China Trade

Object:
Teacup and Saucer Brought from China on the Experiment, probably Jingdezhen, China, c. 1786, porcelain, Albany Institute of History & Art, gift of Peter Gansevoort Ten Eyck, x1940.700.562

Image: The Return of the Experiment, Len Tantillo, 1994, oil on canvas, courtesy of Len Tantillo
City records reveal that Captain Stewart Dean built a home along Albany’s waterfront in the year 1775. With the outbreak of the Revolutionary War, he offered his services to the American cause and for three years his ship named the Beaver and his crews aided the war effort gathering supplies in battles with British ships as far south as the Caribbean. Towards the end of the war, he was made a member of Albany’s Committee of Correspondence and became a leading citizen of the city.

Almost immediately after the United States won its independence from Great Britain, captains like Dean ventured into the lucrative and dangerous world of maritime trade. Dean built a 60-foot-long sloop named the Experiment in Albany in 1784, and with the help of merchant investors, he set off to trade with China in 1785 with a tiny crew of seven men and two boys. Dean’s investor’s loaded the sloop with silver, ginseng, rum, and furs to trade with the Chinese, and equipped it with cannon, pistols, rifles, gunpowder, and ammunition to keep the crew and cargo safe from pirates.

Dean successfully returned to Albany 18 months later in the summer of 1787, a voyage of 14,000 nautical miles. The cargo, including tea and china, made a significant profit for Dean, his partner Teunis Van Vechten of Albany, and the voyage’s New York City investors, who soon commissioned Dean for a second voyage.

Dean’s cargo from the Experiment included this porcelain teacup and saucer. It was part of a larger tea set that its original owners valued as an exotic luxury item used for formal entertaining.

Vocabulary

- **Cargo** – goods carried on a ship
- **Exotic** – from or characteristic of a distant, foreign country
- **Lucrative** – producing a great deal of profit
- **Luxury** – of great comfort, ease, and wealth
- **Maritime** – connected with the sea
- **Merchant** – a person or company involved in trade, especially one dealing with a foreign country
- **Nautical** – a unit used to measure distance at sea; 1 nautical mile equals 1.15 standard miles
- **Porcelain** – a white ceramic used to make dishes, cups, and saucers; also referred to as china
- **Sloop** – a small sailing ship with one to three masts

STEM Interdisciplinary Questions / Web Connections

**Science**

- What is porcelain made from?

**Mathematics**

- If the Experiment traveled 14,000 nautical miles, how many standard miles did it travel?