he was impressed into the Royal Navy at swordpoint.⁴⁵ Bates made several attempts to prove his American

⁴² Joseph Bates, *Embracing a Long Life on Shipboard: With Sketches of Voyages on the ATLANTIC And Pacific Oceans, the Baltic and the Mediterranean Seas; -ALSO- Impressment and Service on Board British War Ships, Long Confinement in Dartmoor Prison, Early Experiences in Reformatory Movements; Travels in Various Parts of the World; and a Brief Account of the Great Advent Movement of 1840–41* (Battle Creek, MI: Steam Press of the Seventh Day Adventist Publishing Association, 1868), preface.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 17.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 19.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 35.

citizenship, explaining: "...a friend of my father's arrived from the United States, bringing documents to prove my citizenship, and a demand for my release from the British Government."⁴⁶ Unfortunately, these documents were not enough as the British government required additional evidence, though Bates's memoir does not provide the specifics of what was required.⁴⁷

Before he could pursue his case any further, war with the United States broke out in June of 1812. His best option, his narrative remarks, was that he could voluntarily become a prisoner-of-war. His was not a unique case. Two hundred other sailors within his squadron—twenty-two of whom were serving on board the HMS *Swiftshore* (the vessel Bates was berthed on) found themselves within the same situation. Bates explains:

At last some six of us united and walked to the quarterdeck with our hats in hand, and thus addressed the first lieutenant: "We understand, sir, that war has commenced between Great Britain and the United States, and we do not wish to be found fighting against our own country; therefore it is our wish to become prisoners-of-war."⁴⁸

This sentiment quickly spread throughout the squadron, in spite of inducements—or threats—from the officers against such activity. Bates remarks that the worst incident occurred when these same men tried to force him to take up arms against the French, with whom the English were still at war. This condition of stalemate would persist for another eight months until, finally, Bates was transferred off of the *Swiftshore* and onto a prison hulk, from which point he would eventually be sent to Dartmoor Prison.⁴⁹

After his release from Dartmoor Prison on April 27, 1815, Bates explains to the reader that he had been held in captivity, in one form or another, for five years of his life.⁵⁰ This would explain some of the bitterness found within portions of his narrative. There is also little wonder that he did not hold his former captors in high regard and took many opportunities to point out

⁴⁶ Ibid., 49.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 50.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 52–53

⁴⁹ Ibid., 56.

⁵⁰ Ibid., 76.

their shortcomings. On the other hand, his narrative is not nearly so inflammatory as that of the Waterhouse/Babcock manuscript, or for that matter that of Charles Andrews.

Joseph Valpey Jr.—born June 21, 1791 in Salem, Massachusetts—served on board several privateering vessels.⁵¹ His first posting was to the schooner *Monkey* on November 2, 1813.⁵² Owing to damage to the vessel, he was transferred to his father's ship, the *Herald*, which would eventually set sail on March 1, 1814.⁵³ The *Herald* would serve for only five months, being captured on August 15, 1814 by two British frigates.⁵⁴

A week later on August 22, Valpey reached Halifax, and was incarcerated there at the prison on Melville Island. His stay there was short, for three days later he was put on board another frigate, thence to be taken directly to Plymouth and, subsequently, transferred to Dartmoor Prison.⁵⁵ He would remain in captivity until April 25, 1815, when in a moment of frustration, he would purchase a place in a draft of prisoners being released that day.⁵⁶ Nothing else is known of Valpey's journal beyond this point, as it ends rather abruptly.

The brevity of Valpey's journal is explained, in part, by the fact that it contains many breaks in the narrative, due to extensive damage to the manuscript. Even worse, Valpey did not long survive his freedom from Dartmoor Prison: on March 21, 1816, while on his way home to Salem, he was killed—though no details of this incident are available. The damage to the manuscript and his own sudden death explain why there is so little in the way of information on Valpey, other than his imprisonment within Dartmoor.

Regardless of the haphazard nature of his narrative, Valpey provides a visceral account of his day-to-day encounters in prison. The only real flaw with the text is its near illegibility in many places. A small sample of Valpey's narrative style will serve as an example of how difficult

⁵¹ Joseph Valpey, Jr., *The Journal of Joseph Valpey of Salem* (Detroit, MI: Michigan Society of Colonial Wars, 1922), introduction.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 1.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 3.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 11.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 12.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 29.

his journal is to read in many places. The excerpt below is of an encounter Valpey's ship had with a British vessel:

...nothing More worth our Notice until the eighteenth when at two P M as we was standing on the wind to the Southward and Eastward with a stiff Breeze we discovered a Brig Coming down upon us with Studding sails below & Aloft we called all hands to Quarters and we hoisted English Colours for to see what she was But she soon had the English flag displayed at her Main peak and began for to Make signals to Which Made us suspect that she was a Brig of War But that did not Daunt us for in a few Minuets [sic] we Was along side of him with our English Colours still display'd at our Main Gaff as soon as we was within hail of him we gave him a Broadside and hoisted our Yankey [sic] flag at the Main topmast head when he Returned us his Compliments [sic] by Giving us his Broad side which did us no material Injury but on our giving him two more Doses of our Yankey Pills he Was Oblidged [sic] for to strike his Colours we Dispatched our Boat amediately [sic] on Board of her which soon Returned Back and imformed [sic] us that she was his British Majesty Packet Little Catharine from Falmouth Bound to the Brazils with dispatches but that they had Drowned there Mail and that she was a considerably cut in the Riging [sic] and hull and had one Man killed in the action we then Boated our Prisoners with there [sic] dunage on Board of us...⁵⁷ (Valpey, 7)

As ambiguous as Joseph Valpey's account might seem to the reader, that of Nathaniel Pierce is little better. Born in Newburyport, Massachusetts in 1795, he was the son of an Irish immigrant who had married a local girl. Beyond this point, nothing else of Pierce's early life was recorded in his journal. In fact, the journal shifts focus to his capture at sea on November 9, 1814 by the HMS *Bulwark*.⁵⁸ The circumstances of his capture were not recorded other than the fact that the British vessel was a ship of the line, possessing seventy-four guns.

Pierce was taken to Nova Scotia soon after his capture and remained there, held on ship board, until he was transferred to Plymouth and, eventually, Dartmoor Prison.⁵⁹ Pierce would quite literally be one of the last Americans discharged from the prison, commenting: "ends this journal for want of paper."⁶⁰ The only other fact recorded in his journal (quite

⁵⁷ Ibid., 7.

⁵⁸ Pierce, "Journal of Nathaniel Pierce of Newburyport, Kept at Dartmoor Prison, 1814-1815," Essex Institute Historical Collections 73 (January, 1937), 24.

⁵⁹ Ibid., 25.

⁶⁰ Ibid., 59.

obviously penned by an editor) was that of Pierce's death. This event took place in 1823, but the circumstances are not known.⁶¹

Similar to Valpey's journal, Pierce's manuscript is difficult to read in many places—though not to the extent of the former's. Like Valpey's writing, Pierce's narrative does describe in some detail the day-to-day functioning of the prison. For instance, he reports what happens to cooks suspected of stealing rations, or the daily round of rumors and news that circulated throughout the prison.⁶² He expresses some degree of bitterness toward his captors, though this seems to be more of a reaction to how he was transported to England; he was crammed below decks and scarcely allowed fresh air and exercise.⁶³

As with *A Journal of a Young Man of Massachusetts*, "Reminiscences of a Dartmoor Prisoner" was published anonymously. Unfortunately, the author of the latter has not been discovered at the time of the writing of this study. Ironically, the anonymous author does provide some degree of information concerning his capture and, eventually, his imprisonment within Dartmoor. He was taken by the British while he was in India (he does not discuss the particulars) and was imprisoned there for some months. He was eventually transferred to a British vessel that he identifies as the *Lord Wellington*.⁶⁴

While he does not provide any specific dates, the anonymous prisoner places his time of capture just before the defeat of Napoleon Bonaparte.⁶⁵ As with Valpey's narrative, there are breaks within the manuscript. One such break (or perhaps pause?) occurs, and the narrative picks up with the memoirist arriving at London. Here, he devotes some of his manuscript to reflections on the three weeks of freedom he had before recapture by the British. If nothing else, the anonymous prisoner seems to have been well-educated as an excerpt from his memoir demonstrates:

⁶¹ Ibid., 24.

⁶² Ibid., 45.

⁶³ Ibid., 24.

⁶⁴ "Reminiscences of a Dartmoor Prisoner," *Knickerbocker Magazine*, 23 (February, April, June, 1844), 146.

⁶⁵ Ibid., 149.

As I gazed upon the massive gray walls of the Tower [of London], the magic scenes of Shakspeare [*sic*] arose, and passed in review before me. I thought of Gloucester, Clarence, Hastings, Henry VI, his two murdered nephews then came forth the unhappy Jane Shore, pale, exhausted, and starving; no one daring to offer a mouthful of food to save the poor wretch from death.⁶⁶

Regardless of how many sights he had the opportunity to see during this time, the anonymous prisoner's main purpose in coming to London was not for tourism. His ultimate intent was to seek passage back to the United States, a goal which he found to be nearly impossible.⁶⁷ His next best option was to try and seek passage to France, but his time of freedom had finally run out: "One day as I was seeking to obtain a situation on board a vessel bound to Marseilles, I was accosted by a suspicious individual. I was soon made acquainted with his business, and in a few hours I was on my way to prison." On the other hand, his narrative goes on to express little regret at finally having been arrested. His financial situation had begun to look bleak, and he reasoned further that because he had been imprisoned early on in the war, he was perhaps likely to be one of the first men to be released from captivity.⁶⁸

Again, there is little in the way of information provided by the anonymous memoirist. He was first confined to one of the hulks, and then was soon transferred to Dartmoor Prison as part of one of the many groups ordered there. He provides no sort of chronology.⁶⁹ Unfortunately, his prediction of an early release was wrong as the anonymous author was released in early June of 1815.⁷⁰ His voyage would finally end after reaching New York by his agreeing to hire on as a hand on board of a schooner.⁷¹

Regarding his narrative style, the anonymous memoirist provides vivid descriptions of his imprisonment. His narrative is more or less objective, but he does express outrage in the expected portions of the manuscript. While outrage is present, this does not lead directly toward

⁶⁶ Ibid., 357.

⁶⁷ Ibid., 358.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ Ibid., 360.

⁷⁰ Ibid., 520.

⁷¹ Ibid., 523.

some of the more inflammatory statements made by other authors. Finally, his narration provides a glimpse into the day-to-day doings of the prison, but that curious matter is discussed later in this thesis.

Finally, Charles Andrews's memoirs provide a great majority of the information concerning Dartmoor Prison. It is therefore an irony that little is known of Andrews, at least outside of his experiences as a Dartmoor Prisoner. Andrews's narrative begins with his recollections of his time on board of a prison hulk—the *Hector*. Almost immediately, on April 3, 1813, Andrews and the others berthed with him all were ordered to Dartmoor Prison.⁷²

After spending a little over two years in Dartmoor, Andrews was one of the first to leave the prison on board one of R. G. Beasley's transports, which were hired to convey the Dartmoor men home. They would arrive in New York on June 9, 1815.⁷³ Beyond these facts of Andrews's arrival and his eventual departure from Dartmoor Prison, little is known. It is not clear if he had been a career sailor, a green hand (as Cobb had been), or merely an adventurer excited by the prospect of war with England. Similarly, there is no record of what Andrews did after his imprisonment.

There are several parallels between this work and that of the Waterhouse/Babcock narrative. For instance, Andrews's own memoir was published soon after his homecoming from Dartmoor, allegedly in response to "the public [wishing] to possess knowledge of the facts."⁷⁴ Another parallel is that Andrews devotes space for moralizing, comments occasionally on the superior morality of Americans, and not least, laments the treatment of prisoners-of-war by characterizing his British captors as being unfeeling and uncaring.

⁷² Charles Andrews, *The Prisoners Memories on Dartmoor Prison: History of the Americans in England From the commencement of the late war between the united States and Great Britain until all prisoners were released by the Treaty of Ghent also A Particular detail of all occurrences relative to that Horrid Massacre At Dartmoor On the fatal evening of the 6th of April 1815* (New York: Printed for the Author, 1815), 17.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 221.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, preface.

There are profound differences, however, between the two accounts. Andrews was actually present for the entire goings-on at Dartmoor, while Waterhouse was not. Yet another stark difference is the character of the two narratives. Waterhouse meant to use the Babcock manuscript as a means for instructing the young, thus he took every possible opportunity to denounce the British, not to mention the Federalists nearer to home. Andrews's account, on the other hand, wavers between praising and denouncing his captors.

Before proceeding to the main focus of this study, it is important to point out that many of the Dartmoor memoirists, before their ultimate incarceration inside the prison, spent periods of time on board the hulks. This point is necessary as their experiences on board of these vessels probably, if not definitely, colored their outlook toward their British captors.



Figure 2 Image of the *Discovery*, which was in use as a prison hulk from 1824 to 1830. The *Discovery* shown here had been Captain George Vancouver's ship during his voyages of exploration in the Pacific, most notably along the northeastern coastlines of North America. (The image is in the National Maritime Museum, London; reproduction ID PU7308. The National Maritime Museum holds the copyright. The image was published in France by Bailleau in 1838; the engraver was Leleux and printer Chardon.)

3.2 Floating Hells: A Brief Examination of the Prison Hulks

Prison ships—more commonly called prison hulks—were old, decommissioned vessels, a throwback from the early eighteenth century; indeed, they were a practice copied from the French and put into place during the Jacobite Rebellion of 1745.⁷⁵ But only toward the end of the eighteenth century did the British make extensive use of the prison hulk. In his description of these terrible places of confinement, Lloyd remarks: "It is strange that whilst the story of the Black Hole of Calcutta has survived from 1756 to the present day, equally terrible and not dissimilar atrocities which took place so much nearer home [England] and such a short time before, should have been so completely forgotten."⁷⁶

But why bring up the subject of the hulks at all? As stated at the end of the previous section of this chapter, a few of the Dartmoor men were incarcerated on board of these vessels, sometimes for long periods of time. It is curious, therefore, that the majority of their vitriol is reserved for the prison and not the hulks, as the latter were clearly many times worse than the former. This section of the chapter serves a two-fold purpose: to provide the reader with an understanding of reality on board the hulks and to include a definite comparison with the prison on the moor.

Lloyd's comparison of the prison hulks with the infamous Black Hole of Calcutta is not mere hyperbole. These vessels were often small, the entire deck measuring one hundred and twenty-five feet long, forty feet wide, and often times, no more than four feet high. These confined spaces would often hold upwards of four hundred men at any one time, often confined to the decks below!⁷⁷ It is important to note that Lloyd's description is only of the average prison hulk, and often times, many of the prisoner narratives report that even more than four hundred men were confined on board, not to mention the guards and the officer commanding the vessel.

⁷⁵ Clive L. Lloyd, *A History of Napoleonic and American Prisoners-of-war 1756–1816: Hulk, Depot and Parole* (Suffolk: ACC Distribution, 2007), 70.

⁷⁶ Ibid., 71.

⁷⁷ Ibid., 100.

Out of all the prisoner narratives surveyed in the present research, Neal, Selman, Bates, the anonymous prisoner, and Andrews were confined on board prison ships. They constituted over half of the memoirists detailed in this study. Brown, Valpey, Cobb, and Pierce were spared this particular form of imprisonment only for one reason: by the time of their capture, the Transport Office's policy toward American prisoners-of-war had changed significantly. All prisoners were to be consolidated at one facility: Dartmoor Prison. As will be discussed later in this paper, the Transport Office had many compelling reasons for this change and for the subsequent abandonment of the hulks.

Out of the five memoirists who spent time on board prison hulks, Andrews, the anonymous prisoner, and Bates provide the most descriptive account of the experience. Other narrators—such as Neal—provide little description of their time on board the hulks. In Neal's account, for instance, he only records that he was transferred from a hospital ship to a hulk in October 1814; he thus narrowly missed the window in which Americans were to be sent to Dartmoor Prison by default.⁷⁸

Selman's memoir is equally unrevealing. His account only comments on the lice infestation and paroling of some of his ship's officers.⁷⁹ The only other main point he makes is that prisoners were confined to the holds except for one hour each day when they were permitted on deck.⁸⁰ Selman's final encounter with these floating hells came on January 7, 1814, when he was transferred to the *Samson* and placed in the company of 400 French prisoners.⁸¹

Bates's experience with the hulks began with his arrival at Chatham. From there, his narrative explains, he was put on board of a hulk that contained 700 prisoners! As can be imagined, conditions were terrible with "scanty allowance of food" amid the constant

⁷⁸ Neal, *East By Sea and West By Rail*, 111.

⁷⁹ Roads, *Marblehead Manual*, 32.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 33.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 34.

confinement within the overcrowded hold.⁸² Here, Bates's description of the hulks comes to an end, but it is easily imagined how nightmarish the conditions on board actually were.

While Selman and Bates provide only the barest hints of their experiences on board the prison hulks, the anonymous prisoner does not. His account of his first impressions of being confined below decks is perhaps one of the most vivid and worth quoting at length:

It was several minutes before I could discern the objects around me. It was like going into a cellar. The only air and light were admitted through port-holes, few and far between, which were left open for the purpose, and secured by strong iron gratings to prevent escape... Casting a Glance around, I found myself amidst a squalid, cadaverous throng of about six hundred [prisoners], ranging from about fourteen to sixty years of age: and I never beheld a set of more wretched human beings. They were nearly starved and almost naked, and wholly unable to take exercise, from their crowded condition. It was too dark to read, and they yielded their minds up to corroding despondency, and became sullen and morose. Their features became rigid; and to see a smile upon a face was like a sunbeam illumining a thunder-cloud.⁸³

Prisoners were divided into six groups (companies) for the purposes of receiving rations. The anonymous prisoner comments that the rations were "course and scanty," agreeing closely with Bates's description. The British solved sleeping arrangements by issuing each prisoner a hammock. The crowded conditions created a situation in which men had to be packed in tightly, "so close as hardly to admit a passage between them."⁸⁴

Adding to the difficulties of berthing arrangements was the absolute prohibition of light. If a prisoner had to "make a necessary excursion," as the anonymous prisoner's memoir puts it, he could quickly become disoriented. Often, the memoir adds: "Many was the one who became so bewildered in his journey that he could not find his lodgings, and had to sit down and quietly wait until morning..."⁸⁵

Security on board the hulks was maintained through several simple, but rather effective, expedients. First, guards with loaded muskets and fixed bayonets were always on patrol on the upper deck of the vessel. To insure further compliance, loaded cannons were turned about such

⁸² Bates, *Embracing a Long Life on Shipboard*, 57.

⁸³ "Reminiscences of a Dartmoor Prisoner," *Knickerbocker Magazine* (23), 358.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 359.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*

that they faced the prisoners. One need only imagine the horrible carnage that would ensue if one of these guns were fired into a ship's hold, packed tightly with prisoners. As a final measure, only two or three prisoners were allowed on deck during the day.⁸⁶

Andrews's own experiences on board the hulks were very similar to that of the other memoirists. His narrative, before plunging into a description of life on board these vessels, provides a bit of additional exposition as to what a hulk was (a decommissioned British ship) and who commanded it (often a lieutenant in the Royal Navy, with disabled sailors as his subordinates).⁸⁷

Beyond this point, Andrews provides little in the way of insightful information, except for one tidbit: the disposal of the inevitably sick prisoners. A man who contracted a disease was never removed from the general population until he was near death. Men so taken off the hulk were confined to a hospital ship, never to return, according to Andrews. Whether these men simply died from disease, or that the surgeons were unable to adequately treat them, or recovered patients were transferred elsewhere is not stated. It is most likely that these men simply died. The most likely fate for men taken on board a hospital ship was death, as Andrews mentions a statistic that only one in ten men survived the various diseases contracted on board the hulks.⁸⁸ Taken on its own, this statistic would of course be suspect, but various secondary sources provide corroborative evidence that support Andrews's assertion.

In spite of the treatment on board the hulks, Andrews's account does not offer much in the way of complaint. In fact, Andrews goes so far as to claim that "they [the prisoners] were comparatively well off, when compared with our situation [within Dartmoor Prison]."⁸⁹ Taken on its own, this observation comes across as being rather absurd. As trying as the conditions within Dartmoor Prison were, the conditions there do not compare to the situation on board the hulks.

⁸⁶ Ibid.

⁸⁷ Andrews, *Prisoners Memories*, 12.

⁸⁸ Ibid.

⁸⁹ Ibid., 27.

Americans were not the only prisoners incarcerated within Dartmoor's walls. In fact, before housing the Americans, Dartmoor was a place of confinement for the French. It is important, therefore, to examine the French experience within the prison on the moor. This brief examination serves two very important purposes: many of the Americans who would inhabit the prison starting in 1813 would inherit many of the trades, skills, and positions that the French held during their tenure at Dartmoor. Of equal importance, French accounts corroborate—or perhaps reinforce—the accounts of the American memoirists.

3.3 A Brief Intermission—The Tale of Louis Catel

Before housing Americans, Dartmoor Prison was home to French prisoners-of-war. At this time, England was embroiled in her campaign against Napoleon Bonaparte, and naturally enough, needed a place to keep captured enemy soldiers. Dartmoor Prison was built specifically for this purpose. It is therefore appropriate to examine, in brief, what the experience was like for the French. This brief examination is necessary as many American prisoners-of-war would inherit—or at least observe—many of the practices that would keep most of them relatively sane during their period of incarceration.

Louis Catel's account provides a very brief examination of what life was like during French occupation of Dartmoor. There are no details of who this man was. Catel was most likely a soldier in Bonaparte's army, but how and when he was captured and sent off to England is quite beyond the scope of this study. Catel witnessed enough and thought it important enough that he published his journal in 1847.⁹⁰

Catel's account of Dartmoor Prison begins, appropriately enough, with a general description of both its exterior and interior. Very similar to many future narrators, American memoirists specifically, Catel's descriptions are not encouraging:

⁹⁰ Louis Catel, *La prison de Dartmoor ou récit historique des infortunes et évasions des prisonniers français en Angleterre sous l'Empire depuis 1809 jusque'en 1814*, trans. Albert Archer (Paris: Chez les principaux librairies, 1847), introductory note.

Six leagues North of Plymouth, under a somber and melancholy sky, in an atmosphere cold and hazy, the ground is hilly, sterile, almost bald, hidden eight months of the year by a mantle of snow, and covers an expanse of several square leagues. This sad scene stuns those who see it and communicates to the soul a sort of bitterness.⁹¹

His descriptions of the interior were little more encouraging, his memoir emphasizing the claustrophobic feeling of the prison compound and buildings. This claustrophobia was even more intensified given that buildings designed to hold 1,000 men usually held two and a half times more!⁹² This overcrowding makes Catel's continued description of the interior even more vivid: "The ceilings were 12 feet tall. Four hammocks were placed one atop the other. The beams, only 18 inches apart, forced the four slats of these beds to be so close as to be almost touching." He further adds: " Thus, if it happened that one made a movement that was even a little brusque, all the beds near him felt the 'electric' shock, and if this happened too often, it made sleep difficult for all..."⁹³

The hammock situation was even more precarious as Catel's narrative explains that the cords used to secure them to the stanchions were not very reliable. Often times, he explains, one of the cords came loose, and if the unfortunate man was above another man, he would dislodge his neighbor, causing all to fall to the wet, cold stone floor; sometimes resulting in serious injuries to those involved.⁹⁴ Coupled with the poor climate, the exhaustion, and the stresses of living in a closely confined and crowded compound, Catel's remark that "a ghastly, deathly pallor gave the impression that the poor prisoners were the living dead..." probably had some degree of merit.⁹⁵

It is little wonder therefore that Catel's narrative pauses at this point to express disgust toward the English. This disgust was not completely derived from the prison itself—though Catel did not hesitate to express his opinion on its fitness to hold men—but from their general treatment by the English. Catel's narrative insists that the prison's authorities, represented by

⁹¹ Ibid., 1.

⁹² Ibid., 2.

⁹³ Ibid., 3.

⁹⁴ Ibid.

⁹⁵ Ibid., 2.

Captain Isaac Cotgrave, regarded them as common criminals, a foreshadowing of the opinion of many future American memoirists.⁹⁶

As with the American prisoner narratives, Catel comments at length on the cold of Dartmoor. In some ways, his narrative provides an even more graphic description of the climate than those who would follow after him:

The winter, which lasted eight month[s] of the year under a temperature cold and wet, forced, during all this time, and without exaggeration, the unhappy prisoners to remain whole hours [outside] in mud ten inches to a foot deep, and sometimes even after escape [attempt?], which happened often enough, they retained us outside almost the whole day; consider the deplorable state of the Romans without clothing, and the other poor captives with neither shirts nor shoes.⁹⁷

Next, Catel's account turns to the description of life within the prison. By necessity, and with the approval of the prison's authorities, the French mostly governed their own affairs.⁹⁸ The population divided itself along strictly enforced class lines. Catel explains that there were six social stratifications to be found within the prison: lords, laborers, the indifferents, the seedies, Germans, and the Romans. These social castes were derived from a number of factors, some of which included a prisoner's wealth, his willingness to work, and not least, his propensity toward gambling.⁹⁹ It is worth noting that Catel does not spend any time explaining what sorts of men made up each class within Dartmoor, nor does he inform the reader in which class he was numbered.

The most infamous of these social classes—more akin to a criminal underclass than anything else—were the so-called “Les Romains,” or “The Romans.” “These of the sixth category,” Catel explains, “called themselves Romans because they occupied the highest part of each building, that were called capitols...”¹⁰⁰ There were initially 250 of these men and their “brotherhood” would eventually number 500 or so.¹⁰¹

⁹⁶ Ibid.

⁹⁷ Ibid., 11.

⁹⁸ Ibid., introductory note.

⁹⁹ Ibid., 4.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., 4.

¹⁰¹ Ibid., 5.

