THE PROVINCE GALLEY OF MASSACHUSETTS BAY, 1694-1716: A CHAPTER OF EARLY AMERICAN NAVAL HISTORY

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The Province galley of Massachusetts Bay, 1694-1716: a chapter of early American Naval History by Harriet Silvester Tapley

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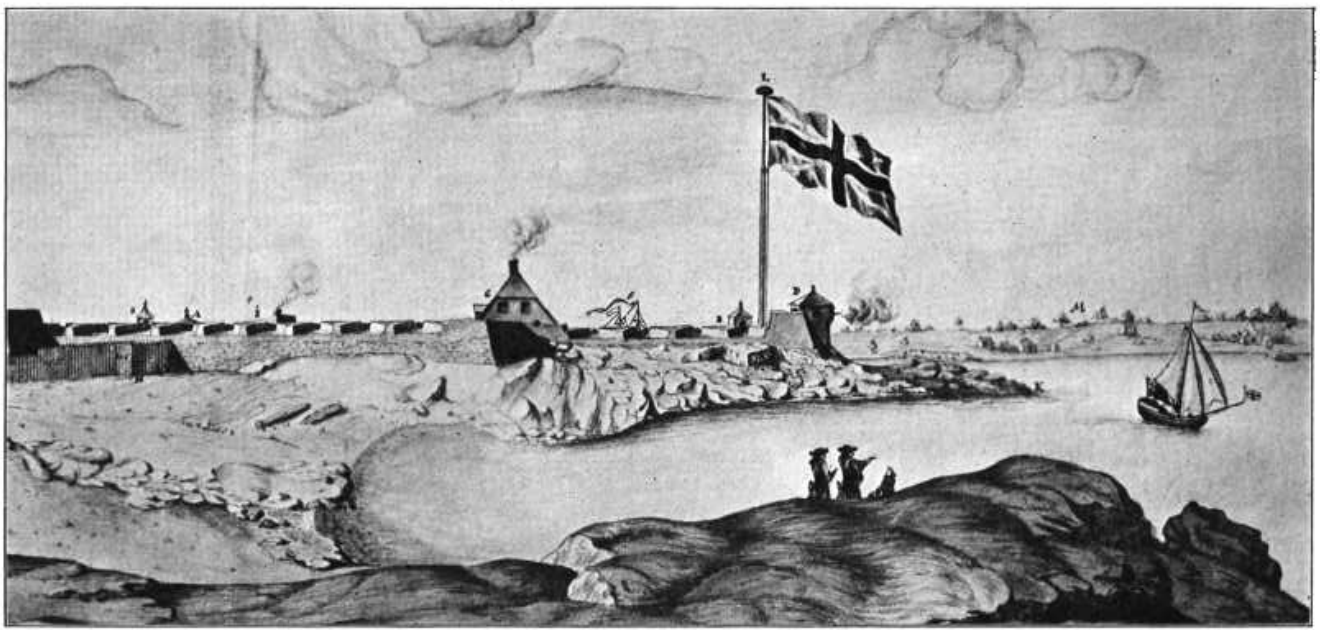

SECTION OF A LATE 17th CENTURY PLAN OF FORT WILLIAM AND MARY AT PISCATAQUA.
THE VESSEL IN THE CENTRE IS MARKED ON THE ORIGINAL "S THE PROVINCE GALLEY. CAPTAIN CYPRIAN SOUTHACK, COMMANDER."
From the original in the "British Museum", as reproduced in the "Crown Collection", Harvard Library.

The Province Galley of Massachusetts Bay

1694 - 1716

A Chapter of Early American Naval History

... BY ...

HARRIET SILVESTER TAPLEY

Salem, Massachusetts

1922

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[*Cut of Man with Cross-Staff used by courtesy of Society for the Preservation of New England Antiquities.*]

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THE PROVINCE GALLEY OF MASSACHUSETTS BAY, 1694—1716.

By Harriet Silvester Tapley.

In the latter part of the seventeenth century the New England fishing industry along the coast from Boston to Nova Scotia was constantly menaced by the French and Indians. So flagrant did their acts of violence and destruction become that the General Court ordered, December 11, 1693-4, "there is need of building and fitting of a small vessel mounted with ten guns and a suitable number of oars, to cruise on this coast for the better securing of trade and navigation," and promptly appropriated £500 for the purpose.

Thus did the *Province Galley* come into existence; and for over twenty years this government vessel, together with another of the same name which succeeded her, helped to protect the fishermen of Essex county. Not only did she secure safety to navigation, but she acted as convoy in many naval actions, transported Governors from one part of the Province to another, carried stores and ammunition to Nova Scotia, transported troops, brought home exchanged prisoners, captured French privateers and hunted pirates. The French government once at least offered generous prize money for her capture. In her later years misfortune seemed to pursue her, for she was struck by lightning, and lost six men from the overturning of her pinnace. Then, passing into private ownership, she fouled a fishing vessel in Marblehead harbor, for which suit was brought against her owners, and at last she was wrecked and went to pieces off Block Island. During a portion of that time she was commanded by a Salem shipmaster, Captain William Pickering, whose acts of dauntless courage on the sea won him distinguished honors, and throughout her career she was so closely in touch with Essex county that the story of her accomplishments should be included in the maritime history of this locality.

The two frigates of the English navy, the *Sorling*, Captain Eams, and the *Newport Galley*, Captain Paxton,

M.H.H.

detailed for constant duty in New England, were not adapted to pursue small craft in shoal water and this explains the project of fitting out an armed vessel of light draft. The matter was discussed by the Governor and Council as early as March 7, 1692-3, in relation to the protection of vessels coasting in Vineyard Sound, and by June 1, 1694, the *Galley* had been built at a cost of £1022. 4s. 6d. Bills of credit were issued for payment, and in 1697 a special tax was levied for the protection of the Province, which included the maintenance of the *Galley*, the fire ships, and the Castle and other fortifications. The apportionment among Essex county towns was as follows: Salem, £200; Ipswich, £215; Newbury, £150; Salisbury, £34; Amesbury, £12; Haverhill, £36; Andover, £53; Bradford, £18; Topsfield, £36; Marblehead, £80; Lynn, £84; Wenham, £40; Beverly, £60; Gloucester, £39; Manchester, £9; Rowley, £54; Boxford, £30.

Captain Thomas Dobbins, previously commander of the ship *Nonesuch*, was the first commander. He was at this time about forty-four years of age, and is said to have been a favorite of Governor Phipps, who was responsible for his appointment. In 1694, instructions, dated Boston, August 8, were given Captain John Alden to embark on the *Province Galley*, Captain Thomas Dobbins, commander, and proceed to Pemaquid to see if any Indians had been talked with in regard to peace and reprisals, and also to go to Penobscot to see if any Indians were concerned in the murders there.* Captain Dobbins was succeeded later in the same year by Captain Samuel Mould, probably of Charlestown.

Reports of seventeen French vessels being fitted out at Petit Goâve in 1693 for the purpose of intercepting English vessels bound for the West Indies was the signal for renewed activities among the colonists. Lieutenant-Governor Stoughton, in a letter dated February 11, 1694-5, to the government of Connecticut, asking them to provide twenty able seamen for the *Province Galley* until the end of the summer of 1694, wrote, "This Province is so dreyned of men by the calamities of the war, sickness,

*Maine Historical Collections, vol. 23, p. 9.