Admittance into “Les Romains” was easily achieved, provided that an aspirant was willing to part with all of his dignity and comfort. An initiate was required to perform three tasks: he was obliged to sell his hammock, so that the proceeds could be used for all members as tobacco money; he was required to not possess any clothing; and if he had to leave the building, to be covered by a blanket with a hole (for his head) cut in the center.¹⁰² Because of their universal and self-inflicted poverty, these men were required to take desperate measures in order to stay fed. “From morning to evening, in all the coqueries [*sic*],” Catel remarks, “one can see these Romans picking through piles of garbage (onto which the cooks threw cores of cabbages, peelings of turnips, and others) to chew with beautiful teeth all these scraps...”¹⁰³

Naturally enough, the only member of “Les Romains” allowed any sort of luxuries, e.g. a hammock, was their leader—called “the general.” For the rest of this brotherhood, they had to make do with sleeping on the stone floor, quite naked and with nothing to protect them from the omnipresent chill of the prison.¹⁰⁴ Later in his life, long after his time in Dartmoor Prison, Catel encountered two former members of Les Romains. The one man had joined the clergy and was quite ashamed of what he had done while in Dartmoor. The other, Catel's narrative continues, was a merchant, and unlike the clergyman, was quite proud of his time in this fraternity.¹⁰⁵ Of course, there is always the chance that Catel might have been using these supposed encounters for a bit of moralizing very similar to what Waterhouse attempted in his own manuscript.

Many of the Dartmoor memoirists were not present at the prison early enough to have encountered “Les Romains,” but Charles Andrews was. His descriptions of these men are less charitable than those of Catel's. “In this prison were about nine hundred of the most abject and outcast wretches that were ever beheld.” He adds: “[only] French prisoners, too wicked and malicious to live with their other unfortunate countrymen,” made up the ranks of “Les Romains.”

¹⁰² Ibid.

¹⁰³ Ibid., 6.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., 7.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., 9.

Yet, as shocking as their appearance was, the first Americans confined to Dartmoor were in for another surprise: they were forced to occupy the same building as these men!¹⁰⁶ It is worth pausing to note that Andrews is not precise on the number of French confined in No. 4; in his first description, he estimates 900, but later revises this to 700.

Most of the prison population found more productive ways of keeping busy. Many of these men engaged in some form of art or craft. For instance, a large group of French prisoners wove straw into hats for ladies. Another similar group used hair, presumably human, to create necklaces or watch bands; while others worked bones—leftovers from the daily rations—into various items for sale.¹⁰⁷ One of the latter items shaped from bone, not to mention other materials, were models of ships. One of these men was a sailor from Brittany whom Catel describes as being a master at the art. This sailor not only constructed his ships to exacting detail, but was also able to include some articulation in these models, i.e. certain parts of the replica could be moved. This man's work was admired enough such that he was eventually able to sell it for 2,500 francs.¹⁰⁸

Buried in his narrative, Catel hints that their daily issue of rations was insufficient. In order to supplement their daily allowance of food, many French prisoners took up cooking. This served the dual purpose of not only enriching the diet somewhat but also allowing men who had no other means of financial support to make some extra money. Unlike the American memoirists, Catel does not provide any descriptions of the sorts of food available for sale. Examination of American narratives and the inheritance of many crafts from their French predecessors provide enough evidence for an educated guess: fried potatoes, fish, and coffee substitutes.¹⁰⁹

The last portion of Catel's narrative concerns two subjects: punishment and disease. Disease was a very real danger, owing to overcrowding and, according to Stanbrook,

¹⁰⁶ Andrews, *Prisoners Memories*, 25–26.

¹⁰⁷ Catel, *La prison de Dartmoor*, 10.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid.

importation of prisoners from the West Indies. For instance, before the year 1810 several French prisoners were transferred to Dartmoor, causing an outbreak of the measles. Five hundred prisoners would die by February 2, 1810.¹¹⁰ This outbreak of measles must have been what Catel's account was referring too, when he describes how disease had become so rampant that the hospital had become full.¹¹¹

As was standard practice at the time, prisoners-of-war held in England who were caught committing any infraction were often confined in the cachot, often called "the black hole." Catel's narrative does not provide any specific incidents that saw his countrymen confined within the cachot. He does however provide a vivid description of the structure in question:

... a building, constructed of hewn stone, twenty square feet inside, with a floor of regular pieces of granite; an iron door with a window eight square inches to pass through a morsel of bread, the only food that one confined there received; two holes six inches tall and four width were the only openings; neither cot, nor straw, nothing absolutely nothing...¹¹²

Men sentenced to solitary confinement within the cachot often spent between eight and ten days imprisoned. From the style of Catel's writing, it can be inferred that he himself had spent some time held within the cachot.¹¹³

At this point, the relevant portions of Catel's account come to an end. While it provides a very brief overview of Dartmoor, it offers also an interesting comparison to the narratives of the American memoirists. There are many parallels between both groups of prisoners. For instance, both groups of prisoners were permitted largely to govern their own affairs. Another shared similarity was the types of activities that both French and Americans engaged in to stay sane, e.g. cooking, the fine arts, and, not least, model building. There are even parallels between the two criminal underclasses of both groups only so far in that they existed at all. The

¹¹⁰ Elisabeth Stanbrook, *Dartmoor's War Prison & Church* (Brixham, Great Britain: Quay Publications, 2002), 33–34.

¹¹¹ Catel, *La prison de Dartmoor*, 14.

¹¹² *Ibid.*, 11.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*

Americans would put into place strict regulations to try to prohibit the formation of any societies similar to that of “Les Romains.”

On the other hand, there were stark contrasts as well. The French government would make no attempt to see to the welfare of its soldiers held in captivity.¹¹⁴ Catel’s account does not provide any commentary, vis-à-vis the French government providing assistance to men captured in its service. On the other hand, there is an explanation: it is possible that the Frenchmen held within Dartmoor neither expected nor demanded any assistance from their government. As demonstrated later in this study, Americans held within Dartmoor not only had a representative in London—called an “agent”—who could see to their wants, but the United States government would attempt to provide some form of relief to its sailors and soldiers.

¹¹⁴ Andrews, *Prisoners Memories*, 52.

CHAPTER 4

DARTMOOR PRISON

4.1 A Prison on the Moor



Figure 3 Map of England showing the location of Dartmoor Prison. (Taken from “The Letters of Perez Drinkwater,” <http://www.usmm.org/felknor1812.html>, accessed on 02/08/2011)

The authority that governed the confinement of all prisoners-of-war, called the Transport Office, conceived of Dartmoor Prison as an alternative to the hell that was the prison hulks.¹ One of the directives for this new prison was that it had to accommodate 5,000 prisoners-of-war.² Ultimately, the man who selected the final site for Dartmoor Prison, or as it was initially known, “Dartmoor Depot,” was Sir Thomas Tyrwhitt. Tyrwhitt was a man who had a

¹ Elisabeth Stanbrook, *Dartmoor's War Prison & Church* (Brixham, Great Britain: Quay Publications, 2002), 7; A. J. Rhodes, *Dartmoor Prison: A Record of 126 Years of Prisoner-of-war and Convict Life, 1806–1932* (London: John Lane, the Bodley Head Limited, 1932), 22.

² Stanbrook, *Dartmoor's War Prison*, 9.

vision of greatness for the prison. He conceived of “transforming Dartmoor into a land of lush pastures, smiling wheat fields, swaying flax lands, and productive gardens...”³

The plans for the prison were made public on July 13, 1805, in the *Bristol Mirror*.⁴ Stanbrook argues that one of the underlying reasons for the prison’s construction was a part of the movement toward the enclosure of land.⁵ In any case, the man who would actually design the prison was an architect named Daniel Asher Alexander who had trained at the Royal Academy. Inspiration for the design of the prison came from “William Blackburn’s 1785 design of Liverpool Borough Gaol.”⁶

Construction of Dartmoor Prison would not begin until March 20 of the following year. The building process would not be completed for another three years, owing to many delays during construction.⁷ The prison would finally be opened to receive the first French prisoners on May 24, 1809.⁸ Even though the prison was opened officially, Stanbrook points out that construction on it never really ceased. For instance, when “Les Romains” began making nuisances of themselves, Captain Cotgrave ordered an additional building to be constructed that would contain these men. Eventually, this same building, No. 4, would be used to segregate black prisoners from their white counterparts.⁹ This project was only one of many that the Transport Office authorized throughout Dartmoor’s existence as a prisoner-of-war compound.¹⁰

While the facts surrounding Dartmoor’s overall design, location, and construction are not in doubt, historians have not paid close attention to the experiences of the prisoners

³ Rhodes, *Dartmoor Prison*, 20.

⁴ Ibid., 22.

⁵ Stanbrook, *Dartmoor’s War Prison*, 6.

⁶ Ibid., 9.

⁷ Rhodes, *Dartmoor Prison*, 23.

⁸ Stanbrook, *Dartmoor’s War Prison*, 23.

⁹ Charles Andrews, *The Prisoners Memories on Dartmoor Prison: History of the Americans in England From the commencement of the late war between the united States and Great Britain until all prisoners were released by the Treaty of Ghent also A Particular detail of all occurrences relative to that Horrid Massacre At Dartmoor On the fatal evening of the 6th of April 1815* (New York: Printed for the Author, 1815), 69.

¹⁰ Stanbrook, *Dartmoor’s War Prison*, 62.

themselves who were forced to reside within its walls. As noted in the previous chapter, Stanbrook and Rhodes provide little in the way of descriptions of the general topography of the Dartmoor area and its prevailing climate. Each of the prisoner narratives contains a vivid description of both Dartmoor's exterior and interior. Of equal importance is the way in which each prisoner finally arrived at the compound. Almost without exception, all of the memoirists began their march in Plymouth. Out of all of the accounts discussed subsequently, Cobb provides the most descriptive language regarding his passage through Plymouth:

As soon as the commander of the detachment received his final orders, we started off, without music, passing through various streets, which were lined with spectators, gazing in silence at our tatterdemalion column. We were not spoken to by any, nor jeered at by the crowd ; but, on the, contrary, much commiseration was manifested by those looking on, for the worn and unhappy spectacle we must have exhibited to their sight, with our filthy garments and wan faces, covered with beards of seven weeks' growth.¹¹

Usually, the march to Dartmoor Prison was an unpleasant one for those making it. New arrivals to Dartmoor almost always completed the journey after nightfall.

In Cobb's particular instance, the weather was cold and rainy, making the roads muddy and difficult to travel.¹² He also notes that while the prisoners were rested, they were not provided with any rations, but had to obtain them the best they could.¹³ Fortunately, he made the march with relative ease, owing to the fact that he was unable to make the trek on his own two legs because of a recent illness. Rather he was placed amongst the baggage wagons and made the trip that way, arriving after dusk had fallen.¹⁴

Joseph Valpey was less fortunate. He was ordered to Dartmoor from one of the numerous hulks that the British kept for the express purpose of confining prisoners-of-war in 1814.¹⁵ His journal notes:

¹¹ Josiah Cobb, *A Green Hand's First Cruise: Roughed Out From The Log Book of Twenty-Five Years Standing*, 2 vols.(Boston: Otis, Broaders, 1841), 1:249–250.

¹² Ibid., 1:250.

¹³ Ibid., 1:275.

¹⁴ Ibid., 277–278.

¹⁵ Joseph Valpey Jr., *The Journal of Joseph Valpey of Salem* (Detroit, MI: Michigan Society of Colonial Wars, 1922), 12.

... on the thirty first of October we was [sic] landed in Plymouth and Marched to Dartmoor [Prison] it being about sixteen Miles in the Country and the Roads Exceeding bad and the Most [of the prisoners] was Without shoes or stockings and the Soldiers pricking us up with there Bayonets thus we poor half Starv'd [sic] prisoners was [sic] marched in the Rain from seven in the Morning until half past Eight in the Evening without having one Morsel to eat and cast into a dark Cold and Wet Prison...¹⁶

Many prisoners, such as Cobb or Bates, had some clue about their ultimate destination. For instance, Bates notes that, "the British government began to talk of sending us all to Dartmoor prison, a dreary waste some fifteen miles inland from Old Plymouth harbor..."¹⁷ This statement not only suggests prior knowledge of the destination on the part of the prisoners, but an awareness of its general appearance and reputation. Bates was a part of one of the groups sent to Dartmoor in the summer of 1814, not bothering to describe the journey to the compound, but apparently more concerned with the prison's general reputation as a hell-hole.¹⁸

Many others followed Bates's example of not describing the journey to the prison. For instance, Nathaniel Pierce only notes the date of his arrival in England, December 20, 1814, and his subsequent transfer to the prison on the 27th.¹⁹ Brown's journal only notes the time of day after dark during which he reached the prison, but he provides little else in the way of details, vis-à-vis the conditions while undergoing the trip.²⁰ The anonymous account of a Dartmoor prisoner, titled simply *Reminiscences of a Dartmoor Prisoner*, provides even less detail. In the latter instance, the author only notes that his arrival to Dartmoor took place on "a

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Joseph Bates, *Embracing a Long Life on Shipboard: With Sketches of Voyages on the ATLANTIC And Pacific Oceans, the Baltic and the Mediterranean Seas; -ALSO- Impressment and Service on Board British War Ships, Long Confinement in Dartmoor Prison, Early Experiences in Reformatory Movements; Travels in Various Parts of the World; and a Brief Account of the Great Advent Movement of 1840-41* (Battle Creek, MI: Steam Press of the Seventh Day Adventist Publishing Association, 1868), 70-71.

¹⁸ Ibid., 72.

¹⁹ Pierce, "Journal of Nathaniel Pierce of Newburyport, Kept at Dartmoor Prison, 1814-1815," *Essex Institute Historical Collections* 73 (January, 1937), 25.

²⁰ Benjamin Brown, *The Yarn of a Yankee Privateer*, ed. Nathaniel Hawthorne (New York: Funk and Wagnalls, 1922), 157.

late day in autumn."²¹ The accounts of Charles Andrews and David Neal make no mention of the journey to the prison whatsoever.

There are several possibilities why many of the memoirists do not describe this part of their experiences. First, because many of these men wrote their accounts later in life, such as David Neal, they might not have accurately recollected the particulars of the march to Dartmoor—especially as these very same details were overshadowed by later events within the prison. Another possibility is that many of these men simply were indifferent to the means by which they would arrive, and as suggested in their individual narratives, were only concerned with the grim reputation of their final destination. In any instance, while details of the trip to the prison might be vague, each account contains a vivid description of the prison at Dartmoor.

In many instances, the new arrivals were forced to abide the night before being processed into Dartmoor Prison by one of the clerks. Many of the narrators do not supply any commentary beyond this point, but Pierce saw fit to provide the reader with details. For instance, he said he was marched to Prison No. 2, a building not in use at the time, and forced to spend the night there. The reader will recall that all of the men who made this march were not provided with any rations and often made it in cold and rainy weather—often without shoes. The building Pierce and his companions were temporarily assigned was not insulated to keep the cold out. Therefore, these particular individuals strongly remembered they had had to spend the night very cold, wet and hungry.²²

As with many other details of the prison, the various memoirists here vary in their knowledge of Dartmoor's physical location. For instance, Melish, in his brief essay, entitled *A Description of Dartmoor*, places the prison in Devonshire.²³ He goes on to note that, at least at the time of the Dartmoor Massacre, the walls measured one mile in circumference, with the

²¹ "Reminiscences of a Dartmoor Prisoner," *Knickerbocker Magazine*, 23 (February, April, June, 1844), 360.

²² Pierce, "Journal of Nathaniel Pierce," 26.

²³ John Melish, (Philadelphia: Bioren for Melish, 1815), 3.

outer wall being higher—twenty feet—than that of the inner—sixteen feet.²⁴ Melish's account then goes on to describe the countryside surrounding the prison as grim and barren with the only town nearby being Princetown.²⁵

Brown's journal provides more description of the countryside surrounding the prison: "It was up hill as far as the eye could see; and not a blade of grass, nor the remnants of one, not an object which appeared to be susceptible of cultivation, could be seen. It was all bleak, barren, and desolate."²⁶ Turning to the prison itself, Brown adds: "The prisons could boast of no architectural beauty; but they were strong and massy, and seemed to be admirably adapted to the purpose for which they were erected..." Brown then elaborates more on the general appearance of the prison's exterior, adding that the walls were built from large quantities of stone, the buildings possessed slate roofs, and the doors were "strong and ponderous," suggesting a very grim-looking enclosure.²⁷

Joseph Bates's own account of his time in Dartmoor provides a similar description of the prison and the land surrounding it. He comments:

"These buildings were located on the slope of a hill, fronting the east, affording us a prospect of the rising sun; but it was shut out from our view long before sunset." And "On these three sides [of the prison], one of the most dreary wastes, studded with ledges of rocks and low shrubs, met our view, as far as the eye could reach."²⁸

In addition, Pierce adds to the grim imagery of the prison by noting that it was surrounded by other hills, equally bleak and barren in appearance.²⁹ Finally, in his rather extensive memoirs describing the prison as a whole, Andrews comments that Dartmoor was a "depot of living death."³⁰

Cobb's narrative also provides the reader with a thorough description of the local landscape. He notes that the hills surrounding the prison were bleak and dreary, even more so

²⁴ Ibid., 3–4.

²⁵ Ibid., 5.

²⁶ Brown, *Yarn of a Yankee Privateer*, 155.

²⁷ Ibid., 167.

²⁸ Bates, *Embracing a Long Life on Shipboard*, 73.

²⁹ Pierce, "Journal of Nathaniel Pierce," 26.

³⁰ Andrews, *Prisoners Memories*, 19.

during the colder months. He also provides some insight into the locals.³¹ According to the narrator, the people living in the area of the prison were superstitious and believed that the dead haunted the barren moors surrounding the prison. He claims:

And so fully were the country people's minds convinced, that the departed dead were yet restless, and that their spirits still danced over the moor in that witching hour, when ghosts love to riot in transparent forms, and lightly float in drapery of swathing clothes, that it was difficult for those rustics to bring their minds, to pass this extensive waste after night-fall.³²

Coupled with the grim-looking exterior and surrounding lands were Dartmoor's climate and prevailing weather conditions. Rain, cold, snow, and fog were all normal for the prison and the surrounding countryside.³³ One passage in Cobb's narrative reflects his semi-humorous desperation to see sunlight:

I tried every expedient either to bring the sun to the east or the east to the sun; I whirled round and round till dizzy, with my eyes shut; counted the paving stones at my feet, in the compass of a square yard, called myself a fool (one rational idea,) and at last I so far succeeded, after an hour's buffetings, to make an impression upon the sun, that I perceived it was moving towards the point I was expecting to see it when rising.³⁴

While Cobb's commentary might sound exaggerated to the reader—if not outright amusing, Valpey's journal sarcastically provides some additional corroborative evidence. "The First Month that I had the pleasure of being in these palaces we never had sight of the sun but three different times and nothing but a continual rain from the first of November to the first of January..."³⁵ Pierce's own memoir suggests much the same: "we always call it pleasant here when it does not rain, for it is very seldom we see the sun moon or stars." He adds: "the latter I have not seen since I have been in Dartmoor."³⁶

The cold was perhaps the worst aspect of Dartmoor's weather. Andrews's recollection provides the reader with the most in-depth recounting of how miserable the weather really was for the average prisoner. The worst years for the Americans were those of 1813 and 1814. For

³¹ Cobb, *Green Hand's First Cruise*, 2:182.

³² Ibid.

³³ Ibid., 2:131.

³⁴ Ibid., 2:132.

³⁵ Valpey, *Journal of Joseph Valpey*, 13.

³⁶ Pierce, "Journal of Nathaniel Pierce," 33.

instance, November 1813 was particularly grim as Andrews's journal notes: "rain, snow, and hail, almost every day," and the situation was even worse: "and many had been so unthoughtful of the future, as to sell their jackets to buy food."³⁷ The severe conditions would reach their peak by January 1814, by which time the roads were lost to snow and the prison only had enough provisions for ten days. A quick-thinking Captain Shortland, by that time, Dartmoor Prison's new administrator, ordered the roads cleared by prisoners.³⁸

In the meantime, Andrews's journal adds:

The weather was incredibly cold upon this mountain ; the moor, as far as the eye could extend, was covered with frost and snow; the prison walls, by being continually damp, had become like solid ice, and the prisoners obliged to keep [to?] their hammocks, for being allowed no fire, had no other means to keep themselves warm.³⁹

The Americans were not permitted to light fires, during both Captain Cotgrave's and Shortland's administrations. Andrews does not provide any explanation for this policy, and the author has been unable to discover any reasoning for or other mention of this regulation other than a fear of arson. In order to stay warm, Andrews explains, the Dartmoor men were forced to hang their hammocks as close together as possible.⁴⁰

By March 1814, the weather had sufficiently improved, allowing the prisoners to leave the confines of their individual hammocks.⁴¹ Not wishing to be caught off guard by the severity of another Dartmoor winter, as the season approached, the various prison committees requested permission to keep fires burning. As before, this request was denied by Captain Shortland.⁴² Fortunately, the following winter months, beginning in December 1814, were not nearly so severe, though according to Andrews, hardly comfortable.⁴³

As grim as the exterior and the weather of the prison might sound, the interior was little better. Many of these same accounts describe in great detail the interior of the prison, from the

³⁷ Andrews, *Prisoners Memories*, 57.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 65.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 62.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 64.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 71.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 132.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 135.

yards to the individual prison buildings. It is worth pausing here to remind the reader that Dartmoor was not a single building, but rather a compound. In his description of the prison, Melish notes that there were seven separate buildings designed to hold prisoners. Originally, the fourth building, Prison No. 4, was set aside for the Americans while the French still occupied the place. Because of the number of buildings present within the compound, there were a number of yards, (three) with walls separating them from the rest of the prison, e.g. the barracks, hospital and other buildings.⁴⁴ Cobb's account does point out one irregularity within the prison: the buildings were not all of uniform size. For instance, prisons Nos. 1, 4, and 7 were the largest; 3 and 5 were of medium size; and 2 and 6—buildings never occupied by prisoners—were the smallest.⁴⁵

Very fortunately for the prisoners, water was readily available. Running through each yard, Melish explains, were streams that were designed for the express purpose of keeping the prisoners well supplied with waste disposal, and with drinking and washing water, conveniently separated into two channels.⁴⁶ In addition, and to keep the prisoners supplied with extra goods, an improvised market square had been set up in front of the wall separating the prison yards from the rest of the prison.⁴⁷

In Joseph Bates's own account, he provided some additional clarification, vis-à-vis the individual prisons. His account agrees rather closely with Melish's description of seven individual buildings but he adds that each of these buildings was designed to hold between 1,500 and 1,800 men. The various memoirs are contradictory on this subject, but it appears that newly arrived prisoners had the option to select the building in which they would take up residence. Brown, for instance, would ultimately settle in No. 7.⁴⁸ Others, such as Cobb, imply that new arrivals were assigned to prison buildings, though he does not specify to which he was

⁴⁴ Melish, *Description of Dartmoor Prison*, 4.

⁴⁵ Cobb, *Green Hand's First Cruise*, 2:181.

⁴⁶ Melish, *Description of Dartmoor Prison*, 5.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 4.

⁴⁸ Brown, *Yarn of a Yankee Privateer*, 171.

ultimately sent. Pierce insists that a newly arrived prisoner could select any of the occupied buildings he liked, but only after the clerks had processed him into the prison.⁴⁹ It is in Bates's description of Dartmoor that one learns that there was a degree of ethnic segregation in practice. Bates notes that Prison No. 4 had been set aside specifically to house black prisoners.⁵⁰ Indeed all the memoirs agree on this point: all blacks were automatically assigned to No. 4 prison for the duration of their stay within Dartmoor.

According to Andrews's own memoirs, there was a great degree of ethnic tension amongst the prison population and segregation was the only way to resolve this particular issue.⁵¹ A small passage from Cobb's own account suggests another underlying reason behind establishing No. 4 as a separate prison: "prison No. 4, occupied exclusively by the blacks, except a few whites who have been driven from the other prisons by their bad conduct, and are compelled to take up with such accommodations here, as they can find, or the blacks will allot them."⁵² In other words, a separate building was necessary, at least by the reckoning of the various prison committees, to avert ethnic tension and to contain exiled undesirables. Accordingly, on February 22, 1814, Prison No. 4 was set aside for all black prisoners sent to Dartmoor Prison.⁵³

While all of these features sound impressive on paper, what was the prison actually like? How did each of the memoirists perceive their surroundings? As with the impressions of Dartmoor's exterior, each of the prisoners provides his own somewhat unique description. It is important to note here that while there might be slight differences from narrative to narrative, the overall impressions of these men overlap quite a bit.

⁴⁹ Pierce, "Journal of Nathaniel Pierce," 26.

⁵⁰ Bates, *Embracing a Long Life on Shipboard*, 72.

⁵¹ Andrews, *Prisoners Memories*, 89.

⁵² Cobb, *Green Hand's First Cruise*, 2:43.

⁵³ Andrews, *Prisoners Memories*, 69.

Perhaps the most readable account, that of Benjamin Brown, provides the most detailed description of Dartmoor's interior. For that reason, it is worth quoting this narrative at length:

Light was admitted from a number of small windows with iron bars, and wooden shutters inside the bars. The prisons were of two stories, with capacious cock-lofts, and each prison was...from 150 to 200 feet in length. There were...four doors, two at each end, and opposite each door a very large stairway, built also of stone, leading to the second story. A cookhouse stood at one end of each prison. There was no glass in the windows, and we were generally unable to provide any; and it was impossible to admit sufficient light without keeping the shutters unclosed—so that we suffered a great deal from the cold, damp winds, during our winter residence here. The windows were about nine feet apart, and about eighteen inches high and twelve wide. The interior of the prisons was very gloomy; there being no ceiling to the rough stone walls, they were very dark, very damp, very dirty, and... about as uncomfortable places of abode as the malicious ingenuity of their contrivers could possibly have hit upon.—The floors were of stone— said to have been originally covered with cement; but the only cement I saw was a very thick one of dirt. There were stanchions, or upright posts, some of wood and some of iron, running through each prison, forming an alley on each side to pass from one end to the other.—These stanchions were about one foot and a half apart, and were used for suspending our hammocks. Three of these, comprising a space of four and a half feet, were allowed for six men to live in—being nine inches for each man in width, and about eight feet in length.⁵⁴

Cobb's description of Dartmoor's interior closely mirrors that of Brown, but he emphasizes the intense crowding within each building. "...[There was] no one portion of the apartment offering room for the stowage of either our bodies or bedding."⁵⁵ The crowding was so intense that when men sat down to eat their meal, they were only permitted a few feet of space. Mostly, Cobb's narrative notes, a mess had the space equivalent of three of the stanchions used to hang their hammocks—approximately ten to twelve feet. Many men, such as Cobb and his particular mess of prisoners, often joined up with another mess of six and thus increased their allowed space. In these latter situations, the allotted space was doubled and it somewhat alleviated the crowded conditions, for a short time at least.⁵⁶

As with the Waterhouse/Babcock publication, Andrews had plenty to say on the matter of Dartmoor's interior. He likened the inside of each prison to that of a stable and indicated that:

⁵⁴ Brown, *Yarn of a Yankee Privateer*, 167–169.

⁵⁵ Cobb, *Green Hand's First Cruise*, 2:6.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 2:61.

"[we] saw the water constantly dropping from the cold stone walls on every side, which kept the floor...constantly wet and cold as ice."⁵⁷

For Cobb's part, his description of Dartmoor's buildings includes his belief that they were well ventilated, perhaps too well ventilated, given the area's climate. None of the individual prisons had any means by which the prisoners could provide warmth. If a prisoner wished to have additional heat, Cobb's narrative notes, he had to possess enough wealth to purchase a stove.

Imposing walls, grim-looking buildings, and a poor climate were, of course, not enough to keep the Americans confined within Dartmoor. Regulations, both official and self-imposed, were required to accomplish this latter task. The English government had such regulations in place as a direct result of the ongoing Napoleonic Wars. The fact that the prisoners were willing, and quite able, to regulate themselves is a subject in of itself that is worth extensive discussion. The following section of this chapter examines both forms of governance in some detail.

4.2 Regulating the Prisoners

The prisoners at Dartmoor were governed by two sets of regulations. The first, or official, regulations were those constraints and policies set out by the British government. Specifically, the Admiralty's Transport Office was responsible for managing all prisoners-of-war, be they French or American, held in British captivity.⁵⁸ Of equal importance, perhaps even more so, were the self-imposed regulations created by the various elected bodies of prisoner committees. Both sets of regulations dictated what the prisoners could and could not do, their rations, how they were treated in hospital, the clothing that they were issued, and not least, how their bodies were disposed of in the event of death.

But how effective were these regulations? How, for example, did the Transport Office go about clothing each prisoner? Each of the prisoner narratives spends a significant amount of time on these matters. Some, such as Neal's, look more favorably upon these attempts, while

⁵⁷ Andrews, *Prisoners Memories*, 22.

⁵⁸ Stanbrook, *Dartmoor's War Prison*, 7.

others, such as those by Pierce and Andrews, less so. In addition, many of these same accounts comment quite extensively on self-governance, and a subject of equal importance, how the United States government attempted to see to the welfare of its military personnel and citizens.

In all instances, newly arrived prisoners to Dartmoor were not processed until the next morning. This rule often caused the prisoners to spend a miserable first night, without clothing or food.⁵⁹ One of the first events that Brown experienced was to have been examined rather closely by the prison officials. His name, physical appearance, biographical details, (birth place and date, and the like), and what position he held on board ship was recorded.⁶⁰ Cobb's account adds that each prisoner processed into Dartmoor was assigned an identification number. In Cobb's case his number was 6632.⁶¹

Once processed, the new arrivals were issued with several items: a blanket, hammock, bedding material, rope to suspend the hammock, a pillow, a spoon, a tin pot, and to every sixth man, a bucket.⁶² Yet these items were not new, or for that matter, very clean. Valpey's journal comments: "[the] hammocks beds and Blankets that [we received] was as full [*sic*] of Lice as the Devil is of Wickedness..."⁶³ As unappealing as these items might have been, they were nevertheless the property of the British government. Each prisoner, Cobb's account notes, was responsible for turning these items back in on the date of his release from the prison.⁶⁴

When the first Americans were brought to Dartmoor, they were confined in one building. Andrews's memoir estimates that there were 8,000 French prisoners confined in the prison at that time.⁶⁵ The difficulties began right from the start as the Americans were forced to share

⁵⁹ Pierce, "Journal of Nathaniel Pierce," 26.

⁶⁰ Brown, *Yarn of a Yankee Privateer*, 161–162.

⁶¹ Cobb, *Green Hand's First Cruise*, 2:5.

⁶² Brown, *Yarn of a Yankee Privateer*, 167.

⁶³ Valpey, *Journal of Joseph Valpey*, 12.

⁶⁴ Cobb, *Green Hand's First Cruise*, 2:5.

⁶⁵ Andrews, *Prisoners Memories*, 22.

their captivity with a group of rather infamous Frenchmen, so-called “Les Romains.” Andrews provides one of the more vivid descriptions of these men:

In this prison were about nine hundred of the most abject and outcast wretches that were ever beheld. French prisoners, too wicked and malicious to live with their other unfortunate countrymen: they were literally and emphatically naked; having neither clothing nor shoes, and as poor and meager in flesh as the human frame could bear. Their appearance was really shocking to human feeling.”⁶⁶

In addition to being confined with “Les Romains,” the newly arrived Americans had to contend with the ruthless Captain Isaac Cotgrave. Cotgrave had been appointed commander of Dartmoor Prison in 1807.⁶⁷ Stanbrook notes: “Capt Cotgrave was considered a harsh man, if contemporary accounts from prisoners are to be believed.”⁶⁸ In his description of Cotgrave, Rhodes suggests that the man was a strict disciplinarian and held to the letter of his orders, rather than being intentionally cruel.⁶⁹ This latter interpretation of Capt. Cotgrave’s intentions is borne out by the various descriptions of Cotgrave’s decisions and actions from the various accounts of the Dartmoor prisoners.

As an example of Cotgrave’s strict interpretation of his orders from the Transport Office, the man insisted that the Americans share No. 4 prison with “Les Romains.”⁷⁰ This particular practice would end only after a battle, of sorts, was fought between “Les Romains” and American prisoners. This battle, or more likely brawl, resembled more of an ambush initiated by the French. The end result would convince the Transport Office, and by extent Captain Cotgrave, that the prison yard of No. 4 needed to be separated by a wall, to keep the peace between the two groups.⁷¹ This incident clearly illustrates that Cotgrave was reluctant, or perhaps unable, to exercise any initiative on his own behalf.

Additional incidents provide further insight into Cotgrave’s character. Andrews notes that every morning, the prisoners were called out into the bitter cold to be counted. For obvious

⁶⁶ *ibid.*, 25–26.

⁶⁷ Stanbrook, *Dartmoor's War Prison*, 15.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*

⁶⁹ Rhodes, *Dartmoor Prison*, 54.

⁷⁰ Andrews, *Prisoners Memories*, 26.

⁷¹ Andrews, *Prisoners Memories*, 37.

reasons, the Americans objected to this practice, but Cotgrave replied that these were his orders and “as agent he must obey them.”⁷² A further regulation, apparently set down by the Transport Office, was that Americans were not permitted to purchase from the prison market; This measure was enforced by the simple expedient of locking the gates that led out from No. 4.⁷³

Unfortunately, the only insights into Cotgrave’s administration of Dartmoor come from one source. Charles Andrews was the only memoirist to have been held in Dartmoor long enough to have been a direct witness to Cotgrave’s methods. No other account, examined in this project at any rate, provides any description of the man’s character. All of the other memoirists arrived in Dartmoor after governorship had been transferred to Captain Thomas George Shortland, Royal Navy, which took place on December 22, 1813.⁷⁴

Shortland’s administration of Dartmoor saw the fortunes of the Americans improve quite a bit. Andrews comments: “Shortland was a man whose feelings had not yet grown callous by being familiarized with human misery, and at his first arrival he was shocked at the scenes of our misery...” Shortland’s humanity even saw him go so far as to act as “agent,” or representative of, the interests of the prisoners under his care.⁷⁵ For instance, under Cotgrave’s administration, Americans needing medical attention were often denied access to the hospital, but Shortland saw to it that this practice was put to an end, granting them admittance. In another instance, as discussed previously, Americans were not permitted access to the prison market. Shortland altered this regulation, permitting two prisoners, presumably as representatives, to go to the market and purchase provisions.⁷⁶

On June 20, 1814, Shortland announced to the Dartmoor population that all American prisoners held in England would be consolidated into one prison. The prison of choice, naturally

⁷² Ibid., 60.

⁷³ Ibid., 31.

⁷⁴ Ibid., 61.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁶ Ibid., 62.

enough, was Dartmoor. To that end, Shortland wanted the prisoners to help get the prison compound ready for the new arrivals.⁷⁷ Shortland announced that he would hire one hundred prisoners to attend to the various tasks required to better prepare the prison for additional occupants.⁷⁸ Prior to this announcement, any Americans that had applied for the various labor positions were told that these were closed to them until all remaining French prisoners had been discharged.⁷⁹

Other policies introduced by Shortland included all incarcerated Americans being allowed contact with their French counterparts—while the latter were still present—and also access to newspapers, though Andrews laments that all of these were of English origin.⁸⁰ Shortland was also keenly interested in the quality of provisions his charges received. In March 1814, Andrews's journal reports that it was discovered that one of the prison's contractors was attempting to cheat the prisoners, vis-à-vis the quality of food. The incident was immediately reported to Shortland, who promptly confronted the contractor.⁸¹

Shortland's fair-play policies were not just limited to prisoners and prison contractors. In March 1815, Pierce's memoir notes, the garrison at Dartmoor was comprised of new recruits.⁸² On the third of that month, Pierce reports that one of these soldiers got out of hand when attempting to restore discipline among the prisoners. One of his charges had not responded quickly enough to a command and was stabbed. The incident was promptly reported to Shortland, and "his [Shortland's] answer was if the Prisoners [*sic*] would point out the man that did it he would have him severely punished for he was not alow'd [*sic*] so to do..."⁸³

For all of his concern for his charges, Shortland was nevertheless a disciplinarian and did not hesitate to mete out punishment where appropriate. For single offenders, there was any

⁷⁷ Ibid., 89.

⁷⁸ Ibid., 90.

⁷⁹ Ibid., 86.

⁸⁰ Ibid., 72.

⁸¹ Ibid., 75.

⁸² Pierce, "Journal of Nathaniel Pierce," 34.

⁸³ Ibid., 35.

number of means at Shortland's disposal. For instance, if a prisoner was found to be dishonest or troublesome in his dealings at the prison market, Shortland would simply bar his entry, ordering the guards to keep the man out.⁸⁴ Other forms of punishment might include confinement in the cachot, or as the prisoners called it, "the black hole." This practice of confining prisoners in a near lightless and poorly insulated chamber was derived from prison hulks and easily put into practice at land-based facilities.⁸⁵

However, the vast majority of Shortland's punishments were collective in nature, leaving the various elected committees to deal with individual miscreants. Most of Shortland's mass punishments involved market stoppages. Usually, this particular action took place when it was evident to Captain Shortland that some form of mass disobedience by the prisoners was in the offing. This action was a measure of last resort as Neal explains in connection with two men who had escaped from the cachot:

Capt. Shortland...marched a company of soldiers into the yard. The prisoners hustled them and finally drove them out, and threatened to kill any others he might send among them. He did not attempt to do this, but in order to coerce them stopped the market.... Finding his plan not effectual, Shortland proposed to negotiate and offered, if the prisoners would allow the soldiers to search the prisoners without molestation to open the market, whether they found the proscribed men or not. This was agreed to. The soldiers marched in and marched out again and the market was restored, but the men were not found. They were under ground, in a mine which some few of us were having constructed with a view of escape sometime or other.⁸⁶

This incident demonstrates the methods to which Shortland was willing to resort to in order to keep his charges in line. The first approach, marching soldiers into the prison to search for the two escapees, was rendered ineffectual when the prisoners demonstrated their ability to hinder the search. Shortland then resorted to stopping the market. Although this was not as effective as he had hoped, it did grant him some bargaining power with the prisoners. Finally, Shortland was willing to bargain with the population and this method was accepted by both

⁸⁴ Cobb, *Green Hand's First Cruise*, 2:48.

⁸⁵ Samuel Roads, *The Marblehead Manual* (Marblehead, MA: Statesman Publishing, 1883), 40.

⁸⁶ David Augustus Neal, *East By Sea and West By Rail: The Journal of David Augustus Neal of Salem, Massachusetts, 1793–1861* (Toronto: Elbridge Printing, 1979), 115–117.

parties; indeed, the prisoners did eventually get what they had wanted. This behavior suggests that Shortland could be a reasonable administrator, in spite of later accusations.

Less spectacular displays of authority did take place more frequently. For instance, Valpey's journal reports that the market was closed on January 21, 1815, when it was discovered that several prisoners were using the window shutters from No. 6 prison as tables.⁸⁷ Other events, as recorded by Selman's journal, insist that prisoners found with lights lit within the prison after dark were deliberately fired upon by soldiers.⁸⁸ Andrews reports similar activity, but adds that prisoners were warned before the firing was actually carried out and that no one was harmed when the warnings were ignored.⁸⁹ There are no clear records of whether or not this was official policy set out by the Transport Office, was a regulation instituted by Shortland or Cotgrave, or was merely a punishment that the sentries had improvised on their own.

Shortland was quite capable of subtlety in his methods. He came to hire many American prisoners to perform various tasks around the prison. Many of these tasks required that the men leave the prison, that is, be out from under direct supervision for short periods of time. Naturally, this scenario provided opportunists with chances at escape. Andrews's memoir explains how Shortland was able to curtail these attempts rather effectively:

He [Shortland] then told us under what restrictions we were to work; we were to be under the eye of a guard all the time, and if any prisoner attempted to make his escape, that no more Americans would be employed, and to prevent this, the following rule was adopted; they were to receive their pay, at the rate of sixpence per day.⁹⁰

As Valpey's journal, and those of many others, describe, the Dartmoor prisoners were also governed by a few elected individuals from amongst their own number. Each building housing Americans had its own committee for self-governance—with the exception of Prison No. 4. Not surprisingly, Andrews was witness to the creation of the first committees within

⁸⁷ Valpey, *Journal of Joseph Valpey*, 19.

⁸⁸ Roads, *Marblehead Manual*, 41.

⁸⁹ Andrews, *Prisoners Memories*, 126.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 90.

Dartmoor Prison. These officials were put into place not only provide to a legislative and regulatory body for the prisons but to be responsible for punishing those who broke the rules.⁹¹

This measure was necessary, Andrews explains, owing to the desperate circumstances of living in Dartmoor Prison. He remarks: "Petty larcenies were daily committed among the prisoners; brothers and the most intimate friends stealing from each other."⁹² It is worth remembering that the men confined within Dartmoor Prison were not criminals but prisoners-of-war captured during service to their country. Among convicts, such activities as stealing from comrades and the like, might be tolerated, but the vast majority of these men considered themselves to be civilized. This is why, perhaps, each committee was known for its absolute ruthlessness when dealing with those brought before it for punishment. Andrews's memoirs note that the usual punishment for any number of infractions was two dozen lashes!⁹³

The most extreme punishments might involve a trial, conviction, and then the convict being turned over to the English authorities, as happened when one man killed another in a duel.⁹⁴ Usually, the process for formal trials involved a committee drawing up a slate of potential jurors but with a twist: "the [prison's] crier went round to each man, who made a mark against the names of the twelve individuals he preferred."⁹⁵ Subsequently, the trial of the accused was held publicly, usually on the top story of one of the prison buildings.⁹⁶

Individuals usually warranted a trial when they were caught stealing or defacing public property or in extreme instances of disorder.⁹⁷ Yet the defendant was permitted to speak for himself during this procedure, and if he felt so inclined, could retain the services of a "lawyer." Brown comments: "There were no monopoly bar-rules there, but everyone was free to practice

⁹¹ Ibid., 44.

⁹² Ibid.

⁹³ Ibid.

⁹⁴ Ibid., 96.

⁹⁵ Brown, *Yarn of a Yankee Privateer*, 179.

⁹⁶ Ibid.

⁹⁷ Ibid.

[law], who felt himself moved to the vocation, and could get clients."⁹⁸ If a man was convicted, the punishment was often severe: "I have known an individual, convicted of stealing, tied up to a post and whipped with a cat-o'-nine-tails so severely, that he was obliged to be carried to the hospital..."⁹⁹

As makeshift as these trials might sound today, all elements of the regular judicial process were present. Cobb's account notes that judges, jury, defense, and prosecution were all to be found during a trial procedure. He further comments that regardless of the harshness of the punishment for a convict, all trials were fair. All of the aforementioned positions were filled by appointed prisoners. Cobb also comments that most of the prisoners tasked with serving as prosecutors did not relish the task.¹⁰⁰

Harsh though many of the punishments were, the worst were reserved for those men who had been judged guilty of treason. Unlike the orderly trials conducted in the instances of other crimes, mob mentality was often the order of the day. Cobb explains the fate of two men from the U.S. who had enlisted in the Royal Navy and fought against their fellow Americans:

One night, after becoming some little merry, their [Joseph Smith and John Price] insolence became past endurance, by their boasting that the very money with which they were then carousing, was a part of that obtained from the capture of the United States' brig Argus, while they were doing duty on board of her destroyer, the Pelican. This the others could not bear—that they should openly boast of fighting against their own countrymen, and publicly riot upon the spoils of the vanquished, among who was the gallantly remembered Allen, the then commander of the Argus. Two of them were seized and stamped in the forehead and across the cheeks, with Indian ink pricked into the surface of the skin, with the word traitor—the third with the initial T on the one cheek, and termination R on the other. While this was going on, none interfered in their behalf, till all was completed, when they were sent to the hospital, with a request to have them retained therein as a place for their safety.¹⁰¹

Cobb was not the only prisoner who witnessed these sorts of acts. Andrews also witnessed the same events as related above, but by the tone of his narrative he might have been amongst those who had decided the fate of these two men. Andrews notes that simply

⁹⁸ Ibid., 180.

⁹⁹ Ibid., 179.

¹⁰⁰ Cobb, *Green Hand's First Cruise*, 2:138.

¹⁰¹ Cobb, *Green Hand's First Cruise*, 2:250–251; Stanbrook, *Dartmoor's War Prison*, 66.

killing the men had been considered but, ultimately, the branding method was adopted.¹⁰² Valpey's memoir also records an incident where a man considered a traitor to his country was almost literally branded as such in his journal. In this instance, only two letters were tattooed onto the man's cheeks and the crimes he was guilty of were being a traitor to his country and "damning the flag."¹⁰³

This rather infamous deed of course reached the ears of Captain Shortland. He reported the incident to the Transport Office. As Stanbrook describes, "The [Transport] Board, equally appalled, was anxious to prosecute them. By some means, Capt Shortland was partially successful as he found three culprits: J. Jackson, J. Hogaberts and S. Robinet, who were sent to trial in Exeter in March [although they are reputed to have been acquitted]."¹⁰⁴ It is curious that none of the prisoner memoirs makes a note of Shortland's reaction to the affair, let alone how he attempted to mete out punishment for it.

Other prisoners, such as Brown, commented occasionally on the various committees throughout the prison. In his journal, Brown expresses some confusion as to how these committees were elected to power; presumably, he was not referring to the fact that they were voted into office, but perhaps the election process itself.¹⁰⁵ He does go on to point out some of the various tasks these committees were responsible for. For example, appointing cooks and keeping the prisons swept out—a very important task. This oversight seems to have been doubly important, owing to the fact that the British government authorized payment to the prisoners who worked at these various tasks.¹⁰⁶

The elected committees also had another very important task. As the representatives of the Dartmoor prisoners, they were the ones who inspected the rations sent to Dartmoor. It is unclear as to how this policy had first begun, but clearly it was approved by the Transport

¹⁰² Andrews, *Prisoners Memories*, 141–142.

¹⁰³ Valpey, *Journal of Joseph Valpey*, 18.

¹⁰⁴ Stanbrook, *Dartmoor's War Prison*, 66–67.

¹⁰⁵ Brown, *Yarn of a Yankee Privateer*, 172.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 177.

Office. If goods, e.g. foodstuffs, were not met with approval, the committees had the right to reject them as such. The contractor that provided the goods did have the right to appeal to the prison commander, but usually he found little mercy from Captain Shortland.¹⁰⁷

Mostly, the prisoner-appointed committees did not concern themselves with the day-to-day lives of the Dartmoor men. In fact, they did not presume to speak for the entire prison when an important matter presented itself. Cobb notes that when such a decision was before a building's entire population, the matter was resolved via direct democracy. Votes were collected simply by having the crier announce the issue to be decided and voting proceeded directly via verbal ascent. The issue was only decided if there was a clear majority.¹⁰⁸

Almost without exception, all of the prisoners were governed by the decisions of these committees. However, Brown's journal comments: "No. 4, or the negro-prison, was an exception to the democratically form of government; this was under a regal, or rather despotic form."¹⁰⁹ This particular prison was ruled over by a black man named Richard Crafus, called "King Dick" or "Big Dick," by all of the other prisoners.¹¹⁰ Crafus, Brown's journal continues, was a large man who stood nearly seven feet tall and was very muscular. Crafus was able to keep his charges under his thumb by virtue of being both an expert boxer and possessing a rather shrewd mind.¹¹¹

Crafus was able to maintain his authority by simply clubbing those conspiring against him into submission.¹¹² Perhaps the other reason Crafus was permitted his "monarchy" in No. 4, Brown's narrative speculates, was because of the tacit support of all the other committees.¹¹³ Cobb goes beyond speculation, noting:

¹⁰⁷ Brown, *Yarn of a Yankee Privateer*, 182; Stanbrook, *Dartmoor's War Prison*, 87.

¹⁰⁸ Cobb, *Green Hand's First Cruise*, 2:137. Unfortunately, Cobb's narrative does not provide any specific examples of this form of democracy.

¹⁰⁹ Brown, *Yarn of a Yankee Privateer*, 181–182.

¹¹⁰ Stanbrook, *Dartmoor's War Prison*, 64.

¹¹¹ Brown, *Yarn of a Yankee Privateer*, 181–182.

¹¹² *Ibid.*, 183.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, 182.

Big Dick [Richard Crafus] is a great favourite with the authorities of the Depot, and is allowed greater indulgence than any other within the walls. He frequently obtains permission to pass through the gates, remains outside for hours, roaming about the fields, occasionally visits Princeton, and returns at his will.¹¹⁴

Brown's narrative also adds that Crafus was even able to levy taxes from his unwilling subjects by the age-old practice of convincing those in his charge that contributing a little money would guarantee them the services of government.¹¹⁵ Numbered amongst these subjects were all of the undesirables cast out from other prisons by committee decree—a policy used by the French before them.¹¹⁶ It is unclear if Crafus's authority encompassed these exiled whites, or if they were left to govern their own affairs. After Richard Crafus was released from the prison, all of the strict discipline he had instilled into his subjects fled; No. 4 prison broke down into anarchy.¹¹⁷

Finally, if a prisoner was unsatisfied with the decisions of those who had charge of him, he could make a direct appeal to the agent for American prisoners-of-war, Reuben G. Beasley, who was stationed in London.¹¹⁸ A prisoner could write a letter to Beasley directly, but there was no guarantee that it would reach its intended destination.¹¹⁹ To insure a more efficient line of communication, a committee of correspondence was appointed from amongst the prison population to remain in contact with Beasley.¹²⁰ Andrews notes that it was Beasley himself who suggested the idea of the prisoner-elected committee that would convey their requests to him; from there, he would approach the Transport Office on their behalf.¹²¹

But Andrews's memoirs also provide more detail on the correspondence process with Beasley. In the early days of American imprisonment at Dartmoor, conditions under Captain Isaac Cotgrave were terrible. Complaints to Cotgrave fell on deaf ears, owing to the prison

¹¹⁴ Cobb, *Green Hand's First Cruise*, 2:44.

¹¹⁵ Brown, *Yarn of a Yankee Privateer*, 184.

¹¹⁶ Cobb, *Green Hand's First Cruise*, 2:148.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 2:257.

¹¹⁸ Roads, *Marblehead Manual*, 35.

¹¹⁹ Beasley to James Madison, 28 November 1816. Consular letters from London, 1812–1816 (Beasley's letters), USS *Constitution* Museum.

¹²⁰ Brown, *Yarn of a Yankee Privateer*, 182.

¹²¹ Andrews, *Prisoners Memories*, 68.

commander's firm insistence that he was carrying out orders. Presumably, one of these regulations was that the Americans were not permitted to have contact with the outside world.

This would explain the necessity of what the prisoners had to resort to, as Andrews explains:

The prisoners who remained able, collected themselves together, and formed a committee of correspondence, who, by bribing the guards, conveyed letters daily to Mr. Beasley; particularly describing their situation, that they were almost naked, and defrauded by the Contractor of half their rations, which before were but one third enough. That the smallpox had got among them and numbers died daily...and unless he could do something for their relief, they must all perish together.¹²²

While the prisoners were able to communicate with Mr. Beasley, was it effective as a method of recourse? The general opinion among the prisoners was that it was not. The chief complaint by these men was Beasley seeming indifference to their plight. Andrews, for instance, complains in reference to the above quote that "[to] these complaints he [Beasley] paid no kind of attention, neither came to see whether they were true or false, nor sent any answer either written or verbal."¹²³

Beasley's inability—or unwillingness, as some of the various memoirists believe—to take any action created a great deal of tension between themselves and the United States government's representative.¹²⁴ As discussed at the conclusion of the final chapter of this thesis, Beasley's letter to James Madison had a ready answer to this charge: that it was Dr. George Magrath who was responsible for the tension.¹²⁵ Still, Beasley appears to have made no attempt to explain why he was unable to receive the illicit letters that Andrews claims were sent to him.

In spite of the various complaints made by Pierce, Waterhouse/Babcock, Cobb, and Andrews, Beasley was able to do some good for the men in his charge. For instance, Beasley was somehow able to procure additional clothing for the Dartmoor men, when it became clear

¹²² Ibid., 38–39.

¹²³ Ibid., 39.

¹²⁴ Pierce, "Journal of Nathaniel Pierce," 37.

¹²⁵ Beasley to James Madison, 28 November 1816.

that the Transport Office's efforts had fallen short of the mark. Andrews provides a very clear description of what these men received:

On the same day [May 15, 1814], Mr. Williams, clerk to Mr. Beasley, and a Jew merchant of London, Mr. Jacobs, brought and delivered to each prisoner a jacket, pair of trowsers, a pair of shoes, and a shirt. The jacket and trowsers were of very coarse blue cloth, much coarser than that of the English; but it was such a dress as we had been used to wearing.¹²⁶

However, Bates's account is quick to point out that "some [of the prisoners] who were not needy got supplied with a whole suit, while others were turned away, who were much in want. The prisoners remonstrated with Mr. B. [Beasley] by letter, but he justified his agent, and paid little or no attention to our grievances."¹²⁷ Regardless of the haphazard distribution of the clothing, the effort did raise the morale of all of the Dartmoor prisoners.¹²⁸

Perhaps Beasley's most important contribution to the welfare of the American prisoners was the daily allowance. As has been discussed elsewhere, the rations authorized by the Transport Office were scanty at best, inadequate at worst. In February 1814, the United States Government authorized a fixed payment of one and a half cents per day to each prisoner, the total daily sum to be paid at the end of each month. Even more importantly, this stipend took effect, retroactively, starting in January of that same year.¹²⁹

In April, Beasley was able to offer additional money to his charges. This policy came about as the result of authorization for the Dartmoor men to be given sugar and coffee twice a week—on the days on which they were given fish (see below), rather than their normal pound of beef. Rather than providing these items directly, as Beasley first thought to do, he was advised by other prison committees simply to increase the allowance by three and a half pence. This same letter contained one last bit of good news: the initial stipend was increased another halfpenny.¹³⁰

¹²⁶ Andrews, *Prisoners Memories*, 83.

¹²⁷ Bates, *Embracing a Long Life on Shipboard*, 71.

¹²⁸ Andrews, *Prisoners Memories*, 84.

¹²⁹ Andrews, *Prisoners Memories*,

¹³⁰ Reuben G. Beasley letter, quoted in Andrews, *Prisoners Memories*, 74.

However, in spite of what he managed to accomplish, dissatisfaction with R. G. Beasley's methods would continue up until the last American was released from Dartmoor. In 1815, this dissatisfaction reached a boiling point. The reasoning behind this growing tension is easily explained: the Treaty of Ghent had been signed and peace had been declared. Each man held within Dartmoor's walls expected to hear news of ships waiting in Plymouth harbor that would take them all home. Instead, the months slowly dragged by, winding the anticipation to a breaking point. Pierce describes the situation best: "...No news has come to us yet about our release from this dark hole of Despotism."¹³¹

While this situation was bad enough, other prisoners added additional accusations against Beasley. Cobb, for instance, notes that Beasley seemed more interested in enforcing the letter of his operating instructions, rather than their spirit.¹³² He adds an additional piece of information that puts the whole situation into a slightly different perspective: "The prisoners were not alone exasperated at this conduct of our agent; for the officers of the garrison expressed their disapprobation freely at the niggardly conduct of this representative of our government."¹³³

What were these additional factors? One of them was the claim by many of the memoirists that the daily stipend begun in January 1814 was stopped in March, or (some say) as late as April 28.¹³⁴ Cobb's account elaborates further on Beasley's reasoning behind the sudden stoppage of the allowance:

...a notice came from the prisoner's agent, at London, Mr. Beasley, that as his orders were to pay the prisoners their per diem, during the war, and as nothing was said in the instructions, what disposition he should make with the funds in hand, after the war had ceased, he must wait for new orders from his government, before he could ad farther [*sic*] in the matter.¹³⁵

Cobb was not the only prisoner who made note of this policy. In the anonymous work entitled *Reminiscences of a Dartmoor Prisoner*, the author notes that one of the factors that increased

¹³¹ Pierce, "Journal of Nathaniel Pierce," 38.

¹³² Cobb, *Green Hand's First Cruise*, 2:192–193.

¹³³ *Ibid.*, 2:193.

¹³⁴ Pierce, "Journal of Nathaniel Pierce," 47.

¹³⁵ Cobb, *Green Hand's First Cruise*, 2:190.

the tension level within Dartmoor's walls was Beasley's deliberate intention to withhold the payment of the promised stipend.¹³⁶

The tension would eventually trigger the prisoners into action. Many of them expressed their frustration by creating and destroying an effigy of Beasley. Cobb's account explains:

Beasley's effigy was paraded about the yards, amid the hooting shouts and mad ravings of the enraged crowd-placarded and hung to a lamp-hook, in full view of the surrounding garrison, for several hours. Afterwards it was stoned, pelted, torn down, and cast into the gutter, to await the scavenger cart's daily round, when it was loaded up with the other filthy scrapings of the prisons, and deposited upon the common dung-heap without the walls to rot; all regretting that these distinguished honours should not be showered upon himself in person."¹³⁷

Bates's journal adds that Beasley's effigy was actually burned, in addition to everything else done to it.¹³⁸ The author of the anonymous account of a Dartmoor prisoner even goes so far as to add that Beasley's effigy was actually subjected to a mock trial, and was convicted, sentenced to be hanged, and, as previously explained, burned.¹³⁹ Andrews even goes further by providing a direct quotation of the verdict handed down by the jury that "convicted" Beasley.

The question remains, was Beasley truly indifferent to the plight of his countrymen? Or, was he as powerless as he claimed? Many of the Dartmoor authors would have insisted that the former was the case, but their own accounts undermine that explanation. For instance, Andrews quotes Beasley after a list of demands had been presented to him as saying: "He then opened his mouth, and said, he had no power to do anything, nor any funds to do with; but he would do his endeavor."¹⁴⁰ Given the dire straits the United States government was in at the time vis-à-vis funding the war effort, Beasley's reaction is hardly surprising. More importantly, Beasley's conduct was much the same when he visited the prisons in Stapleton and Chatham.¹⁴¹ An even

¹³⁶ "Reminiscences of a Dartmoor Prisoner," *Knickerbocker Magazine* 24 (November, December, 1844): 459.

¹³⁷ Cobb, *Green Hand's First Cruise*, 2:191.

¹³⁸ Bates, *Embracing a Long Life on Shipboard*, 75.

¹³⁹ "Reminiscences of a Dartmoor Prisoner," *Knickerbocker Magazine* (24), 459.

¹⁴⁰ Andrews, *Prisoners Memories*, 49.

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 52.

more important point for consideration is that the French prisoners received no assistance from their government at all.¹⁴²

Even before the War of 1812 ended, prisoners were occasionally released from Dartmoor. These particular instances of release were only brought about through formal prisoner exchange programs. Unfortunately for the vast majority of the Dartmoor men, exchange programs were only open to those who had served on board ships in direct service of the United States and not to privateers.¹⁴³ Cobb also explains that "none [of the prisoners] were exchanged but such as were captured in national vessels, or troops under the pay of the government of the United States."¹⁴⁴ That prisoners were exchanged out of Dartmoor there is no doubt as Andrews records that a total of sixty-two Americans were released from the prison.¹⁴⁵ The only other means for men to leave early was to simply enlist into the Royal Navy, but as noted above, that was dangerous in its own right.¹⁴⁶

The vast majority of the Dartmoor men were not so fortunate as to be exchanged out of prison. Almost all of them would be released *several months* after the signing of the Treaty of Ghent, with some men required to wait an additional *seven months*! Part of the delay was that the policy was to release the first men to be brought to Dartmoor initially, until those who had spent the shortest time were released at the last. It is unclear as to which government decided on this policy.¹⁴⁷

After prisoner exchanges, the first men to be permitted to leave Dartmoor were those who had contacts in England who could vouch for their conduct. Men falling into this latter category were issued a passport and discharged from Dartmoor promptly.¹⁴⁸ Neal, as it turns out, was in this latter group of men: "The next day, April 1st, I took my departure, being the first

¹⁴² Ibid.

¹⁴³ Ibid., 124.

¹⁴⁴ Cobb, *Green Hand's First Cruise*, 1:200.

¹⁴⁵ Andrews, *Prisoners Memories*, 126.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid., 25.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid., 215.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid., 214.

American prisoner released under the Treaty of Ghent."¹⁴⁹ Neal would eventually travel to Liverpool, linking up with a group of Americans with similar goals, and sometime between April 15 and April 20 would set sail for New York.¹⁵⁰

There were several factors delaying release of those men left in prison. Firstly, many of them refused smallpox vaccinations, creating a minor delay in the release procedures.¹⁵¹ However, the primary difficulty was in how all of the prisoners—by this time there were close to 6,000 Americans in Dartmoor—were to be shipped back to the United States at all. On March 25, 1815, Pierce records that word reached him that Shortland and Beasley were attempting to solve this very issue. In point of fact, two days prior to this entry, Pierce records: "a letter was received to day from Mr Beasly [*sic*] telling the Prisoners not to be uneasy that he would give them his word & honour that there should not be a man in the prison after a year from this time."¹⁵²

Beasley was able to keep this rather vaguely worded promise, but the task was not easy. The most daunting aspect of returning the Dartmoor men home was procuring enough ships for the task. Pierce's journal records that on April 5, 1815, word reached the prison that the first group of vessels had reached England and were prepared to transport a group of 240 prisoners.¹⁵³ It would not be until April 19 that the first group of prisoners was made ready to depart Dartmoor Prison. This preparation, as with subsequent departures, required all of the men selected to return any government-issued articles to the Dartmoor clerks.¹⁵⁴

Prisoners unable to return all issued articles were forbidden to join the departing prisoners. This was a policy long in place as far back as when the French occupied Dartmoor. Indeed, Andrews notes that a Frenchman who was unable to return all of his articles—and denied discharge—was so distraught at the prospect of remaining imprisoned, that he cut his

¹⁴⁹ Neal, *East By Sea and West By Rail*, 117.

¹⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 119.

¹⁵¹ Andrews, *Prisoners Memories*, 152–153.

¹⁵² Pierce, "Journal of Nathaniel Pierce," 37.

¹⁵³ Pierce, "Journal of Nathaniel Pierce," 39; Andrews, *Prisoners Memories*, 215.

¹⁵⁴ Pierce, "Journal of Nathaniel Pierce," 45.

own throat.¹⁵⁵ No records exist that describe any similar behavior on the part of the Americans, though many accounts record instances of close calls.

The process was uncomfortably long and drawn out, at least from the point of view of the men still within Dartmoor's walls nevertheless, by June 15, there were only 1,500 prisoners remaining.¹⁵⁶ Cobb remarks that the vast majority of these men were blacks. The reasoning was quite simple: many of the vessels that had been hired were destined for southern American ports.¹⁵⁷ Cobb's narrative records:

Whenever a cartel [vessel] was in readiness, if bound to a southern port, as mostly they were, the blacks would not answer to their names when called, preferring to stay in prison to that of going to a slave State, fearing they might be taken up whilst wandering about in their destitute or vagabond condition, and sold into slavery. Their greatest fears were, that the cartel, when arriving at her port of destination, would be kept off, till the highest price could be ascertained for able-bodied slaves. To counteract this, they determined to remain till the last, when they would go out in a body, and by numbers or acclamation, take the vessel to where their bodies and services were less appreciated, than they were generally in southern ports.¹⁵⁸

Adding insult to injury, those leaving Dartmoor were required to march back to Plymouth. Cobb comments that the march back was not as arduous as when he had first arrived, noting that the weather was much better. In addition, their escort of soldiers was more amiable and fraternization was permitted.¹⁵⁹ All of the prisoners received two articles before leaving the prison: a pair of shoes (like previous issues of clothing, many too small or large) plus a day's worth of rations.¹⁶⁰ Conversely, Andrews insists that many men made the march to Plymouth without footwear at all.¹⁶¹

Once a group of men had made it back to Plymouth and the waiting vessels, they discovered two things of import. First, their passage had already been paid in advance, presumably by the United States government, which was very fortunate as many of the former

¹⁵⁵ Andrews, *Prisoners Memories*, 88.

¹⁵⁶ Pierce, "Journal of Nathaniel Pierce," 57.

¹⁵⁷ Bates, *Embracing a Long Life on Shipboard*, 78.

¹⁵⁸ Cobb, *Green Hand's First Cruise*, 2:255.

¹⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 2:273.

¹⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 2:266.

¹⁶¹ Andrews, *Prisoners Memories*, 215.

prisoners were left penniless by their stay in the prison.¹⁶² The other discovery was less welcome: a disproportionate number of Dartmoor prisoners were from the New England area—Fabel estimating 45 percent of the entire population—but many of the vessels were bound for southern ports.¹⁶³ Cobb and Bates both faced this difficulty—with the former destined for Charleston, South Carolina, and the latter for a port in Virginia.¹⁶⁴ For Bates, the solution was simple: his group of prisoners simply mutinied, seized the vessel, and sailed it into a more amenable port.¹⁶⁵ Cobb's narrative records a similar incident: seizing the *Henrietta* on July 24, 1815.¹⁶⁶

The difficulties for the former prisoners did not end once they reached the United States. As noted previously, many of men had left Dartmoor penniless and had to find some way to reach home.¹⁶⁷ The United States government had not made any arrangements to deal with this matter, or if they had, such services were awaiting them in their original destinations. According to the anonymous memoirist, Boston certainly did very little in the way of assistance for returning prisoners.¹⁶⁸

As grim as Dartmoor Prison was—not to mention the strict discipline that governed the prisoners—what was the reality for individuals actually like? In spite of the miserable climate, the isolation from family, and the British authorities' seeming indifference to suffering, the prisoners of Dartmoor managed to survive, but in some instances actually to flourish. The following chapter will examine these varying circumstances and the coping methods many of the memoirists employed, or in some cases witnessed, to stave off boredom and homesickness.

¹⁶² Cobb, *Green Hand's First Cruise*, 2:280.

¹⁶³ Robin F. A. Fabel, "Self-Help in Dartmoor: Black and White Prisoners in the War of 1812," *Journal of the Early Republic*, 9, No. 2. (Summer, 1989), 168–169.

¹⁶⁴ Cobb, *Green Hand's First Cruise*, 2:280; Bates, *Embracing a Long Life on Shipboard*, 77.

¹⁶⁵ Bates, *Embracing a Long Life on Shipboard*, 78.

¹⁶⁶ Cobb, *Green Hand's First Cruise*, 2:282.

¹⁶⁷ "Reminiscences of a Dartmoor Prisoner," *Knickerbocker Magazine* (23), 522.

¹⁶⁸ *Ibid.*

CHAPTER 5

THE REALITY OF DARTMOOR PRISON

5.1 Food and Clothing

While the general treatment of the Americans at Dartmoor Prison might, on first glance, appear to have been unnecessarily harsh, it is worthwhile to point out that the English government did feed and clothe their reluctant charges. While by today's standards these attempts appear to be ineffective, Lloyd reminds the reader: "Not so many years earlier, and for past centuries, most captured enemies would have been taken into slavery, thrown overboard or slaughtered on the battlefield..."¹ Taken in this context then, the fact that the British government was willing to undertake plans for feeding and clothing its reluctant charges must be seen differently.

The British government did have a plan for how prisoners—both on land and at sea—ought to have been fed and clothed. Cobb's narrative claims that the clothing issue took place on the third day of his imprisonment. According to Cobb, same author, many prisoners found that they had been issued with clothing that was either too small or too large, and many trades amongst newly arrived prisoners took place to alleviate the difficulty.² Even worse, much of the clothing was recycled from deceased prisoners, men who had perished from smallpox! Fortunately in Cobb's particular instance, his clothing issue fit him, but he did not explain whether or not he had inherited a dead man's clothing.³

Others, such as Bates or Valpey, provide very little commentary on the Transport Office's clothing issue. In Pierce's instance, he remarks only that his particular outfit was too

¹ Clive L. Lloyd, *A History of Napoleonic and American Prisoners-of-war 1756–1816: Hulk, Depot and Parole* (Suffolk: ACC Distribution, 2007), 198.

² Josiah Cobb, *A Green Hand's First Cruise: Roughed Out From The Log Book of Twenty-Five Years Standing*, 2 vols. (Boston: Otis, Broaders, 1841), 2:14.

³ *Ibid.*, 2:15.

small, but says little else.⁴ The anonymous author of the *Reminiscences of a Dartmoor Prisoner* remarked that the clothing was provided, but the author notes that only those in desperate need used any of it; the garments were not sized properly and were yellow in color.⁵ Andrews's own narrative noted that the clothing was of very poor quality, suggesting that it was not manufactured with durability in mind. The shoes, for instance, began to wear out in less than a year.⁶

What exactly did this clothing issue consist of? And why, considering the poor climate of the prison, did many prisoners refuse it? Not surprisingly, Andrews provides the most complete description:

The prisoners were to receive for clothing, every eighteen months, one yellow roundabout jacket, one pair of pantaloons, and a waistcoat of the same materials, as the government of England allow for their soldiers: and one pair of shoes and one shirt, every nine months. The cap was woolen, about an inch thick, and seemed to have been spun in a ropewalk, but much coarser than common rope yarn. The jacket was not large enough to meet around the smallest of us... the sleeves came about halfway down the arm, and the hand stuck out like a spade : the waistcoat was short; it would not meet before, nor down to the pantaloons; thus leaving a space between of three or four inches ; the pantaloons, which were as tight as our skin itself, came down to the middle of the shin. The shoes, which were the pedestal for all the ornaments above, were made of list, interwoven and fastened to pieces of wood an inch and a half thick. The figure we made in this dress was no common one.⁷

Unfortunately, prisoners entering Dartmoor stopped receiving clothing issues in 1814.⁸ Fabel's discussion on this matter does not provide any insight into why this practice was discontinued, forcing the incarcerated Americans to find other means of protecting themselves. The alternative measures that were taken by these desperate men are discussed elsewhere.

⁴ Nathaniel Pierce, "Journal of Nathaniel Pierce of Newburyport, Kept at Dartmoor Prison, 1814–1815," *Essex Institute Historical Collections* 73 (January, 1937), 28.

⁵ "Reminiscences of a Dartmoor Prisoner," *Knickerbocker Magazine*, 23 (February, April, June, 1844), 520.

⁶ Charles Andrews, *The Prisoners Memories on Dartmoor Prison: History of the Americans in England From the commencement of the late war between the united States and Great Britain until all prisoners were released by the Treaty of Ghent also A Particular detail of all occurrences relative to that Horrid Massacre At Dartmoor On the fatal evening of the 6th of April 1815* (New York: Printed for the Author, 1815), 120.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 41–43.

⁸ Robin F. A. Fabel, "Self-Help in Dartmoor: Black and White Prisoners in the War of 1812," *Journal of the Early Republic*. 9, No. 2. (Summer, 1989), 172.

If the clothing issue was considered inadequate, then how did the prisoners view their rations? As has previously been stated, the British government did attempt to feed the prisoners in their care. The Transport Office set out specific requirements that could only be met through the use of contractors.⁹ Because of this, and Dartmoor Prison's remote location, there were times in which the required supplies could not reach the prison.¹⁰

Prisoner accounts comment, in varying degrees, on the quality of the food they received. A few of the authors (such as Brown, Neal, Valpey, and Pierce,) did not comment in their narratives on the rations at all. All of those memoirists that do discuss the food in their journals are in general agreement as to what they were given each day. For five days out of the week, each man received a pound and a half of bread, half a pound of beef, including the bone, a third of an ounce of barley, a similar quantity of salt, onions, and one pound of turnips. On the other two days, the prisoners were to have their beef replaced with pickled fish.¹¹

Quality of food was almost a secondary concern, considering the fact that Dartmoor, owing to its remoteness and climate, was difficult to supply. In 1814, for instance, severe winter storms piled snow in drifts that reached the tops of the walls in Princetown—the town nearest to Dartmoor Prison. All water in the prison, such as was kept in buckets, froze solid, causing Captain Shortland to have to hire prisoners to clear the roads. Needless to say, because of the heavy reliance on contractors to ship food to Dartmoor, the cold was devastating to the distribution of rations.¹²

Transportation was not the only difficulty blocking the proper distribution of rations to prisoners. While some historians—such as Fabel and Rhodes—argue that the contractors were mostly honest in their dealings, this was not always the case. Rhodes points out that contractors caught in any form of dishonesty in their dealings faced stiff penalties, but this threat did not

⁹ A. J. Rhodes, *Dartmoor Prison: A Record of 126 Years of Prisoner-of-war and Convict Life, 1806–1932* (London: John Lane, the Bodley Head Limited, 1932), 27.

¹⁰ Fabel, "Self-Help in Dartmoor," 172.

¹¹ Andrews, *Prisoners Memories*, 40.

¹² Elisabeth Stanbrook, *Dartmoor's War Prison & Church* (Brixham, Great Britain: Quay Publications, 2002), 60.

prove enough of a deterrent to prevent a few from trying to cheat the system.¹³ For instance: "Examination of these samples [of flour] showed that 52 sacks contained contaminated flour; it had been mixed with china clay and other Deleterious Articles..."¹⁴ As has been discussed elsewhere, prisoners had the authority to reject food that they thought was not up to standards—subject to the final word from the prison commander.

Once the required foodstuffs reached Dartmoor, the items were then distributed to each prisoner. In order to avoid confusion, all prisoners were organized into groupings of six men, called "messes," to disburse the food more effectively. On each day, one man in each mess was given a ticket that was used to collect the daily ration.¹⁵ This process was begun every morning, during which time the prisoners were counted out. Cobb's narrative adds: "If any [prisoner]... remained inside till the 'messaging out' was finished, he received no rations..."¹⁶

Only after each mess received its assigned ticket, each with a number, could the distribution of food begin. Cobb provides the best explanation of how this process actually worked:

When the one [prisoner] from each mess who received the ticket at the door, being dubbed cook for the day, proceeded to the cook-house, and there waited till his number was called. The calling began at the low numbers, and proceeded in regular rotation to the highest; the cook received the ticket as he delivered the bread to the holder, strung it upon a wire, and so on in succession until all were gone through. At the next serving out of either bread or soup, the cook of the mess received his ticket, together with the provisions for the day. The numbers being now called from the highest to the lowest each member of the different messes took his regular day as its cook, as often as it fell to his turn.¹⁷

Cobb's account highlights another very important point: the prisoners were required to cook their own food; this task was not performed by any one of the prison's staff.

Each cook was appointed by prison committee and the post was sought by most, according to Brown. Brown ascribes this desire to the possibility that the cook for each mess,

¹³ Rhodes, *Dartmoor Prison*, 27.

¹⁴ Stanbrook, *Dartmoor's War Prison*, 87.

¹⁵ Cobb, *Green Hand's First Cruise*, 2:11.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 2:12.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 2:12–13.

provided he was circumspect about it, could “[get] a good belly-full every day” and not necessarily be restricted to what was provisioned to him by the British government.¹⁸ The cook’s position was a tenuous one at best, though; these men were under constant suspicion of taking more than their fair share and, if caught, punishment was often severe.¹⁹

Valpey notes one such instance of what could happen to a man if caught skimming too much of the fat:

On the Fifth [of December] I was at the Trial of our Cook's [sic] during the day and late in the Evening the Jury Brought in there [sic] Verdict Guilty of Robbing there Fellow Prisoner's of there Small Allowance and Skimming the fat from off[f] the Soup they was Sentenced for to Receive Eighteen Lashes each on there Naked back As an Example for others[.]²⁰

As scanty as their rations were, men in Dartmoor Prison were not specifically singled out by British policy for unusually cruel treatment. In many ways, and in addition to the horrific conditions on board, prisoners confined to the hulks faced consumption of even worse food. In addition to the scantiness of the ration, the food was often of very poor quality, causing Francis Selman to remark: “The beef that came on board [the hulk] appeared as if it was not fit for a dog to eat...” The men held inside Dartmoor had a degree of recourse if faced with bad food; they could complain to Captain Shortland who, often as not, took punitive action against contractors attempting to defraud the prisoners. By contrast, men on board prison ships often did not have this luxury and were often told to desist from their complaints.²¹

The overall quality of the food in Dartmoor, therefore, was passable, if not very plentiful. Cobb, for instance, comments on the quality of the bread: “It was made of barley meal, of a dark brown colour, rather coarse, but sweet, and when warm, light and very palatable.”²² Bates’s journal closely follows the description of Cobb’s, but also notes that in the instances when the

¹⁸ Benjamin Brown, *The Yarn of a Yankee Privateer*, ed. Nathaniel Hawthorne (New York: Funk and Wagnalls, 1922), 177–178.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 178.

²⁰ Joseph Valpey Jr., *The Journal of Joseph Valpey of Salem* (Detroit, MI: Michigan Society of Colonial Wars, 1922), 16.

²¹ Samuel Roads, *The Marblehead Manual* (Marblehead, MA: Statesman Publishing, 1883), 34.

²² Cobb, *Green Hand's First Cruise*, 2:13.

weather was too cold to bring in soft bread for baking, ship's biscuit—a very hard form of bread—was kept in readiness—though this was not a favorite among the prisoners.²³ As to how the food was actually prepared, the anonymous prisoner provides the best explanation:

The meat was cut up and put into large boilers, with sufficient barley to thicken it for soup. This was boiled until the meat would leave the bone, and the barley was well cooked; and when ready, was served up to the different messes. By the time each person, got his beef it was almost too small to be seen, being shrunk up by long boiling; and the bone being taken out, it was no larger than a small-sized tea-cup.²⁴

As may be expected, there is some degree of disagreement amongst the Dartmoor memoirists regarding the quality of the food. While many of them did not have much to complain of regarding the food's quality, all of them agreed that there was never enough—the issued ration having to last an entire day!²⁵ Andrews was one of the few authors who commented about the quality of the rations. He had little to say on the beef and other portions of the rations, but noted that the bread was of poor quality.²⁶

As dire as the situation might appear for the prisoners, both on board prison hulks and within Dartmoor, they did have one form of compensation in common: they could purchase food from other sources, provided they had the necessary funding. For those men confined to the hulks, at least until they were transferred to Dartmoor, boats carrying merchants would draw side along from which each man could purchase goods.²⁷ The Dartmoor men had an entire market from which they could purchase extra rations and other necessary goods. This market, Andrews explains, was a creation by the Transport Office as far back as when the French were

²³ Joseph Bates, *Embracing a Long Life on Shipboard: With Sketches of Voyages on the ATLANTIC And Pacific Oceans, the Baltic and the Mediterranean Seas; -ALSO- Impressment and Service on Board British War Ships, Long Confinement in Dartmoor Prison, Early Experiences in Reformatory Movements; Travels in Various Parts of the World; and a Brief Account of the Great Advent Movement of 1840–41* (Battle Creek, MI: Steam Press of the Seventh Day Adventist Publishing Association, 1868), 57.

²⁴ "Reminiscences of a Dartmoor Prisoner," *Knickerbocker Magazine* (23), 518.

²⁵ David Augustus Neal, *East By Sea and West By Rail: The Journal of David Augustus Neal of Salem, Massachusetts, 1793–1861* (Toronto: Elbridge Printing, 1979), 115.

²⁶ Andrews, *Prisoners Memories*, 13. There is a possibility that Andrews's description of the rations in this section of his account applied to what was served out on board the hulk he was confined to and not that which was served in Dartmoor Prison.

²⁷ Roads, *Marblehead Manual*, 39.

held in captivity. It was created in recognition, perhaps, of the fact that men would want for provisions that the government could or would not supply.²⁸

The market was permitted to meet twice a week, in a yard specifically set aside for this purpose. There the Dartmoor men could provision themselves with extra food and small articles, and they might sell their own goods to the locals.²⁹ This market was available only to those who had the extra money to afford it. Apparently after February 1814, virtually every prisoner held in Dartmoor had some access to this market.

Initially, Americans confined in Dartmoor were not permitted access to the market en masse. This denial was a practice put into place by Captain Cotgrave and ruthlessly enforced. According to Andrews, the gates leading out of the No. 4 prison yard were kept locked, and only two men were permitted to visit the market. For all others, French prisoners had petition to obtain items—and seeing the desperation of their American counterparts, the latter took advantage of the situation.³⁰ Shortland's tenure at Dartmoor saw these restrictions lifted as well as others: "We could purchase any article of provision in the markets, coffee, sugar, molasses, any thing the country afforded."³¹ Finally, Cobb provides some additional description of what Shortland permitted:

...They might lay in the necessary articles for their business stocks, provisions for their sumptuous tables—bread, flour, meats, fish, vegetables, which you see in abundance. Here likewise the prisoners resort to sell their little knick-knacks for a mere pittance, after having spent weeks or months in the making of them.³²

5.2 Medical Care

As poor as food and clothing were within Dartmoor's walls, medicine was little better. The reader will recall that during this time medicine was primitive on the whole even in England, with the first advances in anesthesia and breakthroughs in antiseptical medical practices not yet implemented. Although medical people were combating certain communicable diseases such

²⁸ Andrews, *Prisoners Memories*, 24.

²⁹ "Reminiscences of a Dartmoor Prisoner," *Knickerbocker Magazine* (23), 518.

³⁰ Andrews, *Prisoners Memories*, 31.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 73.

³² Cobb, *Green Hand's First Cruise*, 2:45.

as smallpox via inoculation and vaccination, there still was widespread objection, even within the medical community, to disease prevention through such means. This overall condition was of course true of Dartmoor Prison as well.

Disease was an ever-present fear amongst American prisoners-of-war and rumors were in constant circulation as to where it had taken hold. Cobb, for instance, notes that while resting on his journey to Dartmoor, a corporal in the British army told him that disease was rampant within Dartmoor's walls. His informer even provided a solid figure: 300 men had died from sickness—though of which particular disease and if it were confined to just prisoners, Cobb's narrative does not specify.³³

Fears of disease dealt more with its inevitable spread, rather than its overall lethality. Amongst a closely confined population, forced to live in less than optimal conditions, a poor climate and scant rations were almost a guarantee that sickness would spread. While this was a real danger in Dartmoor, Rhodes places the estimated fatalities—Both French and American—at 1,478. The worst outbreaks of disease took place between the years 1809 and 1810, killing 500 prisoners. Out of the first total listed, only three hundred Americans—approximately 20%—would actually die from communicable diseases.³⁴

As horrific as these numbers might sound by today's standards, the worst casualties from sickness were found amongst the prison hulks, veritable breeding grounds for disease. Valpey's own diary comments on this, correctly attributing the spread of the diseases to the close confinement of the prison ship.³⁵ Finally, Selman's own journal notes that disease, he does not specify which one, spread amongst 364 confinees, infecting half of this figure.³⁶

³³ Ibid., 1:274.

³⁴ Rhodes, *Dartmoor Prison*, 38. The percentage is based on my own calculations, derived from Rhodes's figures.

³⁵ Valpey, *Journal of Joseph Valpey*, 12.

³⁶ Roads, *Marblehead Manual*, 38.

Smallpox was a major concern at Dartmoor Prison. Andrews's first encounter with the "king of terror," as his account describes it, was in August 1813.³⁷ As with the prison hulks, disease spread the most quickly in confined spaces. Andrews notes one specific instance in which the disease was particularly rampant amongst a small "apartment" in which were confined 500 men.³⁸ As with many outbreaks of this nature, the epidemics came and went, the first one Andrews having witnessed ending in October 1813 but returning in March 1814, when the weather grew more mild.³⁹

There was some small comfort for those men who took sick within Dartmoor Prison. As part of its construction, a hospital had been planned. However, at least initially, American prisoners-of-war had extreme difficulty receiving admittance and care. Andrews noted: "No pains have been spared to render the hospital convenient and comfortable for the sick [American] prisoner."⁴⁰ Usually, men sent to hospital were: "Often not until he was so weak, and reduced so low, that it would take four men to remove him and[?] his hammock."⁴¹ Andrews attributed this draconian policy to two factors: the indifference of Beasley—though he provides no explanation for this conclusion—and the attitude of the then head surgeon, Dr. William Dyer.⁴² At least on the second factor, Andrews provides an explanation:

He [Dr. Dyer] justified himself by saying, that he had been acquainted with the impositions of the Americans during the revolutionary war, and that these impositions were not to be played off on him any more."⁴³

Appeals to Captain Cotgrave seemed to have had little effect on the situation. In an attempt to escape from the perils of contracting a disease, many Americans chose to take their chances by enlisting in the Royal Navy.⁴⁴ An American prisoner confined at Dartmoor was at risk from reprisals from his fellows if he made the decision to join the Royal Navy; he might face

³⁷ Andrews, *Prisoners Memories*, 38.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 39.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 56, 152.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 20.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 29.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 30.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 29.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 50.

censure at best but, more likely, violence. Unfortunately, Andrews does not provide any estimates of the number of men who chose this latter course of action.

Even after administration of the hospital changed hands—to Dr. George Magrath in September of 1814—the hospital was not necessarily a pleasant experience for many of the men confined there.⁴⁵ Valpey, for instance, notes that bleeding to excess was a common practice:

A person in these prisons should take great Care of his health for in taking cold's it Creates a bad Cough and hoarsness [*sic*] and then if he goes into the Hospital he at first is put into a Cold Bath and then he is Bled as long as he has a drop of Blood in his Veins, I knew a Man that went into the hospital with a Bad cold and he at the first Bleeding had two hundred and forty ounces of Blood taken from him, the doctors here Makes [*sic*] a practice of Bleeding a person as long as he has Breath to draw...⁴⁶

The anonymous narrator provides a slightly different explanation. Rather than deliberate cruelty or indifference on the part of the men staffing the hospital, his account suggests that men admitted to the hospital often were already so far along in their sickness that it was too late to treat them. This same narrative also notes that Magrath was a “skillful and humane man” who “did all in his power to alleviate...distress.”⁴⁷

The prison hospital itself had a total capacity of 300 sick prisoners.⁴⁸ The hospital was staffed by the head surgeon and two assistants. As nurses were required to provide additional aid to the staff, prisoners were hired to carry out this task. Andrews notes that there were no fixed number of the latter, commenting that more were hired as needed.⁴⁹ With the change in administration to Magrath, new policies were introduced, including more sympathetic attendants, though this was not a guarantee that a sick prisoner would receive prompt medical attention.⁵⁰ In addition to the change-over in personnel, other medical procedures were put into

⁴⁵ Stanbrook, *Dartmoor's War Prison*, 14.

⁴⁶ Valpey, *Journal of Joseph Valpey*, 13.

⁴⁷ "Reminiscences of a Dartmoor Prisoner," *Knickerbocker Magazine* 23 (February, April, June, 1844), 420.

⁴⁸ Cobb, *Green Hand's First Cruise*, 2:49.

⁴⁹ Andrews, *Prisoners Memories*, 55.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 123.

practice. Pierce's memoir notes that cowpox vaccination was a common practice within the hospital.⁵¹

The hospital was not always reserved for the sick or later the wounded. Cobb's account notes, almost in passing, that a prisoner could be forced into the hospital: "when any proved to be so filthy, that they could not be kept within the rules and regulations made for the general good."⁵² In addition, his account also notes that after the tobacco allowance was stopped, many men suffered from severe nicotine withdrawal. This same narrative notes that many men sickened, and even died; from tobacco withdrawal and that the medical staff seemed to properly diagnose the cause.⁵³

All of the prisoner narratives examined for this thesis agree upon at one point: the decency of Dr. George Magrath. Cobb, for instance, notes several times that while Magrath was not present in the hospital, his subordinates took less interest in the general welfare of their charges.⁵⁴ In one instance, Cobb's narration recollects that he had visited the hospital to have a recurring cough treated. The surgeons working under Magrath paid little mind to Cobb's complaint, sending him away seven times, telling him to return the next day. On his eighth visit, Cobb encountered Dr. Magrath, who promptly took charge of the situation and treated him, informing Cobb that he was "to call every morning for the future whether better or worse."⁵⁵

It is of particular interest that, as opposed to Beasley's description of the man's reputation, Magrath was long remembered by the various memoirists. Every account praised the man and his treatment of his American charges. This behavior continued through the Dartmoor Massacre and even, according to Pierce, reached the ears of President James Madison. Madison dispatched a letter to Dartmoor Prison, which Pierce dates April 25, 1815,

⁵¹ Pierce, "Journal of Nathaniel Pierce," 27.

⁵² Cobb, *Green Hand's First Cruise*, 2:158.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 2:237.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 2:49.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 2:19.

asking if some sort of official recognition was in order for Dartmoor's head surgeon; not surprisingly, the answer to the inquiry was overwhelmingly in the affirmative.⁵⁶

5.3 Passing Time Within Dartmoor

While the prisoners were kept mostly occupied starving, contracting diseases, fighting with the Transport Office and their own government (as represented by Beasley in London) they still needed to find ways to pass their remaining time within Dartmoor Prison. Surprisingly, there were plenty of things for these men to do if only they had the necessary funding. As previously discussed, the money issue was finally resolved in February 1814 with the authorization of an allowance, with the "official" use being that of procuring extra rations. However, many men found other ways to put their money to use.

The sale of food was not the sole domain of the locals. Various companies of prisoners—or enterprising individuals, in many instances—found ways to create various forms of food to be sold to their fellows. For instance, "plumgudgeons" were a form of potato cake, fried and given a fish flavoring.⁵⁷ Coffee was also a prison favorite, but of a purely ersatz quality. Cobb notes that in order to simulate coffee, bread was burnt to a crisp and then boiled.⁵⁸ Neal's memoirs even go so far as to suggest that the prisoners established coffee shops and other forms of eateries.⁵⁹

This practice, along with many others, according to Andrews, was directly adopted from that of the French who previously resided within Dartmoor. He adds: "...but you cannot think it very delicious when I inform you that it could not be bought under two and three pence per pound, and molasses seventy per hundred weight."⁶⁰ Most remarkable of all, the Dartmoor men

⁵⁶ Pierce, "Journal of Nathaniel Pierce," 46.

⁵⁷ Cobb, *Green Hand's First Cruise*, 2:30.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 2:167.

⁵⁹ Neal, *East By Sea and West By Rail*, 117.

⁶⁰ Andrews, *Prisoners Memories*, 72–73.

were permitted to establish a beer house within Dartmoor's walls, though Andrews does not provide any additional details on this establishment.⁶¹

Brown provides some additional insight into the brewing of beer. He does not offer any details regarding how the actual brewing process took place—let alone the ingredients used—but he does confirm that breweries did exist. What Brown's narrative does point out is the concern by many of the prisoner committees for public order. Because of this, brewing was tightly controlled by three of the committees and Richard Crafus, or "King Dick," but not by the committee that ran Brown's particular building. Furthermore, all profits from the breweries were put to public use; that is, proceeds from the sale of beer were expressly set aside for the general well-being of all of the prisoners residing in that particular part of Dartmoor.⁶²

While many of the memoirists comment on the culinary trade within Dartmoor's walls, Cobb was an actual participant. For Cobb, their enterprise involved all members of his mess as they produced a product that his journal calls "friego," a sort of a soup. The primary ingredients included potatoes, onions, and meat, with each member of the group tasked with performing some specific step involved with the creation of the soup. Cobb, for instance, explains that he was responsible for collecting all of the money that was made through this product. Unfortunately for Cobb and his messmates, their business did not survive their stay at Dartmoor. Financial irresponsibility would destroy the business, as procuring all of the necessary ingredients required large quantities of funding.⁶³

However, food was not the only craft the prisoners indulged in. In many of the individual prisons, various schools were established for the express purpose of providing instruction to the population at large. As with many other activities within Dartmoor Prison, the Americans copied the original idea from the French. Andrews explains: "They [the French] also had schools for teaching the arts and sciences, dancing, fencing and music, and each of these in great

⁶¹ Andrews, *Prisoners Memories*, 81.

⁶² Brown, *Yarn of a Yankee Privateer*, 186.

⁶³ Cobb, *Green Hand's First Cruise*, 2:132–134.

perfection."⁶⁴ Presumably, Andrews and his fellow prisoners were able to observe these activities from their confinement within No. 4's yard, or perhaps, by word of mouth.

Brown notes that many of these schools could be found in Prison No. 1, and that subjects ranged from the basics of reading and writing, to instruction in foreign language. Naturally, these subjects were taught at a very small fee for each student.⁶⁵ Other subjects included dancing, music, elocution, and philosophy; there was even a class on naval warfare tactics.⁶⁶ Andrews reports that a school was established with the express purpose of providing instruction for the many "boys" that found themselves imprisoned in Dartmoor. This school provided a basic education by teaching the fundamentals of reading, writing and arithmetic—all for a small price.⁶⁷ The educational standards, according to Andrews, seemed to have been passable: "Many of them, who were perfectly unacquainted with letters when they came to this prison, had acquired a tolerable education..."⁶⁸

For those who sought a less regulated form of education, there were alternatives available. Brown comments that he knew a man who lived in the same building as himself who had started a library. The man had collected a great deal of prize money, while impressed into the Royal Navy, and put this funding to use by purchasing a book collection. Rather than being a library in the truest sense of the word, a man wishing to check out one of the books had to pay a rental fee.⁶⁹

One of the more well-known schools could be found within Prison No. 4. At this school, prisoners could learn the fundamentals of boxing. The teacher was none other than Richard Crafus who, Brown reports, was an expert on the subject. He also notes that classes were only open to whites and not to his own "subjects," as he feared a coup from within if he taught the

⁶⁴ Andrews, *Prisoners Memories*, 74.

⁶⁵ Brown, *Yarn of a Yankee Privateer*, 198.

⁶⁶ Cobb, *Green Hand's First Cruise*, 2:164.

⁶⁷ Andrews, *Prisoners Memories*, 81.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 132.

⁶⁹ Brown, *Yarn of a Yankee Privateer*, 198.

men in his charge the very means to resist his authority.⁷⁰ While Cobb's memoir briefly mentions the activities within No. 4, he does not provide any additional insight into them.⁷¹ Fortunately, Pierce's journal is a bit more specific: "In N [o.] 4 the Black's Prison I have spent considerable of my time, for in the 3rd story or Cock loft they have reading, writing, Fenceing, Boxing, Dancing, & many other schools..."⁷²

For those prisoners who desired spiritual instruction, there were services available—of a sort. Early on, several individual Englishmen took an interest in the spiritual welfare of the Dartmoor men. These individuals—though Brown does not provide names—soon began to provide each prisoner with a copy of the Bible, at no charge. Unfortunately, many of these men would trade their copy of the book for other goods, e.g. beer and the like. Inevitably, word reached the organizations providing these books and the distribution was promptly put to a stop.⁷³

In spite of the Bible disaster, attempts at providing religious services continued at Dartmoor. Once a week, every Thursday, a Methodist preacher would enter Dartmoor Prison and conduct services in No. 4 prison's loft.⁷⁴ Pierce adds that other preachers put in appearances at the prison, but for whatever reason they were not well received by the prison population.⁷⁵ This attitude amongst the Dartmoor men is curious, considering the high regard that spiritual health was held in during this time. On the other hand, the anonymous prisoner specifically complains of the lack of church services, seemingly that they could be found within the prison.⁷⁶

There was one active source of religious activity within Dartmoor's walls. This self-proclaimed preacher was called Simon. Brown notes: "the Pontifex Maximus of the diocese of

⁷⁰ Ibid., 184.

⁷¹ Cobb, *Green Hand's First Cruise*, 2:35.

⁷² Pierce, "Journal of Nathaniel Pierce," 33–34.

⁷³ Brown, *Yarn of a Yankee Privateer*, 191.

⁷⁴ Ibid., 192.

⁷⁵ Pierce, "Journal of Nathaniel Pierce," 34.

⁷⁶ "Reminiscences of a Dartmoor Prisoner," *Knickerbocker Magazine* (23), 420.

Dartmoor was an ugly, thick-lipped, ignorant black man...and I believe, notwithstanding his professions of piety, that he was a consummate rascal."⁷⁷ The majority of Brown's contempt for this man seems to have come from his fraudulent treatment of his flock. In his full description of Simon's version of church services, the reader learns of another source of Brown's hostility:

He [Simon] would work himself up into such a tremendous storm of fervor as to overflow, when such ranting, such roaring, such a torrent of broken gibberish running into blasphemy, as he then uttered, such grimaces and contortions as he then exhibited, it is impossible to describe,—and the attempt would be productive only of disgust.⁷⁸

Simon's rule over the religious welfare of the blacks in No. 4 was guaranteed by the support of Richard Crafus. The man kept order during Simon's services by the simple expedient of brandishing his club at the first sign of disruption.⁷⁹ Simon's rule would come to an end toward the end of the American stay within Dartmoor Prison. His expulsion from the post of No. 4's preacher would come at the very hands of his protector: "the King of No 4...had drove him from the Cockloft saying that he was a Hypocrite & that he would preach all day & at night would steal his messmates bread & Cheat other people."⁸⁰ The allegations of theft appear to have some validity, as Brown notes that Simon used his position as preacher to demand financial contributions from his flock, but would put these tithes to use for personal gain.⁸¹

In spite of Simon's somewhat infamous reputation, many whites attended his services. On the one hand, many men were drawn to performances of the black choir, a group for which Brown records nothing but praise. These additional parishioners were not few in number either, but rather "a considerable number of whites."⁸² Brown also offers a more cynical explanation for the large number of attendants to Simon's services. As with many other aspects of Richard Crafus's reign over No. 4, he gave whites preferential treatment. In this particular instance,

⁷⁷ Brown, *Yarn of a Yankee Privateer*, 193.

⁷⁸ Ibid., 195.

⁷⁹ Ibid., 193.

⁸⁰ Pierce, "Journal of Nathaniel Pierce," 46.

⁸¹ Brown, *Yarn of a Yankee Privateer*, 195.

⁸² Ibid., 196.

Crafus made no attempt to interfere with any white man who decided to attend his preacher's services.⁸³

There was also a crafts industry within Dartmoor's walls. Like so many others, this practice was inherited from the French. While they were still present within Dartmoor, French prisoners were willing to part with many of their tools before they were discharged in 1814. Andrews notes: "And during their long imprisonment they [the French] had obtained almost every article that could be named..."⁸⁴

For instance, in order to construct model ships, the various craftsmen had to make use of the discarded bones from the daily beef ration. As with the majority of learned trades within Dartmoor, this art of creating a finely detailed ship from the bone, and not to mention other readily available materials, was acquired from their French predecessors.⁸⁵ Cobb provides a vivid description of this rather creative—and to modern ears, bizarre sounding—process that it is worth quoting in full:

I was acquainted with two rough, weather-beaten seamen, who had never been used to any mechanical employment, knew nothing but to 'reef and steer,' and to all appearance, were entirely destitute of any ingenuity. These men began at constructing a miniature ship-of-the-line, with no other tools than a knife and a needle; and with no means of procuring others, except by the sale of their daily allowance of meat, for a penny. With this they bought—to-day, a file, next week a pair of pliers, then a small saw...a little glue, a few skeins of silk for the cordage, brass wire for the pinnings, a coarser kind for the guns, and so on, till at the end of two or three months, they had a tolerable set of tools, and materials sufficient to complete the tiny man-of-war....After selecting such beef bones from the cook-house as would answer their purpose, they sawed them into thin slabs, of an eighth to a quarter of an inch in width, scraped them to a high polish, and with these planked up the sides and deck of their little craft, fastening all with pins of brass, so correctly put in as not to show the least irregularity in their lines from keel to gunwale, nor from stem to stern. This imitation three-decker...had each gun bored, mounted upon running carriages, with tackle complete—moveable capstan, wheel, rudder, each block sheeved throughout the rigging, as likewise, her full complement of anchors and boats, one and all in their proper places. The most experienced seaman could not detect the want of a rope, nor one out of place or proportion, every thing from the keel to the truck, being reduced to an exact scale. Yet when finished, the hull of this three-decker was less than two feet in length.⁸⁶

⁸³ Ibid., 193.

⁸⁴ Andrews, *Prisoners Memories*, 81. Prisoners did not have the usual materials available for such things, but had to come up with some original—and rather ingenious—substitutes.

⁸⁵ Ibid., 73–74.

⁸⁶ Cobb, *Green Hand's First Cruise*, 2:161–162.

Not only were there men who constructed model ships, others also tried their hand at crafting musical instruments.⁸⁷ As a natural extension of the manufacturing of instruments, there were other prisoners who could play them. Artistic talents, on the whole, were encouraged by the general population as another form of passing the endless-seeming hours of confinement.⁸⁸ The French had begun the practice of music and dancing, but had taken it a step further. Many of these men put on full productions of various plays with accompanying scenery and music, which Andrews describes as of very high quality.⁸⁹

Additionally, many of the Dartmoor men practiced other forms of crafts. Baskets made from pasteboard and covered with dyed straw and boxes decorated in the same manner, often found their way into the prison market.⁹⁰ Unfortunately, the men who manufactured these items had to rely on locals to sell them. Cobb notes that: "[these items were sold] at prices...most ruinous, if the labour bestowed upon them were estimated at any thing."⁹¹ Cobb is perhaps correct when he notes: "Yet to those that laboured, the remuneration for their toils was but a secondary consideration, for during the manufacture, they were more than compensated by forgetting they were prisoners."⁹²

All of the arts and crafts practiced at Dartmoor served a very singular purpose. While many might have genuinely enjoyed what they were doing—whether singing, dancing, performing or constructing models of ships, the ultimate purpose was to keep busy. All of the accounts examined by this author possess an undercurrent, sometimes very obviously hidden in the overall narrative, of absolute boredom. This boredom can perhaps explain some of the other, less savory means by which men in Dartmoor chose to pass the hours.

⁸⁷ "Reminiscences of a Dartmoor Prisoner," *Knickerbocker Magazine* (23), 519.

⁸⁸ Cobb, *Green Hand's First Cruise*, 2:165.

⁸⁹ Andrews, *Prisoners Memories*, 74.

⁹⁰ Cobb, *Green Hand's First Cruise*, 2:162.

⁹¹ Ibid.

⁹² Ibid.

One such occupation was counterfeiting British currency; the prisoners made both coins and notes.⁹³ However, these men were usually detected in their crimes in the vast majority of instances. This often happened, Andrews tells us, when the counterfeiters tried to pass their coins into the market and the merchants discovered the attempted fraud. Men caught in this activity were always sent to the cachot.⁹⁴

While the vast majority of counterfeit currency was discovered, there were a few prisoners who brought the practice to the artistic level of craftsmanship. Men in this latter group (most of whom were French) were able to pass off their work (mostly the forged bank note) off as completely genuine. This was perhaps most important when the notes were under the direct scrutiny of a cashier.⁹⁵ This practice continued long after the French had departed Dartmoor.

Bank notes were not the only clever forgeries that were present within Dartmoor's walls. Coins were also perfectly replicated by the simple expedient of removing the lead from the prison roof, and by some unexplained means, hardened with an improvised alloy, allowing the coins to be passed off as the real thing.⁹⁶ In Cobb's own narrative, he makes a brief mention of this practice, implying that like the forgery of bank notes the French were not the only experts in this craft.⁹⁷

As a near last resort to fighting the incessant boredom, a prisoner could try his hand at gambling.⁹⁸ The majority of the gambling tables were located inside of the prisons themselves and could seat between twenty and thirty men. Cobb notes that most of the gambling went on after nightfall. Each man had to pay one penny per card; the winner of that particular hand received all the entry money, after of course the table's owner collected his own percentage. Cobb became an expert on the subject of gambling, not because he partook, but rather due to

⁹³ "Reminiscences of a Dartmoor Prisoner," *Knickerbocker Magazine* (24), 458.

⁹⁴ Andrews, *Prisoners Memories*, 141.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 54.

⁹⁶ Rhodes, *Dartmoor Prison*, 57.

⁹⁷ Cobb, *Green Hand's First Cruise*, 2:164.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 2:171.

the proximity of one of these tables to his bedding; this situation apparently annoyed him no end.⁹⁹

Cobb goes on to explain that cards were not the only form of gambling in which a prisoner could indulge. Cribbage and drafts were the other two incarnations of games of chance that Cobb's journal mentions.¹⁰⁰ He saves his greatest condemnation of gambling for No. 4 prison, commenting:

In this prison, gambling is carried to a greater degree than in any of the others. The inmates here have nothing to restrain them, except the ready fist of their king, Big Dick, from indulging in all the vicious principles and habits man possesses.¹⁰¹

When they bother to comment on the subject at all, many of the Dartmoor memoirists, particularly Cobb, place most of the gambling in No. 4. Valpey even goes so far as to note that gaming was taking place during the middle of the Dartmoor Massacre!¹⁰² On the other hand, Brown rather dispassionately notes that the reputation for gambling excess—and subsequent moral deficiency—in No. 4 Prison was rather exaggerated. He points out that the practice had begun in other prisons.¹⁰³ He even goes so far as to comment: "I believe that these blacks were, to say the least, as orderly and correct in their deportment, and as moral as their more intelligent white neighbors. Indeed I know that many of the most respectable prisoners preferred to mess in No. 4, on account of the superior order of that prison."¹⁰⁴

Precisely because of their imprisonment, and its subsequent isolation from the outside world, the Dartmoor men went to extraordinary lengths to receive news of what was taking place—both in their personal lives and with the war. The most obvious sources of current events were newspapers. This not only included news from outside but also reports what was taking place within the prison itself. The usual way in which "official" news was spread within the prison was by a committee appointed crier. This man was required to announce news of goods

⁹⁹ Ibid., 2:173.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., 2:36.

¹⁰¹ Ibid., 2:45.

¹⁰² Valpey, *Journal of Joseph Valpey*, 27.

¹⁰³ Brown, *Yarn of a Yankee Privateer*, 182.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid.

for sale at the market, items that prisoners might have lost, and of equal importance, any upcoming trials for prisoners—and the subsequent need for those prisoners who were willing to serve as jurors.¹⁰⁵ According to Brown, Dartmoor nearly had its own newspaper, something that might have abolished the need for criers, but the outbreak of peace in 1815 quashed this project.¹⁰⁶

As for news of the outside, Brown tells us that newspapers were strictly controlled. Perhaps in an effort to undermine morale, the only newspapers that the Dartmoor men were permitted to see were either those of Tory or Federalist persuasion.¹⁰⁷ Many of the officially sanctioned newspapers, therefore, came out of either London or Plymouth.¹⁰⁸

As can be imagined, these restrictions were not sufficient to stop the inflow of other sources of news: "One of the devices was, by the agency of some of the bakers outside, to have the newspaper carefully enveloped, baked in the middle of a loaf of bread, with a particular mark on the loaf whereby it might be distinguished." There was, of course, a downside to this method Brown explains: "The cost of papers was so great in England that we had to club together and form companies for the purpose of taking them."¹⁰⁹

Brown's account is not the only one that provides stories of intricate smuggling operations. Bates explains: "The plan was this: One day in each week we were allowed salt fish; this we sold to the contractor for cash, and paid out to one of our enemies to smuggle us in one of the weekly journals from London..."¹¹⁰ This is a remarkable length that men would go to, not because of any subtlety the plan might have had, but because these men were willing to part with a part of their scant rations for access to printed material. Bates does add: "Good news from home often cheered us more than our scanty allowance of food."¹¹¹

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., 179.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., 198.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid.

¹⁰⁸ Cobb, *Green Hand's First Cruise*, 2:187.

¹⁰⁹ Brown, *Yarn of a Yankee Privateer*, 199.

¹¹⁰ Bates, *Embracing a Long Life on Shipboard*, 57.

¹¹¹ Ibid.

Andrews goes on to explain that other, less complicated means of smuggling were available for bringing in newspapers. As has already been discussed, many prisoners were employed by Captain Shortland to assist with various tasks inside of, or very near to, the prison compound. These men, in addition to the benefits of being paid, were provided with an excellent opportunity for smuggling various items into the prison: rum, candles, oil, and of equal importance, newspapers.¹¹²

Other means of receiving proscribed newspapers were more straightforward. As Bates's own memoir indicates, and something that Andrews explains readily enough in his own narrative, the very soldiers tasked with guarding the Dartmoor men provided newspapers. Not all of the various regiments that rotated in to guard Dartmoor Prison were staunch loyalists. For instance, The Scots, deployed to guard the prison, were very friendly toward their charges.¹¹³ Among various other kindnesses, e.g. allowing sick prisoners to be absented from the daily counting, these soldiers, Andrews explains, gave them newspapers and provided information of the war still being fought back in the United States.¹¹⁴

As might be expected, there were other methods available for collecting information. One such method was collecting news from newly arrived groups, or "drafts," of prisoners.¹¹⁵ This would be a very logical source of information, owing to the fact that many of these men were captured at a later date than those already within Dartmoor's walls. Not all Americans were held at Dartmoor—at first.

More than likely, these new arrivals came from other prisons, which leads to another means by which the Dartmoor men gathered information: the exchange of letters between the various groups of prisoners scattered throughout England. Throughout his narrative, Andrews makes reference to these letters between prison compounds, explaining their various situations, complaints, requests for information, and (though he does not provide any specific examples)

¹¹² Andrews, *Prisoners Memories*, 91.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, 58.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 71.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 59.

advice.¹¹⁶ Finally, all prisoners received official communiqués from the United States government through R. G. Beasley; sometimes these were through direct visits by the agent—or one of his representatives—or via letter.

We know the means by which these men obtained news. But what was it that they were most interested in hearing about? Owing to their direct, or sometimes indirect, participation in the hostilities, many of these men wanted to hear of news of how the war was progressing. Most of the memoirists mention that they heard of the Treaty of Ghent, placing news of it reaching Dartmoor early in 1815. For instance, Neal's account notes that he received news of the signing of the treaty in early January, but does not cite a specific date.¹¹⁷ On the other hand, Cobb provides a specific date: January 25, 1815.¹¹⁸ Curiously, Bates's narrative recollects that prisoners were given the news of the treaty and its subsequent ratification in February.¹¹⁹ On the other hand, Valpey's account insists that news of the treaty reached Dartmoor on December 31, 1814, with Pierce's narrative placing the date two days before on December 29.¹²⁰ Andrews's own narrative only notes the date of ratification, which interestingly, is a direct contradiction to that of Valpey.¹²¹

The very conflict of these dates suggests that news amongst the Dartmoor prisoners either consisted of rumor and hearsay, or reached some parts of the compound but not others. In either instance, and in spite of the individual inconsistencies, many of these men were well informed of what was taking place. In fact, Andrews tells us, word reached Dartmoor of peace negotiations taking place at Ghent as early as November 1814. The Americans were able to keep tabs on the doings at Ghent through the use of newspapers—mostly from London, according to Andrews.¹²²

¹¹⁶ Ibid., 58.

¹¹⁷ Neal, *East By Sea and West By Rail*, 117.

¹¹⁸ Cobb, *Green Hand's First Cruise*, 1:239.

¹¹⁹ Bates, *Embracing a Long Life on Shipboard*, 73.

¹²⁰ Valpey, *Journal of Joseph Valpey*, 17; Pierce, "Journal of Nathaniel Pierce," 26.

¹²¹ Andrews, *Prisoners Memories*, 125.

¹²² Ibid., 130.

Other subjects of interest included news of the war and events taking place in the United States. For instance, Selman records hearing of the inflammatory statements made by Governor Strong of Massachusetts and one of the numerous battles at sea between American and English vessels.¹²³ Valpey's journal records that on March 11, 1815, he and some of his friends heard of the victory at the Battle of New Orleans.¹²⁴ Pierce's memoir even goes so far as to claim that on March 19, news of Napoleon's return reached the prison, which many of the prisoners interpreted as welcome news.¹²⁵

Not all of the news that reached Dartmoor was good. For instance, word would sometimes reach the various memoirists of the deaths of close friends in battle, as happened to Pierce on one particular occasion.¹²⁶ News was generally more national in scope, and if it was considered unpleasant—for the Americans—was likely to reach the prison that much the quicker. For instance, Andrews records:

The battle, and [subsequent] destruction of Washington, had now crossed the Atlantic, and was sounding with great applause to the British arms; every paper was swelled with the most pompous description of the great battle, and magnanimity of their officers and soldiers, that had defeated and drove the whole American army, headed by Mr. Madison, in person, and that they were in so close pursuit of him, that he had a severe race all the way from Bladensburgh to Washington.¹²⁷

5.4 Suicide, Crime, and Escape

Finally, the Dartmoor men had three other, and perhaps one ought to say desperate, options open to them. The first two included overt criminal activity and escape attempts. The final, and most desperate, option involved the ultimate form of passing time: that is to say, to completely eliminate the need to find diversion by simply committing suicide. While the first two means were the most common—and are to be discussed subsequently—the last was rare.

Suicides did occur, but this practice was not permitted to spread throughout the population. Peer pressure usually kept a large majority of men from making the attempts, but

¹²³ Roads, *Marblehead Manual*, 38.

¹²⁴ Valpey, *Journal of Joseph Valpey*, 23.

¹²⁵ Pierce, "Journal of Nathaniel Pierce," 36; Andrews, *Prisoners Memories*, 78.

¹²⁶ Pierce, "Journal of Nathaniel Pierce," 26.

¹²⁷ Andrews, *Prisoners Memories*, 130–131.

they nevertheless took place.¹²⁸ For instance, the anonymous author describes one such incident:

There was another one, who had been for weeks sullen and gloomy. Despair seemed to have thrown its pall over him. He conversed with none, but shunning his companions, spent the day muttering to himself. Early one morning he was discovered in a secluded part of the prison, cold and stiff. He had hung [*sic*] himself.¹²⁹

As might be expected, when so many men of differing backgrounds are confined in a prison compound, an underclass of criminality is inevitably birthed. Dartmoor Prison, as many of the memoirists demonstrate throughout their narratives, was no different. Perhaps the most famous, or infamous, of these men were the so-called “Rough Allies.” Cobb’s account provides a vivid description of who exactly belonged amongst the ranks of these men:

It must not be supposed that they [the Rough Allies] voluntarily formed themselves into a separate community, but the rather, that they fell into it unawares. Whenever any one became riotous, disorderly, filthy, thievishly inclined or in anywise guilty of rowdiness, he was dubbed as belonging to the Rough Alley clan.¹³⁰

Cobb’s account goes on to note that even up through the very last days in which men were confined inside Dartmoor, the “Rough Allies” continued to make the lives of their fellow prisoners difficult.¹³¹ For instance, during his last two weeks in prison, Cobb witnessed an incident involving the theft of two hammocks. As discussed in the previous chapter, a prisoner had to return all of the articles of bedding issued to him, or else he was not permitted to leave the prison. The bedding was in the possession of two of the most infamous of the “Rough Allies,” fellows that had been dubbed “Sodom and Gomorrah.”¹³²

Unfortunately, “Sodom and Gomorrah” had the uncanny ability to evade any sort of punishment up until the very end of their stay in Dartmoor. “They had the faculty,” Cobb explains, “when hard pressed, by the aid of accomplices or friends belonging to their gang, of

¹²⁸ Andrews, *Prisoners Memories*, 133.

¹²⁹ “Reminiscences of a Dartmoor Prisoner,” *Knickerbocker Magazine* (23), 520.

¹³⁰ Cobb, *Green Hand's First Cruise*, 2:152–153.

¹³¹ *Ibid.*, 2:229.

¹³² *Ibid.*, 2:247.

bringing the stolen articles to light, without being implicated in the theft....”¹³³ The law eventually caught up with “Sodom and Gomorrah.” The two men were caught stealing from one of the local merchants, thus endangering the entire population’s right to access the market.¹³⁴ When finally caught (it is important to note that Cobb does not specify how this was brought off), the two men were sentenced to public flogging but, in a perfectly just twist, it was to be by all of the women who sold goods in the market. As can be imagined, the punishment was severe, as Cobb provides vivid descriptions of the lengths that these women went to in order to vent their displeasure.¹³⁵

Other accounts make brief mention of the occasional criminal act, but nowhere to the same extent as Cobb’s narrative. In addition, it is unclear whether or not these references refer directly to the “Rough Allies” or to individual acts. For instance, Pierce’s account describes an incident in which prisoners wounded one of the guards by throwing a stone at him. Pierce provides no additional details in the way of description for this event, only mentioning it because it caused a stoppage of the prison market.¹³⁶

These incidents of misbehavior, such as assaulting the guards, increased after the news of peace. Pierce’s narrative provides an excellent example of this growing agitation:

29th [of January, 1815) Brings forth pleasant weather on that account all the Prisoners [*sic*] counted out but it being wet underfoot & Cold the Prisoners [*sic*] as usual mad[e] keeno which is done by rushing in on the Soldiers and heaving them into the mud...(Pierce, 28)

The last means by which prisoners found ways to pass time were through planning and executing escape attempts. Many of these attempts were straightforward enough: simply trying to climb over the walls surrounding Dartmoor, while others involved quite a bit of subtlety and subterfuge, as many of the memoirists’ accounts demonstrate. Of course, escape attempts

¹³³ Ibid., 2:148.

¹³⁴ Ibid., 2:149.

¹³⁵ Ibid., 2:151.

¹³⁶ Pierce, “Journal of Nathaniel Pierce,” 29.

were not limited to those men seeking egress from Dartmoor, but included those attempting to extricate themselves from the cachot.

In addition to the garrison of soldiers at Dartmoor, an alarm system was devised in order to keep the prisoners inside. This was achieved through the use of a wire interspersed with bells; if any of it was touched, then the sentries on duty would be aware of the attempt and could take appropriate action.¹³⁷ This system, of course, did not deter any of those who had a serious interest in escaping from Dartmoor.

Andrews's memoir provides the details for the first American escape attempt:

At midnight... eight prisoners thinking to take advantage of the night, to make their escape, as no sentries [*sic*] were in sight, formed a ladder, and with it ascended and descended the first wall directly against the guard house, and in ascending the second, the soldiers in the guard house discovered them, and apprehended seven; the eighth got quite over the wall, and made his escape.¹³⁸

The sole man to escape was soon caught by the local populace. He was identified by the simple fact that he was out and about in the freezing conditions.¹³⁹ For all the men involved in the escape attempt, punishment involved confinement to the cachot.¹⁴⁰

Where direct attempts to escape failed, guile was another option. When time came to discharge the French from Dartmoor, many of the newly arrived Americans simply claimed French citizenship. Andrews notes that 121 men managed to escape in this manner, owing to the fact that they could pass themselves off as Frenchmen.¹⁴¹ Other methods involved many Americans attempting to escape by assuming the name of a deceased French prisoner. Those men who could speak French found an easy release in this manner.¹⁴² Unfortunately, Andrews does not provide an exact figure of how many men managed to escape using this latter method.

In Bates's journal, he remarks that escape attempts were often, and usually, quite elaborate in their planning. He also notes that punishment was not confined to the escapees,

¹³⁷ Andrews, *Prisoners Memories*, 19.

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*, 64.

¹³⁹ *Ibid.*, 66.

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 64.

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 88.

¹⁴² *Ibid.*, 86.

but to all of the other prisoners; food rations were lessened, presumably to reinforce the point.¹⁴³ Not only does Bates comment on escape attempts from Dartmoor, but he provides the details of one such incident:

About this time the prisoners in one of the prisons had commenced the herculean task of opening a subterranean passage to the outside of the prison walls....To accomplish this, one of the large, heavy flagging stones on the ground floor was raised, and the work begun of scratching the dirt into small bags, and packing it snugly away under the flight of stone steps which reached up to the third loft, planked up on the back side. To affect [*sic*] this, one of the planks had to be removed, but carefully replaced, and also the flagging stone, before morning, subject to the critical inspection of the turnkeys after all the prisoners were counted out. The length of the passage from under the foundation of the prison to the first wall across the prison-yard...was about one hundred feet; from thence to the outer wall about twenty feet more. These walls, we were told, were fourteen feet high, and two feet below the surface of the earth...¹⁴⁴

Bates then goes on to describe just how difficult the work really was. For instance, the men who worked in such confined spaces often had faces blackened with filth. Even of more pressing importance was the very difficulty that lay in breathing the air.¹⁴⁵ In order to facilitate ventilation within the tunnels, a lit lamp was placed at the entrance to the tunnel in order to draw out the air.¹⁴⁶

Upon near completion of the escape tunnel, the plan called for the escapees to arm themselves with knives and "other deadly weapons." From that point, the men would leave Dartmoor and make for the coast. The plan then called for the seizure of a vessel by any means necessary. The captured vessel would then be directed toward the French coast, where presumably, the escaped prisoners would find some sort of sanctuary.¹⁴⁷

Unfortunately, this particular escape attempt was foiled by an informer. Bates provides no reasons why, but one of the other prisoners, presumably not involved with the work of constructing the tunnel, informed Captain Shortland of the attempt. Bates reports: "Suddenly armed soldiers and officers came into the prison-yard with their informer in their midst, who

¹⁴³ Bates, *Embracing a Long Life on Shipboard*, 70.

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 75.

¹⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁶ Andrews, *Prisoners Memories*, 112.

¹⁴⁷ Bates, *Embracing a Long Life on Shipboard*, 75.

pointed to the place over the dark passage, which they soon broke in, and thus in a few moments it was filled with stones and dirt from the stone-paved yard..."¹⁴⁸ The informer was subsequently removed from the general prison population in order to protect him from the inevitable retaliation from his fellows.¹⁴⁹

Andrews's memoirs also make mention of escape attempts via a tunnel. As with Bates, Andrews's account demonstrates the complexity involved in these attempts. The first escape attempt he discusses involves an effort made in June 1814.¹⁵⁰ Perhaps this was the same attempt that Bates's narrative describes, but this is difficult to verify, owing to the fact that Bates does not provide any dates. In any instance, Andrews provides one more interesting detail that seems to have aided the attempt: "This regiment was very much embittered against the government; their term of five years, for which they had enlisted, having expired, the government refused to discharge them."¹⁵¹

Whereas Bates seems to have only heard bits and pieces of the details for the attempt—or perhaps, he had collected information after its failure—Andrews provides the reader with additional information. For instance, the tunnel in question was to have been started in No. 6.¹⁵² In order to circulate details of the plot among the prisoners, the necessary information was concealed within the verses of a poem.¹⁵³ Of even greater interest is that those men who were responsible for the construction or other key points of the plot, were required to swear strict vows of secrecy; Andrews even goes so far as to note that these men were required to take death oaths.¹⁵⁴

However, strict secrecy amongst the conspirators was not enough. Other measures had to be put into place to insure the work was not discovered. For instance, spies were

¹⁴⁸ Ibid.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid.

¹⁵⁰ Andrews, *Prisoners Memories*, 92.

¹⁵¹ Ibid., 93.

¹⁵² Ibid., 108.

¹⁵³ Ibid., 109.

¹⁵⁴ Ibid., 110.

necessary to insure that the work on the tunnel was not accidentally discovered. Distances also had to be constantly checked; it would not have done the men any good if the tunnel's exit had been completed short of the outer wall.¹⁵⁵ In addition, how did the prisoners dispose of the dirt from the tunnel? Andrews explains that the dirt was tossed into the streams that ran through each prison yard.¹⁵⁶ The only concern with this method: the dirt would stop up the iron gratings that each stream flowed past before leaving the yard; very much a dead giveaway to the authorities.¹⁵⁷

This was not the only means by which dirt was got rid of as Andrews notes that "every night we made of the dirt a sort of mortar, and plastered [it] on the walls, and then whitewashed it over."¹⁵⁸ Yet perhaps the most ingenious method of protecting the work of this particular escape tunnel involved deliberate misinformation. For instance, a diversionary tunnel was begun within No. 5.¹⁵⁹ These secondary tunnels were not only diversionary in nature but also served as backups in the event that the primary tunnel beneath No. 6 was discovered.¹⁶⁰

Regardless of these rather elaborate precautions, these tunnels were nevertheless discovered and blocked off by the simple expedient of piling rocks and dirt into the entrances. However, one of the other diversionary tunnels, located in No. 4, was not discovered at all.¹⁶¹ While Bates's narrative suggests deliberate treachery by fellow prisoners, vis-à-vis the discovery of the escape attempt, Andrews's memoirs provide another explanation entirely:

We afterwards believed it must have been accidental; that some person had spoken too loud, or in an unguarded manner in the presence of the turnkeys; for we found no discovery had been made of the operations in No. 4 or 5, although Capt. Shortland had declared himself to be acquainted with them...¹⁶²

¹⁵⁵ Ibid., 118.

¹⁵⁶ Ibid., 111.

¹⁵⁷ Ibid., 112.

¹⁵⁸ Ibid., 111.

¹⁵⁹ Ibid., 112.

¹⁶⁰ Ibid., 113.

¹⁶¹ Ibid., 115.

¹⁶² Ibid., 116.

While the outcome of the escape attempt had been compromised, Andrews notes that its methods—the means of providing fresh air to those men constructing the tunnel and the disposal of dirt—were never discovered by Shortland or his guards.¹⁶³

Because there was still work on a tunnel taking place within No. 4, plans for escape continued. In point of fact, Andrews notes that progress permitted the final details of when, and most importantly, who would be permitted to make use of the escape tunnel. The weather had to be stormy, not an uncommon occurrence for Dartmoor, and those leaving had to make their exit no earlier than 22:00 hours. Each man would then be required to split up and make his way, on his own, to France.¹⁶⁴

While the first leak of information of the plan might have been accidental, the second compromise was not. Andrews is even able to provide the name of the informer, a prisoner called Bagley. In addition, he provides a detailed account of how the information was passed along to the prison authorities: "[Bagley] went up to the turnkeys and marched off with them to the keeper's house, gave him information of all the operations and designs, and we never saw him after...For could we have caught [*sic*] him, we should scarcely have tried him; but should have torn him in atoms before the life could have time to leave his traitorous body."¹⁶⁵

This anecdote provides two very important pieces of information. First, Andrews was directly involved with the escape attempts which explains why he possessed such intimate knowledge of the designs and operational details of the plan. More importantly, Andrews was confined to the cachot, a clear indicator of just how involved he really was. The second important point is that informers were rewarded for their activities. In Bagley's specific instance, he was taken away from the general prison population and eventually granted his freedom.¹⁶⁶

A prisoner who managed to escape from Dartmoor was not guaranteed of the success of his escape. Aside from the fact that the man would be wearing the telltale garb of a prisoner,

¹⁶³ Ibid., 117.

¹⁶⁴ Ibid., 118.

¹⁶⁵ Ibid., 119.

¹⁶⁶ Ibid.

probably have little or no money and would be wandering the Dartmoor countryside, lost and alone, Cobb points out another difficulty: "There was a standing reward of £26 for the apprehension of every escaped prisoner...and when a stranger was seen, if at all suspiciously clothed, he was hunted down by the country people..."¹⁶⁷

In spite of the odds being so heavily stacked against them, American prisoners-of-war continued to make escape attempts. This practice persisted even after the signing of the Treaty of Ghent, when the United States government promised to bring these men home.¹⁶⁸ Many of these latter escapes were ignored, provided that the escapee was at least covert about his attempt. However, this laxity toward escape attempts only lasted for some time, until one would-be escapee was caught in the very act of going over the wall. Subsequently, the regulations were enforced and this practice put to a stop until all of the Americans left Dartmoor Prison in July 1815.¹⁶⁹

Before all of the Dartmoor prisoners could return to the United States, a tragedy would take place in April 1815. Loss of the allowance, the anticipation of release from prison and the general unruliness of the prison population, and, not least, British fear of riot would create a tense situation that would result in the tragedy.

¹⁶⁷ Cobb, *Green Hand's First Cruise*, 2:225.

¹⁶⁸ Pierce, "Journal of Nathaniel Pierce," 55.

¹⁶⁹ Andrews, *Prisoners Memories*, 143.

CHAPTER 6

THE DARTMOOR MASSACRE

6.1 The April 4 Bread Riot

The most well-known event that took place in Dartmoor Prison, at least while it still held American prisoners-of-war, was the so-called Dartmoor Massacre. The term “Dartmoor Massacre” is very misleading to modern readers, owing to the relatively low casualty figures considering the size of the prison population at the time. According to most of the prisoner memoirs, the massacre was an act of brutality committed against American prisoners-of-war by, at best, an uncaring authority and, at worst, cold, calculated murder by the English government. The foremost villain in this episode, most of the memoirists insist, was none other than Captain Thomas George Shortland, Royal Navy. Yet was this really the case? Did Captain Shortland plan deliberately to slaughter his charges in an act of revenge for supposed wrongs committed in the past?

Events leading up to the massacre suggest that the issue is not as simple as it first seems. This is not to say that the deaths of seven American prisoners, not to mention the other forty-six wounded, were any less tragic and unnecessary, contributing tension to an already tense situation, but that the credibility of the murder accusations seems to be lessened.¹ These other events as we have seen include the active disobedience of prisoners, direct challenges to the authority of the guards, R. G. Beasley’s relationship with the prison as a whole, the sudden withdrawal of the food allowance, and, not least, the outbreak of peace altogether created a

¹ Charles Andrews, *The Prisoners Memories on Dartmoor Prison: History of the Americans in England From the commencement of the late war between the united States and Great Britain until all prisoners were released by the Treaty of Ghent also A Particular detail of all occurrences relative to that Horrid Massacre At Dartmoor On the fatal evening of the 6th of April 1815* (New York: Printed for the Author, 1815), 182.

veritable powder keg within the prison. All of this pre-existing tension goes a long way toward putting to rest any charge of premeditated murder.²

One other event, perhaps the most important, contributed the most tension prior to the Dartmoor Massacre. This event seems to have been overlooked by prisoner memoirists and historians alike. Taking place shortly prior to the massacre, the April 4 Bread Riot might explain why events played out the way they did two days later. This riot saw disorder and disobedience on a large scale, involving a vast majority of the prison population. Even worse, this riot—for riot it was, though admittedly not nearly as destructive as it could have been—took place while Captain Shortland was not present to contain it. Therefore, the Dartmoor Massacre cannot be discussed without a close examination of this earlier event.

Before the events of the April 4 Bread Riot are recounted, it is necessary to explain which prisoners were present for it or, at least, who bothered to record the events in their journals. Out of all of the prisoner narratives surveyed for this project, six of the ten authors—Andrews, Babcock/Waterhouse, Cobb, Bates, Pierce, and the anonymous prisoner—provide some form of recounting the riot. Why did some of these men discuss it and not others? This is a difficult question to answer, although the omission of the episode from one prisoner's account can be explained. Neal left Dartmoor Prison on April 1, three days before to the riot. Curiously, he does claim to have heard accounts of the massacre, but reports nothing of the riot.

Less easily explained is the lack of reporting from the others. Brown, Selman, and, most curiously of all, Valpey are strangely silent on this subject. Valpey's silence can perhaps be clarified as his journal entry for that day was more concerned with the 1,200 letters he claimed arrived at Dartmoor Prison, and himself not receiving any news from his parents!³ The others do

² Josiah Cobb, *A Green Hand's First Cruise: Roughed Out From The Log Book of Twenty-Five Years Standing*, 2 vols.(Boston: Otis, Broaders, 1841), 2:221.

³ Joseph Valpey Jr., *The Journal of Joseph Valpey of Salem* (Detroit, MI: Michigan Society of Colonial Wars, 1922), 26.

not provide any answers in their journals whatsoever, perhaps not thinking the event worth recording.

The April 4 Bread Riot took place due to a soft bread shortage. As we have seen, prisoners were entitled to a pound and a half of bread as part of their daily ration. In an emergency situation, a supply of hard bread, called ship's biscuit, had been laid in. It was used, for instance, if the roads to the prison were made impassable by weather. The prisoners were told that the soft bread supply had run out and that they would be given the biscuit in its place. The prisoners, as a whole, objected to this policy, owing to the fact that the bread was very old and hard.⁴

It is worth pausing here to ask a simple question: Were the prisoners justified in demanding their soft bread? The memoirists do not provide any details on why they objected to the ship's biscuit, other than that it was old and "damaged."⁵ This latter term, referring to the bread as having been "damaged," is obscure enough, but O'Brian's description of the substance offers an insight into why the prisoners were willing to risk incurring the wrath of their jailers:

The biscuit that was served to the ship's company was so light, that when you tipped it upon the table, it almost fell into dust, and throughout [it] numerous insects, called weevils, crawled; they were bitter to the taste, and a sure indication that the biscuit had lost its nutritious particles; if instead of these weevils, large white maggots with black heads made their appearance... then the biscuit was considered to be only in its first state of decay; these maggots were fat and cold to the taste, but not bitter.⁶

It can be presumed, therefore, that when the various memoirists commented that the bread was "damaged," they likely meant that the biscuit was in the first stages of decay, i.e. the bread was maggot-ridden!

The various memoirists disagree quite a bit on the actual duration of this period. According to Bates, the prisoners refused to accept the bread issue and this situation persisted

⁴ Nathaniel Pierce, "Journal of Nathaniel Pierce of Newburyport, Kept at Dartmoor Prison, 1814–1815," *Essex Institute Historical Collections* 73 (January, 1937), 39.

⁵ Andrews, *Prisoners Memories*, 167.

⁶ Patrick O'Brian, *Men-of-War* (New York/London: W. W. Norton & Company, 1974), 55–56.

for two days.⁷ On the other hand, the anonymous author's account claims that the whole incident—which he speculates was caused by contractors wishing to “palm upon them the damaged remnant of ship's bread”—began on the same day as the riot.⁸ Andrews's own narrative is a compromise between these two extremes. He explains:

During the whole of this day the prisoners remained without bread, and the captain of the prison gone to Plymouth; we were obliged to subsist on the four and a half ounces of beef, and the soup made of it; we demanded of the contractor the reason of our not drawing our usual allowance of bread; he answered, that it could not be obtained till tomorrow; we waited as patiently as our feelings would allow, till the expiration of thirty-six hours from the time we had received the last bread, when hunger became so pressing, that it drove us to a state of desperation, and we could no longer endure it, as the whole allowance was scarcely sufficient to sustain life.⁹

All of the various narratives agree that the riot was a premeditated act. Cobb, for instance, comments: “many [prisoners] showed symptoms of riot early in the day, their numbers increasing as the day advanced...” and adding: “And I am reluctantly compelled to say, there were too many eager to bring on a conflict...”¹⁰ Andrews goes a step further by informing the reader that the decision to march on the storehouse where the soft bread was kept was taken en masse, that is, the issue was decided in a formal, and according to his account, very deliberate fashion. Once the decision was made, the prisoners acted after dark, each building receiving a specific signal to do so.¹¹

After the signal was received, the riot began. This event took place at 18:00, and according to Pierce, lasted five hours—though others, such as Bates, claim a shorter duration, while Andrews insists it took longer.¹² Regardless of the actual duration, most of the narratives

⁷ Joseph Bates, *Embracing a Long Life on Shipboard: With Sketches of Voyages on the ATLANTIC And Pacific Oceans, the Baltic and the Mediterranean Seas; -ALSO- Impressment and Service on Board British War Ships, Long Confinement in Dartmoor Prison, Early Experiences in Reformatory Movements; Travels in Various Parts of the World; and a Brief Account of the Great Advent Movement of 1840–41* (Battle Creek, MI: Steam Press of the Seventh Day Adventist Publishing Association, 1868), 75.

⁸ “Reminiscences of a Dartmoor Prisoner,” *Knickerbocker Magazine* 24 (November, December, 1844), 460.

⁹ Andrews, *Prisoners Memories*, 167.

¹⁰ Cobb, *Green Hand's First Cruise*, 2:211.

¹¹ Andrews, *Prisoners Memories*, 168.

¹² Pierce, “Journal of Nathaniel Pierce,” 39; Andrews, *Prisoners Memories*, 170.

are in agreement as to what actually happened. Cobb, for instance, provides a thorough description of what he saw:

To overlook the intentions of the riotous, I climbed to the gratings, and stood immediately outside, and some five feet below, the military walk. I was soon after surrounded by a gang of the noisy, whose body had surged that way, and who began to assail the guard with the most opprobrious epithets. One of the numbers mounted the gratings, for the purpose of getting into the square, regardless of the two sentries on the other side bidding him desist, but who seemed loth [*sic*] to proceed to extremities to prevent him. The one on the waft above, after telling him to get down, and receiving a curse for his officious meddling, coolly turned the butt of his musket against the blackguard, and dropped him to the pavement. He, with two or three of his companions, gathered stones, mounted the picket, and absolutely drove the guards beyond the reach of their missiles...¹³

But things got much worse for the guards. Cobb's account goes on to say that the guards were unable to contain the rioting prisoners as they lacked the force required for such a task.¹⁴ The weakness of the guards only encouraged further acts of disobedience with the Rough Allies doing the worst damage. At 20:00, the Rough Allies, on a prearranged signal, made a concerted effort to break through the main prison gate and succeeded. Once through the gate leading out of the main prison square, the rioters made straight for the storehouses, where the bread was kept, crying "bread, bread! give us our bread!" causing the garrison commanders to panic. In spite of his condemnation of their action, Cobb's account does try to stress that once their point had been made, the prisoners took no further action, only remaining in the square to await a favorable response to their demands.¹⁵

At this point, the account of the riot becomes unclear. Bates, for instance, claims that Captain Shortland had returned to the prison and was actively negotiating with the prisoners. Bates even goes so far as to provide the very essence of the discussion between the prisoners and Shortland, recollecting: "This was not objected to, provided they gave us as many ounces of hard [bread] as we had been receiving of the soft bread. This governor Shortland objected to,

¹³ Cobb, *Green Hand's First Cruise*, 2:212.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Ibid.

and said we should not have so much by one-third."¹⁶ On the other hand, the anonymous prisoner's narrative insists that Shortland was not present for the incident, claiming that because he was not actually there, nothing was done, i.e. no punitive actions were taken against the prisoners collectively.¹⁷

Andrews's memoir tells a slightly different story concerning what happened between rioters and prison authorities. The contractors and prison clerks were willing to give into the demand for soft bread, provided that the prisoners returned to their prisons peaceably and to this all involved agreed. There was a twist, however: "they took with them as a hostage one of the clerks inside of the prison, and there to remain till every prisoner had received his usual allowance of bread, which was not till after twelve o'clock at night."¹⁸ Furthermore, Shortland, after returning from Plymouth, actually apologized for the contractor's behavior, and seems not to have contemplated any punitive action.¹⁹

While there is general disagreement concerning many of the events during the riot, all of the accounts agree on two very important points. First, that once the prisoners received their normal ration of soft bread, they immediately desisted from further disobedience and returned to their individual prisons. Of equal importance, many of these accounts also agree that the general consensus amongst the rioters was that they would risk being fired upon in order to receive their rations.²⁰

While Andrews insists that the whole affair ended amicably enough, there were consequences. One of these was the fear of another incident like the riot. This fear was not confined to the prison authorities, but reached the locals as well. Coupled with this were the added effects of prisoners growing frustrated with their continued imprisonment, and even

¹⁶ Bates, *Embracing a Long Life on Shipboard*, 75.

¹⁷ "Reminiscences of a Dartmoor Prisoner," *Knickerbocker Magazine* (24), 460.

¹⁸ Andrews, *Prisoners Memories*, 169–170.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 171.

²⁰ Bates, *Embracing a Long Life on Shipboard*, 75. Cobb's own memoir admits that the guards had the right to fire on the prisoners when it became clear that their intention was to break through the main gate; see Cobb, *Green Hand's First Cruise*, 2:213.

worse, Beasley's seeming indifference toward their condition.²¹ The situation grew tense enough to cause Pierce to prophetically record: "it is thought there will be no more Peace here until we are removed."²²

The April 4 Bread Riot and the Dartmoor Massacre are linked in that the former was directly responsible for what took place during the latter. All of the accounts surveyed for this project do not, for whatever reason, acknowledge this possibility. More importantly, other historians have failed to make this connection, for which this author cannot provide a reason. In examining both events chronologically, it is evident that Shortland, no matter how amiable he might have felt toward his charges, was determined not to allow an event such as the riot to occur again. This perhaps can explain what actually took place during the Dartmoor Massacre, why the prisoners reacted the way they had, and why the situation escalated into unrestrained violence.

Before turning to the main subject matter of this chapter, it is important to explain a few points. First, there is a degree of ambiguity surrounding the Dartmoor Massacre. Many of the memoirists are unclear as to where they were during the event. Additionally, there is a fair degree of overlap between the accounts of the episode, such that a retelling of the massacre from each author's point of view would be unnecessary and tedious. Rather, this author has elected to provide a general description of the massacre and highlight the differences between each memoir.

6.2 Massacre!

Without exception, all of the Dartmoor memoirists comment on the alleged massacre, even those who were not present during the event. For instance, Neal provides some insight into the affair (see especially page 119 of his memoir). Most of these same men took the opportunity to condemn the action, paint Captain Shortland as the worst sort of villain and, most

²¹ Andrews, *Prisoners Memories*, 172.

²² Pierce, "Journal of Nathaniel Pierce," 39–40.

of all, provide reasons why they—that is to say, the entire prison population at large—was completely blameless in the matter.

April 6, 1815 was one of the rarely pleasant days at Dartmoor, lending more irony to an already ironic situation.²³ The events that would set the massacre in motion would not begin until 18:00. The triggering event was innocent enough: several prisoners were playing a ball game in one of the yards. Bates provides a bit of context: "Several times the ball was knocked over the wall, and was as often thrown back by the soldiers when kindly asked so to do. Presently one of the prisoners cried out in quite an authoritative manner, 'Soldier, throw back that ball.' And because it failed to come, some of the ball-players said, 'We will make a hole in the wall and get it.'"²⁴ Apparently, this last exchange came after one of the sentries had refused to retrieve the ball yet again, and Cobb claims that the prisoners were told by one of these men to retrieve the lost ball.²⁵

This threat was carried out and Brown actually witnessed four of the men—whom Cobb claims to have been neighbors of his—break through the wall to retrieve their lost ball.²⁶ Bates was also present during this attempted breakthrough, but he did not figure that the men making the attempt (who were using stones for the task) would be successful.²⁷ Bates's assumption, vis-à-vis the effectiveness of using stones to break through a wall, was proven correct as Brown further adds that he saw one of the men retrieve an iron bar from the nearby No. 5 prison to expedite the matter.²⁸

At this point, the events of the massacre become unclear. For instance, Bates was merely passing through the prison yard when he saw the men breaking through the wall; for the

²³ Cobb, *Green Hand's First Cruise*, 2:213.

²⁴ Bates, *Embracing a Long Life on Shipboard*, 75.

²⁵ Cobb, *Green Hand's First Cruise*, 2:215.

²⁶ Benjamin Brown, *The Yarn of a Yankee Privateer*, ed. Nathaniel Hawthorne (New York: Funk and Wagnalls, 1922), 273; Cobb, *Green Hand's First Cruise*, 2:213.

²⁷ Bates, *Embracing a Long Life on Shipboard*, 75.

²⁸ Brown, *Yarn of a Yankee Privateer*, 276.

subsequent events of the affair, he was not present at all.²⁹ The anonymous author only knew what was happening when he chanced to look out the window of his prison building, reporting: "While conversing, we heard the report of fire-arms, and looking out, we beheld the walls lined with soldiers, and down in the yard, saw the prisoners closely pursued by a platoon of soldiers...led on by Shortland..."³⁰ Pierce's narrative implies that he was not actually present, and in fact by the tone of his writing he suggests very much that he only repeated what he had heard.³¹ Cobb is less circumspect about his account of the massacre, claiming that he heard the particulars—except where otherwise noted in his own account—from others.³²

Even Brown's narrative is unable to provide a concise description of what took place. Most of his account of the massacre comes from an anonymous reporter; for whatever reason, Brown wished to leave this other prisoner's name out of his narrative. This is not to say that Brown did not witness any of the events that led up to the actual incident. In fact, he claims to have seen the turnkeys locking up the individual prisons and to have overheard soldiers advising the prisoners to return to their buildings. The last thing Brown saw, as he entered No. 7 prison, was the first discharge of musket fire, and it is at this point that he relies on his anonymous witness to convey the rest of the recollection.³³

Regardless of their intentions, prisoners breaking through a wall that led out of their prison raised an alarm. Taken with the events two days prior, this must have added additional tension to an already tense situation. Even worse, Captain Shortland had once again left Dartmoor Prison for Plymouth, though it is not known why, and this element added additional confusion. According to Brown's anonymous witness, the soldiers guarding Dartmoor Prison

²⁹ Bates, *Embracing a Long Life on Shipboard*, 76.

³⁰ "Reminiscences of a Dartmoor Prisoner," *Knickerbocker Magazine* (24), 461.

³¹ Pierce, "Journal of Nathaniel Pierce," 41.

³² Cobb, *Green Hand's First Cruise*, 2:215.

³³ Brown, *Yarn of a Yankee Privateer*, 274.

had orders not to act without Captain Shortland's express authority, adding the final element for a tragic outcome.³⁴

What did happen during the massacre? What event occurred, or as many of the memoirists claim, order was given, to cause soldiers to open fire on unarmed prisoners? The only two existing narratives of the events of that night come from the reports filed by both the prisoner-appointed committees and the "official" version. This latter report was organized by a joint British and American committee headed by two gentlemen, Charles King (representing American interests) and Seymour Larpent (representing those of the English).³⁵ From these two reports, it is possible to obtain a rough outline of what actually took place. Because Andrews's description of the massacre mirrors that of the prisoner-appointed committee's—an expected outcome, as his own narrative suggests that he held one of these positions—there is little point in providing his point of view. The outline that follows is based on the prisoner-generated report that was compiled shortly after the massacre.

At 18:00, the alarm was raised and most of the prisoners rushed out of their respective prisons to investigate the cause. Waiting for them was an assembly of soldiers with Captain Shortland in direct command. In addition, several soldiers had been posted on the walls surrounding the yard and some prisoners overheard one of these latter advise them to return to their buildings. The reason for this warning, continues the report, was that the soldiers would soon "charge upon" the prisoners.³⁶

This warning spread amongst the prisoners, though the report provides no direct evidence that the soldiers were in fact ready to charge. A panic began. Here the report strays into the realm of speculation as it claims that Shortland waited a while (for at least a hundred prisoners had entered the yard) before giving his next order. This order was simple enough: charge the prisoners with fixed bayonets. The prisoners promptly fled out of the prison yard and

³⁴ Ibid., 277.

³⁵ Andrews, *Prisoners Memories*, 229.

³⁶ Ibid., 199.

closed the gates adjoining it. The report then goes on to claim that Shortland ordered these gates be opened and the soldiers to open fire on the prisoners.³⁷

Many of the soldiers hesitated to carry out this order, and the report then returns to the realm of speculation by claiming that Shortland himself seized hold of a musket and fired the first shot. From this point, the rest of the soldiers opened fire, both in the detachment of men Shortland was commanding and joined by those men posted on the walls.³⁸

It was at this point, the report from the prisoners' perspective continues, that the prisoners discovered that the doors leading back into the individual prison buildings had been locked. These men then found themselves with the difficult task of simultaneously trying to force the doors open while avoiding incoming musket fire. Once the doors were opened and then secured, the report states that several detachments of soldiers marched up to the door of each occupied prison and fired directly into each building, killing and wounding several prisoners.³⁹

The report then halts its general chronology and breaks down into describing various acts of brutality committed by the soldiers. For instance, the report claims: "The soldiers who were posted on the walls, manifested equal cruelty, by keeping up a constant fire on every prisoner they could see in the yards endeavouring to get in the prison, when their numbers were very few, and when not the least shadow of resistance could be made or expected." In another instance, the report recounts how men sheltering in one of the prison cook houses were pointed out by soldiers manning the walls and were fired upon.⁴⁰

At this point, the report does not return to a chronology but once again returns to conjecture. For instance, the prisoner-appointed committee report claims that Shortland's actions during the massacre were premeditated. The evidence that this committee cites as supporting their claim is speculative. They refer to the April 4 Bread Riot, but only insofar as blaming Captain Shortland for the issue of ship's biscuit. This runs contrary to Andrews's own

³⁷ Ibid., 200.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Ibid., 201.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

earlier observation in which he comments that Shortland apologized for the incident.⁴¹ The report then does briefly return to the chronology of the massacre, commenting on the very events that would set the tragic affair in motion.⁴²

Finally, the prisoner-generated report provides a long list of the wounded and killed. Not merely contented with providing the names of these men, this list includes precise details of how each man was killed or wounded, depending upon the circumstances. For instance, one of the entries on this list reads: "John Washington, Maryland, *Rolla* privateer; the ball entered at the squamore process of the left temporal bone, and passing through the head, made its exit a little below the cruceal ridge of the occipital bone."⁴³ The reader will also note that not only was each man's name given, but his place of residence before going to sea, and, not least, the name of the vessel on which he served.

The "official" report of the massacre, the King-Larpent report issued on April 26, 1815, tells a slightly different story. The most immediate difference was that the conclusions of the two reports were quite dissimilar: the prisoner-appointed committee concluded that Shortland had planned the incident from the very start, making the incident one of premeditated murder in a legal sense. The King-Larpent report, however, claimed that the deaths were justifiable homicide.⁴⁴ Furthermore, writers of the official report seem to have considered all of the evidence in a more thorough manner. The investigators did not gather depositions from just the prisoners but also reports from coroners and from the soldiers who were directly involved. However, from the very beginning of the document, the writers admit:

We further proceed to a minute examination of the prisons, for the purpose of clearing up some points, which upon the evidence alone, were scarcely intelligible; obtaining from the prisoners, and from the officers of the depot, all the necessary assistance and explanation: and premising, that we have been from necessity compelled to draw many of our conclusions from statements and evidence highly contradictory...⁴⁵

⁴¹ Ibid., 203.

⁴² Ibid., 204.

⁴³ Ibid., 185.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 222.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 223.

The King-Larpent report begins by noting the disquiet that had settled over the Dartmoor prisoners after the ratification of the Treaty of Ghent. It further comments on prisoners openly threatening to escape from the prison if not soon released. Almost as a footnote, this very report comments on the April 4 Bread Riot, treating it as the ultimate expression of dissatisfaction by the Dartmoor men as a whole, but seemingly not ascribing any connection between that event and the massacre two days later.⁴⁶

Next, the report turns its attention to the triggering event of the massacre. It comments, in greater detail, on the activities of the prisoners at 18:00 and how men breaking through the wall was not the only thing taking place in that part of the prison. At that time, there was a large gathering of prisoners in the same area, and while this was not an unusual activity, the report hints that the two taking place simultaneously and combined with the late hour might have appeared to the guards, not to mention to Captain Shortland, as an escape attempt in progress.⁴⁷

From the point of view of the prison authorities, the situation was even direr when it became clear that this breach in the wall was near to the guards' barracks. Unbeknownst to the prisoners, a stock of arms was then being stored in this building. The report adds: "and though there was no evidence that this was in any respect the motive which induced the prisoners to make the opening in the wall, or even that they were ever acquainted with the fact, it naturally became at least a further cause of suspicion and alarm..." The end result of all of these factors coming together, the King-Larpent report continues, was Shortland's order to sound the alarm.⁴⁸

Unfortunately, the alarm had the opposite effect. Rather than forcing the prisoners back into their respective prisons, the sudden activity only encouraged them to leave and investigate the cause. In addition, though the report is very clear that the chronology is ambiguous, the report does make clear that a prisoner, or prisoners, had broken the iron chain securing one of

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 224.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 225.

the gates. For the guards and Shortland, this would have been of supreme concern because it was the No. 1 gate, which led directly out of the main prison compound. In addition to all of the prisoners leaving their prisons, many of them made their way toward this open gate.⁴⁹

The natural response, continues the King-Larpent report, was for Captain Shortland to assemble the guards, who numbered only fifty initially, and to try to reason with the prisoners to return to their prisons. Assisting Captain Shortland with this latter task was none other than Dr. George Magrath. Yet persuasion failed, even when Shortland pointed out the “fatal consequences of refusal” and he ordered a file of guards to “charge the prisoners back to their own yards.” However, not all of the soldiers ordered to charge could or would do so. Adding even more confusion to the situation, the numbers of prisoners in the square made it difficult for many of them to withdraw through the open gate back to their prisons.⁵⁰

For all of its difficulties, and the reluctance of some to directly participate, the charge mostly had its intended effect. Still, there were prisoners near the gate and, the report adds, crowds within the passage leading back into the prison itself. These remaining prisoners were determined to resist and did so by taunting and, according to some witnesses on both sides, throwing stones at the soldiers. It is important to pause here and note that the King-Larpent report halts its narration to comment that the stone-throwing incident is uncorroborated. Some witnesses on both sides agreed that it happened, while others denied it took place at all. In any case, the British soldiers opened fire on the prisoners.⁵¹

The King-Larpent report at this point inserts an explanation of who actually gave the order to fire. As the prisoner-created report insists, many of the prisoners believed that Captain Shortland gave the order. Not surprisingly, English witnesses were not so certain and claimed that while the order was heard, it came not from Shortland. Still others, namely the officers in command of the soldiers, were positive that Shortland did not give such an order; Shortland

⁴⁹ Ibid., 226.

⁵⁰ Ibid., 228.

⁵¹ Ibid., 229.

himself denied the accusation. In any instance, soldiers throughout the prison opened fire on the prisoners. The report is clear that this was certainly not done under any official order and that this latter instance resulted from a lack of discipline.⁵² The report therefore concludes:

...all the circumstances of the case, from the apprehension which the soldiers might fairly entertain, owing to the numbers and conduct of the prisoners, that this firing to a certain extent, was justifiable in a military point of view, in order to intimidate the prisoners, and compel them thereby to desist from all acts of violence, and to retire as they were ordered, from a situation in which the responsibility of the agents, and the military, could not permit them with safety to remain.⁵³

Not all of the King-Larpent report was sympathetic toward the English. After the initial volleys of musket fire, which wounded a few prisoners, the intended effect of forcing the remaining prisoners back into the prison compound had been achieved. The report pauses at this point to condemn the continual firing taking place within other portions of the compound, even after the soldiers under Shortland's command had been ordered to cease fire. Perhaps as an explanation for this lack of discipline, the report offers two possibilities. First, and probably the most logical, was that the soldiers were by this time so exasperated—their blood was up—that they found it difficult to cease firing upon their charges. Second and equally logical, was that these latter soldiers did not have any officers directly overseeing their activities as many of them were either with Captain Shortland or at dinner.⁵⁴

Finally, the King-Larpent report comes to the accusation of soldiers firing upon men already secured within their prison. The report agrees with the prisoner-generated report in that this incident did take place—the investigators were able to examine the impressions left by musket balls on the building—and that it was completely unjustified. However, the report concludes that there was no way to attach blame to any one identifiable soldier, officer, or Shortland himself.⁵⁵

⁵² Ibid., 230.

⁵³ Ibid., 231.

⁵⁴ Ibid., 232–233.

⁵⁵ Ibid., 235.

Both of these reports are quite different in their description of the massacre. The prisoner-generated report blames Captain Shortland, and generally, the Dartmoor authorities for the whole incident. The King-Larpent report is more even-handed, in that it apportions blame to both sides equally. Unfortunately, neither report attaches much significance to the April 4 Bread Riot, which in this historian's opinion, played a direct role in how Captain Shortland responded to the perceived escape attempt. This is another point on which the prisoner-generated report blatantly refuses to address: the matter of perception.

Coupled with the April 4 Bread Riot, three factors—the prisoners breaking through the wall, the men amassing in the main square of the prison, and the general refusal to cooperate with the authorities—probably forced Captain Shortland to conclude that the only way to deal with the perceived escape attempt was by use of force. Unfortunately, Captain Shortland did not have adequate control over his men in this instance and tragedy quickly ensued.

Yet these two reports do not address what any of the individual prisoners might have seen. Which narrator saw what event during this tragic affair? Cobb was able to witness some of the massacre from the upper story of one of the prison buildings. One of the incidents he did see is as follows:

This boy, belonging to No. 5, was in the yard when the firing began, gained the door in the rear of the building, found it fastened, ensconced himself closely in its recess, till the firing had entirely ceased, and he could see none in the yards, when he ran out, with the intention of reaching the one at the farther end of the building, and, while at his greatest speed, was leveled [*sic*] at by those upon the wall, and shot through the thigh.⁵⁶

While Bates might not have seen enough to place him as a credible witness to the massacre as a whole, he was still present for some of the violence that took place when the firing began. His journal records the following incident: "As I was crowding my way down the flight of stone steps to ascertain respecting the uproar, and report of muskets, a number of soldiers came rushing to the doorway...and discharged their musket-shot upon us."⁵⁷ Bates was

⁵⁶ Cobb, *Green Hand's First Cruise*, 2:216–217.

⁵⁷ Bates, *Embracing a Long Life on Shipboard*, 76.

not the only one who witnessed horrific scenes of violence. Valpey's own journal records the following: "I Cannot but help Remarking the fait [*sic*] of one Young Man—after he was wounded and Making the Best of his way for the prison five of the British Soldiers came up with him...and put there [*sic*] Musquets [*sic*] to his head and Blow'd his Brains out a gainst [*Sic*] the wall..."⁵⁸

Violence was not the only event to which many of the memoirists bore witness. Bates, for instance, recounts an episode in which one of the British soldiers fell into the hands of the prisoners. He does not say how it happened, but an English soldier somehow found himself inside one of the prison buildings, where many prisoners were attempting to shelter from the musket fire. This soldier was promptly taken captive by several of the prisoners. The prevailing attitude, according to Bates, was to have done and hang the man. A vote was called for to decide the soldier's fate, and the first result was so close that the committee called for another. The second vote showed that a slim majority called for sparing the soldier's life. What eventually became of this lone British soldier—whether he was allowed to leave the prison immediately or was released after the shooting had stopped—is not recorded in Bates's journal.⁵⁹

As with Brown, the anonymous author did not witness the massacre directly. He could only report what he had heard from others, but still had one personal recollection. He was able to describe the immediate carnage after the shooting finally stopped:

On the floor opposite where I messed lay a handsome youth, of about fifteen years of age, stiff, and cold as marble, pierced through the heart by a bayonet. A few yards farther on, lay another: a ball had entered his forehead, and passed out at the back of his head. I examined the spot the next morning, and saw part of his brains which had been dashed against the wall nearly opposite the prison door. Among the wounded, who were brought in by their comrades, was one with a wound in the shoulder; another with his thigh broken; another had a most miraculous escape with his life; a musket ball had passed through his mouth from side to side, taking out nearly the whole of his teeth.⁶⁰

There were two other events that took place immediately after the massacre. The first was more immediate in that Dr. Magrath took pains to retrieve all of the wounded and dead from

⁵⁸ Valpey, *Journal of Joseph Valpey*, 27.

⁵⁹ Bates, *Embracing a Long Life on Shipboard*, 76.

⁶⁰ "Reminiscences of a Dartmoor Prisoner," *Knickerbocker Magazine* (24), 461.

the prisons. According to the King-Larpent report, Captain Shortland had set up a casualty collection point in front of the prison, and it can be presumed that Dr. Magrath brought these men here.⁶¹ The other point worth noting is that Captain Shortland attempted to explain his actions to the prisoners, but that all of these men were too distraught to listen to what he had to say.⁶²

As terrible as the immediate consequences of the massacre were, there were other after-effects and implications as well. Among these were the protests of the Dartmoor men themselves and an official inquiry started to look into the matter (this would produce the King-Larpent report). These consequences are many and varied, requiring some degree of examination in order to better comprehend them.

6.3 Aftermath

The Dartmoor Massacre was the most important single event that took place at the prison during its time as a prisoner-of-war compound. The massacre had both immediate and long-term consequences that are part and parcel of the event itself. One of these was purely legalistic in nature; a full-fledged investigation into the matter by both governments that produced the King-Larpent report. Some of the other repercussions included protest, both verbal and literary, and a degree of artistic expression from the prisoners.

Immediately after the massacre, the English authorities prudently withdrew the regiment of soldiers guarding the prison.⁶³ Shortland was temporarily relieved of command by a colonel with a detachment of soldiers, a response implying that the British government took the affair very seriously.⁶⁴ Soon after, several representatives from the Admiralty arrived at Dartmoor to investigate the affair.⁶⁵

⁶¹ Andrews, *Prisoners Memories*, 179.

⁶² Ibid., 181.

⁶³ Cobb, *Green Hand's First Cruise*, 2:219.

⁶⁴ Andrews, *Prisoners Memories*, 181.

⁶⁵ Pierce, "Journal of Nathaniel Pierce," 42.

None of the accounts are very clear on what happened next, but the anonymous prisoner makes reference to a decision to form a court of inquiry, presumably after the arrival of the various senior officers sent to investigate the massacre. In addition, and of equal ambiguity, the court was presided over by Charles King and Seymour Larpent. It is unclear how these selections were made; perhaps Reuben G. Beasley played a role in this decision.⁶⁶

The court proceedings were executed promptly; a jury was brought in from the surrounding countryside and a verdict of justifiable homicide was reached on April 9, 1815.⁶⁷ This trial was not an affair carried out behind closed doors, but in front of the prisoners themselves as Bates describes:

A place was fitted for the court on the top of the walls over the narrow passage and place of demarcation [*sic*] between the prisoners and their keepers, so that the court could be addressed by the prisoners on the left, and by their keepers on the right, the walls being between us. The statement of Governor Shortland and his party, with respect to the attempt of making a hole in the wall, and the bursting open the broken locked gates, to justify his attack upon us... seemed to have but little weight. It was settled with us at the time of the massacre, that his plan was preconcerted [*sic*]. The British Admiral seemed intent on questioning the prisoners with regard to their allowance of food, and whether they had not had all that was allowed them, &c. The reply was, that our grievance was not then about our allowance of food, but the inhuman manner in which our countrymen had been massacred. Finally, in the settlement of this grievous question, the massacre at Dartmoor was disavowed by the British Government...⁶⁸

The results of this official inquiry were the King-Larpent report, the tone of which would bear out Bates's own dissatisfaction with the whole affair. Indeed, the results of this court were a sore point for many of the Dartmoor memoirists. For instance, Cobb's memoir insists that testimony from deposed prisoners was not given much credibility by the various investigators. The general attitude of these men, his narrative insists, was that all of the Dartmoor men were common criminals, worthy only of contempt.⁶⁹ On the other hand, the anonymous prisoner's account blames the results on Charles King's "youth and inexperience."⁷⁰

⁶⁶ "Reminiscences of a Dartmoor Prisoner," *Knickerbocker Magazine* (24), 463.

⁶⁷ Andrews, *Prisoners Memories*, 191.

⁶⁸ Bates, *Embracing a Long Life on Shipboard*, 73.

⁶⁹ Cobb, *Green Hand's First Cruise*, 2:197.

⁷⁰ "Reminiscences of a Dartmoor Prisoner," *Knickerbocker Magazine* (24), 463.

Although the results of the court of inquiry were dissatisfying—at least, from the points of view of the prisoners—the British government did take some compensatory action on behalf of the Dartmoor men. After his critical reactions to the official investigation of the massacre, Bates notes, almost in passing, that the British government provided compensation (presumably financial) to the family members of the men killed.⁷¹ Cobb's narrative goes a bit further as he explains: "It should be equally as well known, that the British government made provision for those, or their families, who were disabled or killed at the massacre."⁷²

Protest against the "official" verdict of the King-Larpent report took many additional forms than just the written word. In Cobb's own narrative, he devotes a few sentences to explaining how various artists within the prison created both pictures and sculptures to commemorate the massacre. Rather than keeping these creations as memorials, these same artists sold them in the prison market. Not surprisingly, many of the locals were only too eager to purchase such memorabilia.⁷³ Bates does not provide the same commentary that Cobb's narrative does, but he does note in passing the sudden outpouring of artistic interpretation and memorializing of the massacre by commenting on the number of banners that had been created for this purpose.⁷⁴

Not every memoirist was convinced that Captain Shortland—and by implication, the entire British government—was at fault for the massacre. For instance, Neal comments: "Previous to leaving England we heard of the affair at Dartmoor prison, commonly called the Dartmoor massacre, but I doubt the justice of the term. There was no doubt blame on both sides."⁷⁵ Brown was also reluctant to cast all of the blame at the feet of the British. He comments: "The whole of that part of the scene which I witnessed is as vivid in my recollection as though it happened only yesterday, and I wrote an account of it the next morning, which I

⁷¹ Bates, *Embracing a Long Life on Shipboard*, 76.

⁷² Cobb, *Green Hand's First Cruise*, 2:220.

⁷³ Cobb, *Green Hand's First Cruise*, 2:221–222.

⁷⁴ Bates, *Embracing a Long Life on Shipboard*, 76.

⁷⁵ David Augustus Neal, *East By Sea and West By Rail: The Journal of David Augustus Neal of Salem, Massachusetts, 1793–1861* (Toronto: Elbridge Printing, 1979), 119.

have before me; but it was written under such strong feelings of excited indignation, that I dare not trust to it now as a correct representation."⁷⁶

6.4 Beasley's Rebuttal

One last aspect of the Dartmoor prison experience requires close examination. While many of the memoirists accused R. G. Beasley of wrongdoing or at least neglect, their criticisms did not go unanswered. In a letter dated November 28, 1816, Reuben G. Beasley, agent for American prisoners held in England, vehemently denied many of the accusations against him—specifically those found within Waterhouse and Babcock's publication. In fact, this letter was written to James Madison with the express purpose of countering many of the allegations made against him in *A Journal of a Young Man of Massachusetts*, but is easily applied against his other critics. It is interesting as the account was directly referred to by Beasley—even going so far as to provide specific citation of page numbers—several times throughout his letter.

Within his letter, Beasley outlines five specific accusations made against him: that he never responded to the letters of prisoners; not visiting the prisoners confined in Dartmoor on a regular basis; not making effective inquiries of the prisoners during these visits; inattention; and last of all, the overextended stay of the prisoners within the prison after the war had ended.⁷⁷ At this point in his letter, Beasley explains in great detail the measures he took to see to the needs of the Dartmoor prisoners. For instance, in addressing the first charge—not responding to the letters of the prisoners—Beasley explains: "there are 800 folio pages of my official journals a great part of which are filled with letters addressed to the Prisoners."⁷⁸ An even more interesting revelation is that these letters had to pass through two specific offices—that of the Transport Office and Captain Cotgrave (later Shortland) before they could reach the prisoners, Beasley not being permitted to directly correspond with them.⁷⁹

⁷⁶ Brown, *Yarn of a Yankee Privateer*, 273.

⁷⁷ Beasley to James Madison, 28 November 1816. Consular letters from London, 1812–1816 (Beasley's letters), USS *Constitution* Museum.

⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁹ Ibid.

Even worse, individual letters never reached Beasley, but always arrived in large shipments. He adds: "Indeed it has frequently occurred to me to have several letters from the same person, but dated many weeks apart, the last [one] complaining of no answer having been received to the first, arrived on the same day."⁸⁰ Not surprisingly, Beasley adds that his own letters were intercepted by the British government, but he does not provide any direct—or indirect—evidence as to how he arrived at this conclusion.⁸¹ It is not precisely clear—as according to official British regulations of the time—what the policy for agents representing prisoners-of-war were. Given some of the seemingly draconian methods employed by the Transport Office at the time, restricting the correspondences between prisoners and the agent representing them would have been more than possible.

Beasley's letter then turns to the matter of the second charge—not visiting the Dartmoor prisoners on a more frequent basis. To this accusation, he had a simple enough answer: he had other prisons to visit—before the British government consolidated all Americans at Dartmoor.⁸² The narrative is interrupted here as Beasley notes that he had considered hiring a local representative to attend to those prison compounds that he could not visit himself but that he could not find any suitable candidates for the position.⁸³ At this point in the letter, Beasley does mention that he had an assistant, or perhaps one ought to say protégé, who was to assist him in his duties.⁸⁴ All that Beasley said concerning this assistant was:

I took with me a young gentleman who had, in a manner, been raised by myself, and in whom I could repose unlimited confidence, in order that he might become thoroughly acquainted with the duties he would have to perform during his future visits.⁸⁵

Beasley argued, rather strongly, that dispatching this protégé, to serve as his personal representative, was the only means he had to insure that all that could be done for the prisoners was being accomplished. This young protégé, according to Beasley, was tasked with meeting

⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁸¹ Ibid.

⁸² Ibid.

⁸³ Ibid.

⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁸⁵ Ibid.

with the prisoner-appointed committee at Dartmoor and sometimes with individual prisoners in order to see to their needs. Beasley does admit that while the method he employed was the most efficient, considering the circumstances under which he had to operate, it might not have seemed so to the Dartmoor prisoners.⁸⁶

Turning to the third charge, that of “making hasty and superficial inquiries,” Beasley argues that he made it a point to call together the most intelligent and respected prisoners for the purpose of seeing to their needs.⁸⁷ From this point, Beasley made an examination of the berthing arrangements and rations for the prisoners, the most recurring complaint he received being the lack of meat in their rations.⁸⁸ However, he adds:

I was unwilling to trust my own judgment on the occasion. On my visit to Chatham I engaged Doctor Boswell of Virginia to accompany me, in order that I might have all the [lights?] which his more skilful [remarks?] might afford me and which at the same time might enable me to urge more strongly to the British Government any alterations which might be considered essential to the health and comfort of the Prisoners.⁸⁹

Curiously, none of the accounts discussed earlier in this study make mention of this practice, but neither do they directly contradict Beasley's assertion. It was very possible that Beasley might have visited Dartmoor with Dr. Boswell in tow, but as has just been mentioned, there is no evidence to suggest that this had occurred, one way or the other.

On the subjects of the fourth and fifth charges, those of inattention and an unnecessarily long stay, respectively, made against him, Beasley has little to say. However, there are some very interesting points that ought to be examined. The first, found within this very letter to James Madison, concerns the conduct of Dr. George Magrath. Beasley contended: “He [Dr. Magrath] told them [the Dartmoor prisoners] that their detention was owing to me, and thus, to the last moment of their confinement, have they been excited against me...”⁹⁰ Therefore, this quote would seem to strongly argue that Dr. Magrath turned the prisoners

⁸⁶ Ibid.

⁸⁷ Ibid.

⁸⁸ Ibid.

⁸⁹ Ibid.

⁹⁰ Ibid.

against him. Unfortunately for Beasley, there appears to be little evidence from other prisoner narratives to support this claim.

The other interesting note concerning the delayed departure of the prisoners can be found in an earlier letter dated June 15, 1815. In this letter, Beasley makes mention of some confusion as to the disposition of vessels called “cartels” in the parlance of the time.⁹¹ Specifically, Beasley expresses his confusion as to which vessels were supposed to arrive in England at what date. A matter of great importance—especially for the prisoners!⁹² It is curious that Beasley does not make mention of this difficulty in his November 28, 1816 letter.

In any instance, Beasley concludes his letter with the firm conviction that he had done all humanly possible for the prisoners under his care. He notes: “The [United States] Government...had expressed its approbation of my conduct.”⁹³ He also adds that he did the best he could, owing to his lack of instructions from the government, a point he made to the Dartmoor prisoners on numerous occasions.⁹⁴ Unfortunately for Beasley, his attempts to clear his name were unsuccessful as many prisoner accounts blamed him frequently for the miserable disposition of the prisoners.

All of this leads to one final question: what did Beasley have to say concerning the Dartmoor Massacre? Did this letter to Madison offer any insights on how he might have attempted to provide any assistance—or at least comfort—toward the Dartmoor men after April 6? The answer, curiously, is that there is no mention of the event whatsoever. In fact, there is not even a veiled reference within the text of the letter to those events. This curious absence of commentary only serves to complicate the question of Beasley’s conduct vis-à-vis the Dartmoor prisoners. Yet it also further complicates the entire matter of the massacre, only deepening the mystery and not resolving it.

⁹¹ Beasley to James Monroe, 15 Jun 1815. Consular letters from London, 1812–1816 (Beasley’s letters). USS *Constitution* Museum.

⁹² Ibid.

⁹³ Beasley to James Madison, 28 November 1816.

⁹⁴ Beasley to James Madison, 28 November 1816.

CHAPTER 7

CONCLUSION

Chapter Two addressed three questions relating to *A Journal of a Young Man of Massachusetts*. The first was about who actually wrote and published the manuscript. Up until Henry Viets's article, published in 1980, no scholarly attention had been directed toward this question. Yet the answer to the question: that the writer was Amos G. Babcock and later Benjamin Waterhouse served as editor, still seems incomplete. Much is known of Waterhouse and his work with vaccination, but next to nothing has been discovered concerning Babcock's origins.

The second question, why was the document written in the first place—or perhaps edited would be a better word—is simple enough to answer. The War of 1812 saw extreme division between the United States's political parties. In addition to providing moral instruction to the young—something Waterhouse was well known for—*A Journal of a Young Man of Massachusetts* was one of many salvos launched at an already moribund Federalist party. The editor's intent is evident; not so subtle references to Federalist perfidy and shortcomings can be found throughout the manuscript.

Finally, the second chapter of this thesis asks the most important question of all, vis-à-vis *A Journal of a Young Man of Massachusetts*: Was it an accurate representation of the American experience within Dartmoor Prison? And as a direct corollary to that question, how accurate is Waterhouse/Babcock's account of the Dartmoor Massacre? The answer to both questions is that the narrative is accurate, but only in a very general sense of the word. Where Waterhouse has not openly, and seemingly, unapologetically, tampered with Babcock's original narrative, the account of prison life is fairly representative. However, attempts to portray the

narrative as an accurate representation of the Dartmoor Massacre fall flat: Buried in the text of the narrative is Babcock's admission that he was not present for the event.

The next main topic covered in this study was that of the other prisoner narrators. As well as introducing each of the memoirists, including how and where they were captured, Chapter Three also examined—in brief—the conditions on board of the prison hulks. The hulks were indeed the floating hells that many former captives purported. This point is an important one to consider in connection with Dartmoor Prison, which while awful in its own right, was a step up—barely—above the hulks.

The final discussion contained within Chapter Three is that of Louis Catel, a French prisoner-of-war held within Dartmoor Prison. Although the Americans probably never encountered this gentleman—with the possible exception of Charles Andrews (but there is no way to substantiate this), his account serves a two-fold purpose. First, it demonstrates that many of the assertions made by later American memoirists were based on prevailing conditions, conditions that were in existence during French occupation, e.g. the miserable climate or the scanty rations. The other point of examining Catel's journal is to highlight the stark differences between the two sets of prisoners. For instance, class—strictly defined by a Frenchman's economic standing and his willingness to accumulate additional money while held within Dartmoor Prison—was a prevailing concern, i.e. separation between each stratum was strictly observed.

Chapter Four presented an examination of what the prison was like, both as an institution and as a place of residence for its prisoners. The general consensus amongst the memoirists was that Dartmoor Prison was cold, gloomy, and rather forbidding in appearance. The interiors were little better as they were constructed of stone, had no insulation to keep the pervading cold out, and were dimly lighted at the best of times. But the worst feature by far, all of the narrators agree, was the bitter cold, especially during the winters.

Dartmoor Prison was administered by an officer in the Royal Navy, first, Captain Isaac Cotgrave, and eventually, Thomas George Shortland. All regulations governing the prison were put into place by the Transport Office, and to many Americans—and before them, the French—were considered to be rather draconian. On the other hand, enforcement, and of equal importance interpretation, of these same measures was slightly different under each of Dartmoor's administrators. Isaac Cotgrave, for instance, was a strict disciplinarian, not deviating from his instructions from the Transport Office. On the other hand, while Captain Shortland also strictly enforced his instructions from that same office, he was willing to work with his reluctant charges and provide improvements to their situation.

The fifth chapter of this study examined the day-to-day activities of the Dartmoor prisoners. Similar to what their French predecessors had done, the American prisoners established several sorts of entertainment, e.g. theatrical and musical productions. The most well known of these were the ones put on by the black prisoners living in No. 4 prison. Other forms of passing time included schools of all varieties and, in one instance, a library. Other Dartmoor men were concerned with more pragmatic forms of keeping busy such as selling food to their fellows or manufacturing items to sell to the local population living in Princetown and the surrounding countryside.

As might be expected, there were several prisoners who did not wish to remain in British captivity any longer than necessary. Many of these men devised escape plans—some more elaborate than others—but virtually none were successful. If other prisoners did not tip off the authorities when an escape attempt was in the offing, then either the local population or conditions on the moor put a prompt end to the matter. The only successful escape attempts took place during the French occupation of Dartmoor and in the very last months of American captivity within the prison.

The final portion of the thesis was an examination of the most important event in Dartmoor Prison's history as a prisoner-of-war compound: the Dartmoor Massacre. However,

before describing the massacre, another event of crucial importance was summarized: the April 4 Bread Riot. Many of the diarists were present for this latter occurrence, but seem to have not attached any significance to it in conjunction with events two days later. Regardless of how justifiable the conduct of the Dartmoor prisoners might have been during the bread riot, the event had a negative impact on British perceptions of American intentions.

Chapter Six then turns to a description of the Dartmoor Massacre on April 6, 1815. A thorough examination of each of the narratives reveals a curious fact: none of the memoirists were actually present for the massacre. Most of them witnessed the events that led up to the incident. In all instances where it is discussed at all, the events that were alleged to have taken place in front of No. 1 gate, e.g. Shortland's order to fire on the prisoners and the mass panic amongst the amassed prisoners that ensued after it was discovered that the soldiers were indeed carrying—and firing!—live ammunition, were reported through secondhand accounts collected after the massacre. Some of the accounts report atrocities committed by British soldiers, but this was well past the episode's flashpoint, i.e. Captain Shortland had already lost control of his men.

The final portion of Chapter Six is an examination of R. G. Beasley's response to the charges made against him by the various Dartmoor memoirists, particularly, those contained in *A Journal of a Young Man of Massachusetts*. To this historian's knowledge, this letter has never received any scholarly attention up until the time of writing. As discussed in great detail in this final portion of the thesis, Beasley attempted to answer the five main charges, as he saw it, against him by providing contrary evidence. For instance, one of the most frequently occurring charges by the prisoners, or at least, the chief complaint present in most of the memoirs examined for this thesis, is that Beasley never replied to letters. In his letter to James Madison dated November 28, 1816, Beasley argues that he eventually received letters from prisoners, but in shipments as each document was subject to the whim of the Transport Office.

Although Beasley's arguments are not necessarily concrete refutations of the charges made against him, his perspective does provide another side to the story. This concept of additional perspective leads to the logical question of what additional research needs to be undertaken, vis-à-vis Dartmoor Prison. The short answer is that there are still numerous areas of potential scholarship centered around the prison on the moor. For instance, were there other American memoirists present at Dartmoor? If so, who were they and was their experience similar to that of the men discussed in this study? Or, perhaps, can these additional narratives, given that they exist, provide a counterpoint to the better-known accounts of the prison? The letters of Perez Drinkwater, a privateersman who held the position of lieutenant on board *The Lucy*, present yet another recollection by an American prisoner-of-war incarcerated within Dartmoor Prison. The Drinkwater letters came to light among scholars as this thesis was in the final stage of writing. The recent appearance of this documentary source begs the question: does Drinkwater's account shed any additional light on Dartmoor prison life?

Missing almost entirely from this study are both the French and English experiences at Dartmoor, although Catel's memoirs provide an intriguing beginning to such an inquiry. To this historian's knowledge, no scholarship whatsoever has been devoted exclusively to that of French experiences within the prison. Conversely, did any of the British soldiers posted at the prison keep diaries or journals? If so, do they discuss the Americans held there? What of the Dartmoor Massacre? Did any of these men, perhaps, witness the event in its entirety? And if so, how different are their recollections from those of their American counterparts?

Much has been made, by those prisoners that bothered to record it at least, of the inquiry after the massacre. According to all of these men, there were very official proceedings and an investigation of both sides and their claims. While Andrews and Waterhouse/Babcock provide the depositions of the American witnesses to the massacre, what of the King-Larpent investigation? At the very least, an in depth study of these documents is required, provided, of course, that such an archive remains intact, to either confirm or deny the charges made against

the report: that the committee headed up by King and Larpent were—at best—indifferent to the testimony of the Dartmoor prisoners.

What of the Dartmoor Massacre itself? What really did take place during that tragic event in the prison's history as a prisoner-of-war compound? While most of the memoirists charge that Captain Shortland deliberately ordered his men to fire on unarmed prisoners with the intent of committing murder, this accusation is invalidated by the simple fact that none of these men were actually present to have heard the purported order. On the other hand, Shortland is, at the very least, guilty of not maintaining proper control over his men as the subsequent violence throughout the prison demonstrates. However, this leaves the question unanswered: what really happened during the Dartmoor Massacre?

Many of the men connected to Dartmoor are virtually unknown outside of their association with the prison. The most striking example of this is that of Captain Shortland. It is unclear who this man really was and how involved he was with the Americans held within Dartmoor. Charles Andrews provides the occasional glimpse of Shortland's personality throughout his memoir, but this is tentative at best and somewhat contradictory—especially toward the end of his narrative. It is therefore necessary to devote some degree of research towards uncovering this man's identity, and perhaps, his role in the massacre.

Privateering is another area of interest that has presented itself with this study. In his book, *Mr. Madison's War: Politics, Diplomacy, and Warfare in the Early American Republic, 1783–1830*, J. C. A. Stagg puts forth the idea that the emphasis on privateering during the War of 1812 stemmed from the general, and very correct, assumption that the United States could not even come close to matching the British navy, ship for ship.⁶⁵⁶ The observations on privateering included in this treatment, though, are related to other points in the discussion. Privateering and its connection with more regular naval service remain a topic for much more thorough study beyond the confines of this thesis. With several lines of inquiry still open to

⁶⁵⁶ Stagg, *Mr. Madison's War: Politics, Diplomacy, and Warfare in the Early American Republic, 1783–1830* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press), 145

extensive research, there is much in the way of future work on the subject of the prison on the moor and the Americans who were incarcerated there for nearly two years. It is hoped that this thesis will encourage future scholarship in this particular era of Anglo-American history.

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BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION

Justin Jones received his BA and MA from the University of Texas at Arlington. His undergraduate major was history and his minor was business administration; he graduated magna cum laude. He was a McNair Scholar in 2006, working with Dr. Stanley Palmer to produce a research paper titled "Massacre on the Western Front: A Study of British Strategy and Tactics during World War I." He was named Outstanding First Year Student and Outstanding Graduating Senior in German language classes, and was honored as a University Scholar at the President's Convocation for Academic Excellence. He completed the master's degree with concentrations in modern British history and archival studies. He is preparing for a career in military history.